RETURNING TO ROISSY:
FEMALE SUBMISSION AND MASOCHISM IN STORY OF O AND ITS ADAPTATIONS

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of female sexuality under patriarchy through masochism and submission. Amongst its original contributions is the examination of: the first female authored BDSM novel *Story of O* (1954), its paratexts *A Slave's Revolt* (1954), *A Girl In Love* (1969), and *Story of O Part Two* (1969), and adaptations *Histoire d'O* (1974) and *The Training of Madison Young* (2007), as case study. This includes close readings of the texts, as well as original research into their production, publication and distribution, and reception. This analysis is undertaken through a queer, feminist post-structuralist framework. Utilising both textual analysis and discourse analysis as its methods, the texts' representations of gender and sexuality are thus explored in this frame as both the constructions of a complex nexus of continual productivity and intertextuality, and the product of, and producer of multiple discursive frameworks.

This thesis thus posits that these texts are marked by a destabilising plurality and multiplicity of readings which shift in accordance to who is speaking, when, and why. This research therefore argues through its analysis of *Story of O* as case study, that female sexuality is constructed under patriarchy through a complex web of competing discourses that in their collective univocal assertions of a fixed 'truth', destabilise each other. The work offers a unique contribution to feminism, queer theory, post-structuralism, literary theory, pornography studies, film studies, and adaptation studies.

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Chapter One – Introduction

Impetus

The impetus of this thesis follows a logical trajectory from my undergraduate BA (Hons) in Photomedia in 2009 and my MA in Cult Film and Television in 2010, the research foci of which exist on a continuum of enquiry. This thread began with my undergraduate dissertation (Harman, 2009) which looked at feminism and female representation across the *Alien* quadrilogy (1979, 1986, 1992, 1997). Here I was interested in what these distinct texts meant when taken as a singular whole and how their internal incongruity reflected the broader divisions comprising feminist thought as a unified mode. In my Master's dissertation (Harman, 2010), I examined archetypal female figures that problematised gender roles under patriarchy, namely the witch and the hysteric. I argued in my conclusion via a close reading of *The Craft* (1996) as case study, that these women held concurrent roles, oscillating as both performer under, and protestor against, patriarchy – both simultaneously passive and active. I concluded that feminists ought to understand both positions as non-binary, and instead as symbiotic and interlaced.

Further, a seminar discussion during my Masters, on Steven Shainberg's mainstream kink adaptation, *Secretary* (2002), sparked debate amongst my all-male course colleagues, with one asserting that the story is most certainly one of abuse, wherein the protagonist Lee Holloway, is "taken advantage of". Whilst that would be an astute analysis of Mary Gaitskill's (1988) short story of the same name upon which the film is based, it seemed obvious to me that this was quite the opposite intention of the film, one which mainstreams BDSM[1] into a fundamentally heteronormative, and rather staidly palatable Hollywood romance (see Weiss, 2006; Cossman, 2007; Khan, 2009 and 2014). What emerged from this discussion however was a theme which intersected my research on female archetypes. Here, I wondered, could the figure of the female submissive masochist further problematise binary constructions of identities of 'self' under

patriarchy? To answer this question, I turned in 2010 to *Story of O* (1954), the first known female authored text on BDSM, written by Dominique Aury under the pseudonym Pauline Réage. Written over sixty years ago, the book has never been out of print and, in happenstance the novel also received resurgent interest during the course of this thesis after the publication of E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* in 2012 (on *Fifty Shades of Grey* see Attwood and Walters, 2013, Barker, 2013, Martin, 2013 and Illouz, 2014; on *Fifty Shad*es and *Story of* O see Tsaros, 2013 and Taylor-Harman, 2014), which evidences its contemporary relevance and thus the timeliness of this work.

The discussion itself of whether female sadomasochists reinforce or challenge patriarchy, is far from new (as explored in Chapter Three). What interested me instead however was whether they can also be seen to do both concurrently, and in so doing, call into question such binary oppositions. The answer, it has transpired, has been much more complex than I could have anticipated, and moves even beyond the confines of the now comparative simplicity of my initial question.

Thesis Statement

This thesis explores the construction of female sexuality under patriarchy. It operates from a queer, feminist, post-structuralist theoretical framework. Accordingly, it posits that this construction is the product of the dominant hegemonic 'regimes of truth' that create binaries of gender and sexuality which act upon the subject. Its examination thus aims to deconstruct these discursive constructions. Central to this is the female masochist and submissive who holds a largely normative position in gendernormative heteropatriarchal power relations. In this mode, man as active sadist, and woman as passive are presented as biologically determined innate truths of gender and sexuality. However, they can also be re-read as non-normative positions in which sadomasochism is pathologised as an abnormal or perverse excess, contrary to normative procreative drives. This concurrent contradiction of normative and non-normative drives destabilises the fixity of this 'truth'.

This thesis focuses upon the 1954 French female authored BDSM novel *Story of O* as a case study for the construction of feminine sexuality under patriarchy. The thesis argues that the novel is a rich text for such an exploration through the main character, O's submission and masochism. To this end it methodologically combines textual and discourse analysis to examine the texts and their reception. Key to this are questions of agency, consent and desire. Further, *Story of O* is posited as a uniquely illuminating text through its status as a love story – both as a work of fiction, and in its status as a love letter, penned as a gift to the author's lover. This metanarrative is examined through *Story of O*'s paratexts, and it is argued that it is the construction of love as a gendernormative and heteropatriarchal paradigm which underlies O's submission and masochism. The analysis also points towards gaps, ellipses, absences, contradictions and ambivalences in the text(s) which work to destabilise its dominant ideology.

Additionally, this thesis expands the text's continuous productivity by analysing two adaptations of *Story of O* to ask what affordances texts outside of the restrictive medium of literature can offer. These are the softcore pornographic theatrical release *Histoire d'O* (1974), and the hardcore digital pornography *The Training of O: The Training of Madison Young* (2007). These adaptive texts create an expansion of both O's storyworld, and therefore complicate our resultant understanding of the complexities of female sexuality under patriarchy. However, ultimately these texts as historically and culturally situated products close down the narrative potentialities and pluralities by reinforcing the texts' dominant ideology, exercising their own discursive truths over O's story. Nonetheless, the co-existence of such concurrent truths collectively destabilise a univocity of the text and its 'truth'; locating it instead, as with the figure of the female submissive masochist, as the product of a complex set of competing discourses.

Structure and Argument Overview

This thesis is divided into eight chapters and structured into three sections. Firstly, chapters two and three, the methodology and literature review, continue

building the foundational framework and context for this research. Secondly, chapters four and five begin the case study, focusing upon the novel, *Story of O* alongside its paratexts *A Slave's Revolt* (1954), *Story of O Part Two* (1969) and *A Girl in Love* (1969) and their reception. Thirdly, chapters six and seven explore its adaptations, *Histoire d'O* (1974) and *The Training of O: The training of Madison Young* (2007) respectively. This is followed by the conclusion in Chapter Eight. In what follows, I provide an overview for each chapter and its argument.

In Chapter Two this thesis' theoretical framework, methodology, research questions and rationale for text selection are explored, to plot out the terrain of enquiry and its parameters. Principally, this research operates from a queer feminist post-structuralist framework, in which gender and sexuality are understood as a construct, the producer of and production of discursive frameworks. In this mode, 'truth' is understood to be the product of discourse(s), a regime of power and the dominant hegemony. Thus, this thesis is concerned with disentangling these constructs. As a consequence, the methods employed throughout my analysis are discourse and textual analysis. However, I argue that in my operative framework there is no fine distinction – texts are discourses, and discourses are texts. This is further clarified in my discussion of the text selection, in which I am both interested in the texts and their reception, which I explore in further detail below. The project here therefore is not to judge whether these texts and their representations of gender and sexuality are 'good' or 'bad' as both positions are subjective discourses, but instead to investigate how these are historical and social culturally constructed positions which construct a truth of the text(s) and their subject(s).

As this thesis is also concerned with examining adaptive texts, a focus upon narrative fidelity is eschewed in favour of a more nuanced and complex theorisation of adaptive texts as a nexus of intertextuality. Accordingly, my analysis is driven by an examination of the conversation produced between these filmic and literary texts, their meanings and representations. Consequently, this thesis is concerned with how these texts open up, or indeed close down *Story of O*'s narrative potentiality; how they may negotiate the

problems of the novel, and yet in turn be problematic in their own normative and recuperative narrative functions.

In the third chapter, the literature review of this thesis positions this research within the broader context, by discussing two key discursive historical frameworks which have shaped the socio-political and cultural understanding of (sado)masochism and submission. Firstly, in the masculine discourse (see Millett, 1970; Chesler, 1972; Daly, 1978; Daly and Caputi, 1987; Dworkin, 1987; Busfield, 1989; and Grosz, 1990; cf. Jordanova 1989) of psychiatry and psychoanalysis in the 1880s to 1950s; and secondly in the feminine discourse of 1970s to 1980s pro- and anti-SM feminism. Thus, these are explored as two distinct but overlapping historical discursive frameworks though it should be noted that though no neat parallel can be made between the two. However I argue that both are characterised by overlapping modes of thought, reliant upon the operation of a number of binary modes: natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, normative/subversive, procreative/perverse, male/female, masculine/feminine, sadist/masochist, aggressor/victim, active/passive, right/wrong, and liberatory/oppressive. It is not however, this thesis' contention that either discourse reveals a 'truth' of femininity, submission, or masochism, but instead I am interested in exploring how these discursive frameworks present a dogmatic construction of gender and sexuality through these binary positions.

Beginning with an examination of the origins of (sado)masochism in the late 19th century, I argue within this chapter that masochism has always been a gendered subject position constructed through a biologically determined gender essentialism. However, I also point towards ambivalences and contradictions in this discourse, namely in the figure of the sadomasochist which embodies concurrently both the positions of sadist and masochist, both passive and active, both feminine and masculine. In so doing, such binary divisions are blurred and troubled, and thus exposed as indistinct.

Secondly, I argue that we can observe the same binary thinking in second wave feminist rhetoric which unwittingly reproduces a construction of gender (and sexuality) as innate, and immutable. In this mode, as in the previous discursive

framework, man is constructed as sadist, and woman his victim. This is the case in their readings of both sexual practice and in pornography, positioned as fundamentally sadomasochist. In contrast, through an examination of pro-SM feminism I explore the claim that lesbian feminist sadomasochists are an oppressed minority, and that their practice, rather than reifying heteropatriarchal constructs of gender and sexuality instead critique and deconstruct such power relations. I side with neither camp, but instead draw attention to the polarisation of debate as to female masochism and submission as being either oppressive or liberatory. Here, I argue that the very existence of two concurrent oppositional discursive frameworks destabilises this binary, despite its enduring status in feminist thought.

Chapter Four begins the case study of this thesis, in *Story of O*. Here I argue that in order to understand how the text represents the complex and divisive issue of female masochism and submission, we must unfold its narrative through a close reading of the novel. Through this I argue that *Story of O* is a rich text for study, revealing a complex, interwoven and at times contradictory exploration of agency and consent, and desire (both heteronormative and queer). Further, I argue that these themes anchor around a deeply problematic heteronormative and patriarchal notion of love, and suggest that it is this, rather than its sexual content that instead a feminist reading should take issue with.

In addition, through a reading of *Story of O*'s paratexts (*A Slave's Revolt*; *Story of O Part Two*; and *A Girl in Love*) we are able to contextualize and thus further our understanding of what discursive 'truths' O's story may offer, as the chapter examines how the novel was penned as a love letter, to Pauline Réage's partner, Jean Paulhan. In so doing, this chapter offers a further multiplicity and complexity of the text in which it is variously positioned as both fantasy and reality; making its status as purely a work of fiction ambiguous. Thus, I argue that while O's storyworld is undoubtedly couched in heteropatriarchy, it is also marked by its ambivalences and contradictions which blur and call into question this dominant ideology.

In Chapter Five I turn to the reception of *Story of O* in radical feminist rhetoric to explore how this discourse has asserted 'truths' about its story and meaning. Here the text is positioned as: violent; oppressive; excessive; dehumanising; non-consensual; and above all harmful, constituting a cultural harm whether one has even read the text or not. It is, they assert, the pornographic text par excellence. I argue however that such assertions are marked by a selective reading and refusal to fully engage with the text and its paratexts, thus positioning my own reading in Chapter Four in contrast, in effect forming a second literature review.

Additionally, I draw together for the first time interviews with the author in: *Confessions of O: Conversations with Pauline Réage by Regine Desforges* (1975); *The New Yorker* article 'The Unmasking of O' (1994a) and overlapping mainstream monograph *The Good Ship Venus: The Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press* (1994b) both by John de St. Jorre; alongside the 2005 American docudrama *Writer of O*, directed and produced by Pola Rapaport. In so doing, I add the author's own understanding of the text into the debate, however it is not my intent to position her authorial intent as the 'correct', 'true' reading. Instead, by drawing attention to the concurrent polarised readings, the non-fixity of meaning is exposed, and further fluidity of the text asserted.

Furthermore, this chapter examines the assertion that it is the medium of literature which ultimately confines *Story of O* within a heteropatriarchal discursive frame. To this end, I turn to the French feminist literary theory of écriture féminine to ask whether we can see *Story of O* as belonging to this tradition of women's writing, in which woman writes her self. Here I draw attention to the novel's absence within this canon and undertake an examination of the mode's conventions and limitations, pointing towards gaps and incongruities. Additionally, this enquiry draws upon the research undertaken by de St. Jorre (1994a, 1994b), Rapaport (2005) as well as by Dorothy Kaufmann (1998) to chart a historiography of *Story of O*'s production and publication. Here I position the text(s) as mediated through the roles of Paulhan as editor, Jean-Jacques Pauvert as publisher, and the pseudonymous likely male translator, Sabine d'Estree acting as a triad. I thus suggest therefore

that we look outside of this symbolic order to attempt to locate O outside of the framework of literature and literary publishing as patriarchal media. However, in the remaining chapters I problematise this suggestion, arguing that film as a medium is just as restrictive.

Chapter Six thus moves away from the confines of the medium of literature, to examine the first feature length adaptation of *Story of O* from 1974, *Histoire d'O* (I refer to this film throughout using this original title to avoid confusion with the novel). The chapter therefore begins with a consideration of key issues in the novel to film adaptive process. Then, through a close reading of this soft-core text, exploring its deviation from the novel arguing that *Histoire d'O* creates a new more palatable narrative for O, one couched in consent and hetero monogonormative desire. I assert that while this adaptation was positioned as being more 'obscene', more violent and more excessive than the novel, it is in fact desexualised, 'dequeered' and the narrative plurality of the text closed down.

Through original archival research undertaken at the BBFC I examine why *Histoire d'O* was refused certification in Britain up until the year 2000. This is an important point of contradistinction given that conversely the novel has never been charged under the UK's Obscene Publications Act (1857, 1959, 1964). I argue that the discursive framework of censorship enacted by the BBFC is reliant upon the discourses examined in Chapter Three; feminism and psychoanalysis which construct BDSM as a perversion and a cultural harm. Here I argue that the BBFC theorises film audiences as lacking interpretive repertoires instead advocating the hypodermic needle model of consumption in which viewers (unlike readers) are theorised as passive receptors of media, unable to recognise and interpret such works as fiction. Building on Dewe Matthews (1994) and Petley (1997) I argue that this flawed conceptualisation is inherently classed. In addition, I posit that *Histoire d'O*'s refusal of certification by the BBFC recalls both the Penny Dreadful debates of the 19th century and foreshadows the 1980s' Video Nasties 'crisis'.

In addition, this chapter argues that the board's decision to award the film an 18 certificate in 2000 evidences a shift in both British socio-political cultural attitudes to BDSM, and to *Histoire d'O's* potential to cause cultural and direct harm. Further, and interrelatedly this chapter examines how film critics' perception of *Histoire d'O* has changed over time. Here the fixity of the text is further destabilised. Thus, I argue that my research reveals *Histoire d'O* to occupy an important, though up until this point absent, position in the history of censorship.

In Chapter Seven, focus moves from this softcore adaptation to hardcore pornography in Kink.com's web series *Training of O* (2007 to present). If *Histoire d'O* was (despite the BBFC's assertions) problematic in the aversion of its gaze, here it is in abundance as Kink.com's adaptation foregrounds its BDSM sexual content. Beginning with a consideration of authenticity in hardcore pornography, I then analyse how both Kink.com and Madison Young construct the Training of Madison Young as 'real', 'authentic' consensual porn.

Next, through an analysis of *The Training of Madison Young* (2007) I explore how, whilst having little narrative fidelity to *Story of O*, this adaptation nonetheless operates as a rich text in which the novel's themes of agency, consent, and desire are furthered. In addition, as I have argued of the novel, *The Training of Madison Young* also blurs reality and fiction in its mode as hardcore. Furthermore, drawing on Young's 2014 autobiography this chapter also explores the commonality *The Training of Madison Young* holds with *Story of O* as a 'love letter', or in this instance a labour of love, between Young and James Mogul, her co-performer and the creator of *Training of O* who like Réage and Paulhan before them, are romantic partners.

While I argue creates a dynamic intertextuality and thus is an opportune text through which to read *Story of O* I do not argue that *The Training of Madison Young* thus reveals a 'truth' of the text, though analysis does consider this performed embodiment through the context of Sontag (1969)'s notion of 'radical passivity. Ultimately, I assert that it acts as an additional discursive framework in which O's story is again anchored in problematic heteronormative patriarchal

ideas of love, agency and desire. However, I also acknowledge the possibility and deconstruct and destabilise this 'truth'.

In the final chapter of this thesis I conclude by overviewing my argument and discuss the findings of this research. Here I return to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter Two; principally asking what *Story of O* tells us about how female sexuality is constructed under patriarchy. That being said, in accordance with my methodological framework this conclusion eschews closure or finitude; I do not assert my readings as the 'truth' of the text but instead this thesis is (re)positioned as a post-structuralist deconstruction of the discursive frameworks that have argued for a (flawed) fixity of the text, rather than, as I have argued, its destabilising position as fluid and changeable. This thesis ends accordingly with a reiteration of its original contribution, as well as delineating avenues for further research.

Lastly, I should note that in this thesis' appendix I supply a copy of my 2013 journal article, *Returning To Roissy: Kink.com's The Upper Floor and Training of O as adaptations of the Story of O*, published under my maiden name during the course of this research. This is to comply with the institution's regulations which state that I must supply copies of any publications which contain content replicated from this thesis.

Original Contribution

This thesis' original contribution is manifold. Ultimately its original contribution is its exploration of *Story of O* as a case study through a queer, feminist post-structuralist framework to understand how female sexuality is constructed under patriarchy. In so doing the work as a whole offers a unique contribution to feminism, queer theory, post-structuralism, Porn Studies, Film Studies, and Adaptation Studies; as discussed below and throughout the work. More specifically, firstly, it is the only work of this length to discuss *Story of O*; there exist to my knowledge no doctoral theses or monographs to date which focus solely, or even principally on a discussion of this text (see Chapter Six, n.9).

Analyses of the novel are thus confined to the length, and therefore restraints, of chapters and articles. More often than not discussions of *Story of O* are either cursory or secondary, wherein statements are asserted based on a limited engagement with the text, as I argue in Chapter Five. Such readings are selective and focus principally upon O's time at Roissy, and to a lesser extent upon her relationship with Renè and Sir Stephen, but do not engage with the other structural 'acts' which comprise the narrative.

Nor do these existing readings engage with the inherent plurality of the novel's structure, with its two beginnings and two endings. Thus, in Chapter Four I redress this imbalance, enacting an original close reading of *Story of O*'s themes as well as contradictions and ambivalences. Furthermore, an engagement with *Story of O*'s paratexts *A Slave's Revolt*, *Story of O Part Two*, and *A Girl In Love* is absent from existing scholarship. This I contend is crucial to an understanding of the text(s), and thus my analysis of these in Chapter Four offers an additional undeniable original contribution in redressing these issues.

Further, in Chapter Five I undertake a discourse analysis of the text(s) reception in feminist rhetoric and scholarship which has never before been grouped together and analysed. I also collect together for the first time the author's comments on her novel, taken from multiple interviews to create and position her voice in this debate. Additionally, I chart an original historiography of the novel's production and publication, building on de St. Jorre (1994a and 1994b). I use this to explore the limitations of écriture féminine, offering an original critique of the mode and bringing new insight into *Story of O* as newly located female authored writing.

In addition, little attention has been paid to *Story of O*'s adaptations, and never in the context of their treatment of gender and sexuality – except by myself in 2013 as mentioned above, to which I will return. While *Histoire d'O* has been subject to some discussion in scholarship, it is discussed in the framework of formalist elements such as the soundtrack, as I note in Chapter Six. Again, therefore my analysis offers a unique expansion of our understanding of both

Story of O and *Histoire d'O*. This includes original research conducted at the BBFC, as well as an original discussion grouping together the film's reception amongst film critics which has never before been analysed. In so doing I make an original claim that *Histoire d'O* occupies an important position in the history of British censorship and deserves to be recognised as such.

Chapter Seven's focus on *The Training of O* is a further original contribution, having only been analysed once previously by myself in 2013. In contrast to that article, which specifically discussed *The Training of Cherry Torn* (2008-9), my thesis analyses *The Training of Madison Young* which is another unique contribution. So too is my analysis of Young's (2014a) autobiography original. Moreover, my treatment of this hardcore pornographic adaptation, which notably has not had theatrical release, as a legitimate text for study is counter to Film Studies' disavowal of pornography as film. My analysis thus offers a number of original illuminations of the representations of gender and sexuality, pornography, performance and an expansion of O's storyworld.

Notes

1. BDSM is a compound acronym comprising (variously): Bondage/ Discipline/Domination/Submission/Sadism/Masochism.

Chapter Two – Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of this thesis' research questions to plot out the terrain of enquiry and its parameters. In what follows, I expand upon the (feminist and queer) post-structural theoretical framework, as well as discussing the methods employed herein to unpack these texts. These are discourse and textual analysis. While both have their origins in different disciplines, from my operative framework there is no fine distinction; texts are discourses, and discourses are texts. This is explained further in the final sub-section of this chapter, wherein the rationale for the texts analysed is provided, and thus the scope of enquiry is further delineated.

Research Questions

The fundamental research question that this thesis explores is: what does *Story of O* tell us about how female sexuality is constructed under patriarchy? This is of course an immensely broad question, and in accordance with the theoretical framework detailed below, this thesis does not seek to provide a definitive answer as to a 'truth' of female sexuality nor as to whether female submission and masochism is either 'good' or 'bad' (again, as discussed below). Instead it offers a narrative which I hope illuminates and complicates such debates through its case study, in order to contribute to feminist theory about female sexuality that is nuanced and explorative, rather than binary.

To this end, this thesis asks: How has sexually submissive and masochistic female desire been historically and culturally constructed, and how does this shape our understanding?; Does the novel *Story of O* challenge or reinforce these notions?; Does this alter when we broaden the storyworld to include its paratexts, and if so, how? Furthermore, in turning to the adaptations, I ask: What do the soft and hardcore adaptive texts offer to this understanding?; How do they deviate from the novel and what affordances or limitations does the

medium of film and the adaptive process bring?; How do they open up or close down *Story of O*'s narrative potentialities?; To what extent are these adaptive texts normative or subversive?; How can they be seen to be negotiating femininity under changing contemporary contexts and paradigms?; And lastly, I return to ask, how do these further texts complicate our understanding of female sexual desire under patriarchy?

Theoretical Framework and Methods

The overarching mode of enquiry in this thesis is a post-structuralist theoretical framework. As Fawcett (2008) explains, in this mode:

> Comprehensive and prescriptive ideological frames or meta-narratives that clearly define and place boundaries around certain forms of knowledge are rejected. All-embracing theoretical frameworks such as Marxism, liberalism, psychoanalysis, and economic rationalism can be seen as examples of structurally oriented meta-narratives that poststructuralist perspectives both interrogate and deconstruct. (Fawcett, 2008: 666)

St Pierre and Pillow therefore argue that a poststructuralist approach troubles 'foundational ontologies, methodologies and epistemologies' (St Pierre and Pillow, 2000 in Davies and Gannon, 2004: 312)[1].Thus since this thesis operates from a poststructuralist framework, it applies no constructivist lens to the texts analysed – e.g., psychoanalytic, formalist, and so forth – and instead, '[o]ld ways of knowing, such as through master or grand narratives, are resisted as arbiters of meaning, even while they are recognized as having constitutive force' (Davies and Gannon, 2004: 313). Indeed, it is this deconstruction of this 'constitutive force' that concerns post-structuralist scholars.

Central to this approach, I believe, is Foucault's conceptualisation of 'truth'. Foucault argues that truth is 'linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power both which it induces and which extend it. This is a 'regime' of truth'' (Foucault, in Foucault and Gordon, 1980: 131) in which truth is 'to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements' (13). Further,

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (131)

This is not to say however, that truth is relative or arbitrary. Post-structuralism is not so far removed from structuralism as to say that nothing 'means' anything, but instead its drive is to deconstruct how meaning is created by the discursive 'regimes of truth' that operate upon it. The scholar's role, Foucault posits, is thus to disentangle 'truth' from power and the dominant hegemony which constructs the subject through, and in discourse. Here, '[d]iscourse, or more properly discursive practices, have the power to hold the normative order in place, and the power to open up the not-yet-known' (Davies and Gannon, 2004: 313).

Discourse analysis is thus a key method of post-structuralism, and in accordance with its framework we must understand that 'texts are the momentarily fixed form of an ongoing negotiation or even struggle over meaning' (Fürsich, 2009: 247); and are therefore 'interrogated to uncover the unspoken and unstated assumptions implicit within them that have shaped the very form of the text in the first place' (Cheek, 2008: 357). In this mode, as Cheek explains,

> Drawing on Foucauldian theoretical perspectives, discourse analysis thus involves more than analyzing the content of texts for the ways in which they have been structured in terms of syntax, semantics, and so forth. Rather, it is concerned with the way in which texts themselves have been constructed, ordered, and shaped in terms of their social and historical situatedness. (356)

This 'social and historical situatedness' is crucial to the concerns of this thesis. Yet there are limitations with a Foucauldian approach. Firstly, I would argue that the operation of a Foucauldian lens is somewhat paradoxical to the previous

definition of post-structuralism, given that it privileges a prescriptive meta-narrative and thus potentially problematic ideological frame. Dumm (1996) delineates this problem succinctly when he explains that 'the authority of Foucault conflicts with his critique of authorship' (xx); and I concur therefore with his proposition that we 'try instead to think with him rather than simply to follow him' (ibid.). Indeed, this is the case for all scholars cited herein; I read through no-one, but with many.

Additionally, there is a distinct problem in the potential mobilisation of a Foucauldian lens for the project of a feminist enquiry, since as Braidotti (1991) asserts, '[s]exual difference simply does not play a role in the Foucauldian universe, where the technology of the subject refers to a desexualised and general "human" subject' (87). Thus, we must move beyond Foucault and turn instead to queer feminist poststructuralist thought. Before beginning to discuss such a theoretical modality, it is important to here note, what I think is a contentious issue – the differentiation between feminist and queer post-structuralism.

Whilst Marinucci (2016) argues that these are two distinct modes, in which the former attends to gender, and the latter to sexuality; I would argue that this is (ironically given the concerns of post-structuralism) a reductive and over simplistic binary – though one reflective of the different modes' origins. Thus, in Davies and Gannon's definition of feminist post-structuralism, its scope is not limited to gender alone, but to 'break[ing] with theoretical frameworks in which gender and sexuality are understood as inevitable' (2004: 313); and in queer post-structuralism there is no necessary limitation to sexualities alone, as:

> Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative. (Halperin, 1997: 62)

Feminist and queer post-structuralism are thus by no means distinct, and are instead overlapping, as is the case for this thesis' analysis.

(Queer) feminist post-structuralism, then, 'makes visible, analysable and revisable, in particular, the male/female and straight/lesbian binaries' (Davies and Gannon, 2004: 312); 'not to expose the hidden truth of sex/gender in all its simplicity, but to *trouble that which is taken as stable/ unquestionable truth*' (314, emphasis in original). This is an issue that Butler focuses upon in *Gender Trouble* (1990), arguing that:

> The univocity of sex, the internal coherence of gender, and the binary framework for both sex and gender are […] regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression (Butler, 1990: 44).

Queer feminist post-structuralism thus works to 'multiply possibilities, to de-massify ways of thinking about 'male' and 'female' – to play with the possibility of subjectivities that are both and neither – to understand power as discursively constructed and spatially and materially located' (Davies and Gannon, 2004: 313). Accordingly, therefore this framework

> Reject[s] the idea of an essential or core self that remains the same in all situations. In contrast, emphasis is placed on decentred subjects, where subjectivity is regarded as changing, complex, and contradictory. […] As a result, there can be seen to be a continual discursive framework taking place for the temporary determination of a subject's identity, with different subjectivities being continually created by competing discourses and social practices. (Fawcett, 2008: 667)

This rejection of a fixed subject, or core female 'self' is integral to my analysis and I thus point towards both a fluidity that is at times contradictory and ambivalent; as well as shifting through multiple historically situated discursive frameworks. This is, I argue, particularly vital in the discussion of texts which represent gender and sexuality.

Accordingly, Lisa Downing (2012) has called for a 'Sex Critical' approach towards texts and their representations. Downing identifies starting points for such a 'Sex Critical' approach wherein firstly: '[a]ll forms of sexuality and all sexual representations should be equally susceptible to critical thinking and

interrogation about the normative or otherwise ideologies they uphold' (Downing, 2012: online); and secondly that

> [t]he discursive trappings of heterosexual relationships, intercourse, and reproduction deserve just as much critical scrutiny as non-normative identities/ behaviours/ presentations and "extreme" bodily practices (if not more, given the historical lack of critical attention brought to bear on what is perceived to be the norm, leading to unquestioning acceptance of potential inequalities and harm) (ibid.,)

Thus, while my analysis points towards queer potentialities of the text(s), I am as much concerned with the ways in which *Story of O* is fundamentally the product of the discursive frameworks of heteropatriarchy and its resultant interconnected gendernormativity; yet I do not speak to a 'truth' to these discourses and practices. As Downing further argues therefore:

> I prefer to eschew altogether the either/ or logic that the lexicon of "positive"/ "negative" presupposes. I also dislike the way in which such language silences the questions that to me seem key: positive *for whom*? Negative in terms of *whose ideological agenda and interests*? The very notion that "positive"/ "negative" can ever be universal qualities, that anything can ever be equally "good" or "bad" for all groups and classes, strikes me as ultimately wrongheaded (ibid., emphasis in original)

Unlike feminist scholars before me then, this thesis thus consequently seeks not to deliver a verdict in which female masochism and submission and associated sexual acts are either 'good' or 'bad' (see Chapter Three). Nor is it the purpose of this research to decide whether *Story of O* is a 'good' or 'bad', feminist or anti-feminist text (see Chapter Five), but instead to investigate how these are historical and social culturally constructed positions which in turn construct a truth of the text/s and their subject/s. In my analysis there are of course inevitably links and slippages between my analysis of the *textual* representations of *actual* SM sexual acts, practitioners and to a lesser degree, cultures, however I am however always principally concerned with the process of deconstructing the textual representation and the discourses that shape their constitute meaning.

There is a sense that in refusing to ‘take sides’ and instead advocating for a complex, reflective, nuanced approach, post-structuralist pornography scholars’ perceived ‘fence sitting’ can ultimately read as endorsing that which it seeks to critique[2]. But I would highlight here that this is a unique additional burden of representation that pornographic texts bear. If this were, for instance, a thesis on the works of Scorsese, it would neither be burdened with the criticism of promoting and upholding Film (as a therefore positive thing), nor of promoting Scorsese ‘itself’ and his texts (though perhaps in this case it often should…) Nor would it be subject to the same decries of reifying the film industry. We understand that film texts are both artistic works and commercial products, not simply ‘good’ or ‘bad’, and indeed they can be either, neither, or both concurrently; such a dichotomous claim to truth is too simplistic and ultimately, I would argue, inconsequential. Instead, as McKee (2003) argues, in analysing texts:

> we don't make claims about whether texts are ‘accurate’, ‘truthful’ or ‘show reality’. We don't simply dismiss them as ‘inaccurate’ or ‘biased’. These claims are moral ones more than anything, attempting to close down other forms of representation without engaging with them. [..] If all we say of them is ‘accurate’ or ‘inaccurate’, then we never get to the interesting part of the analysis - how these texts tell their stories, how they represent the world, and how they make sense of it. (McKee, 2003: 17)

These stories, representations and ‘sense making’ however do not constitute a fundamental truth, but a constructed, mediated discourse. This therefore requires a post-structuralist analysis which views ‘texts as constructed by and in turn constructing understandings of reality rather than describing a or the reality’ (Cheek, 2008: 357); and thus ‘[takes] apart the endless layers that are seen to constitute social reality’ (Fawcett, 2008: 668). As Cheek explains:

> Texts are thus both product of and in turn, produce, discursive-based understandings of aspects of reality. But any text will only ever convey and produce a partial perspective of the reality being presented. This formation challenges the notion that texts are neutral and value-free receptacles, or simply conveyors, of information. (Cheek, 2008: 356)

Therefore, in analysing texts we must be 'attentive to suppressed tensions or conflicts within the text and suspicious of all "natural" categories, essentialist oppositions and representational claims' (Flax, 1990 in Fawcett, 2008: 668). As Johnson argues, of textual analysis:

> The formal reading of a text has to be as open and multi-layered as possible, identifying preferred positions or frameworks certainly, but also alternative readings and subordinate frameworks, even if these can only be discerned as fragments, or as contradictions in the dominant form. (Johnson, 1986/7: 74)

This requires, therefore a bi-modal reading: one which [de]constructs the dominant ideology of the texts and their preferred positions, and another which 'looks for what has been suppressed within the text […] recovering the suppressed allows the strains and self-division that are an at least equally important part of the story to reappear' (Fawcett, 2008: 668).

Moreover, this thesis aims to destabilise and problematise such truths by folding in a queer feminist epistemological approach; one which is 'grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence, [which] offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing, and forgetting as part of an alternative feminist project' (Halberstam, 2011: 124). My analysis thus points towards gaps, ellipses, ambivalences, contradictions and fluidity in the texts; rather than attempting to resolve them or force upon them a reading as dominant ideology. As Cheek explains, post-structural (textual and) discourse analysis

> can thus be perceived by some as not providing a sufficiently rigorous methodology in which the reader is satisfied that the analysis has produced the only possible reading. Yet discourse analytic approaches do not necessarily aim to seek closure in terms of producing the only possible reading; to seek to do so may, in fact, be in conflict with the tenets of the approach employed (Cheek, 2008: 357).

Indeed, at the heart of this method is an eschewing of closure or finitude, or a neat and tidy 'happy ending' echoing the queer project's endeavour to reject futurity (Edelman, 2004). Furthermore, Halberstam (2011) asserts that in this way failure can be reconceptualised and embraced as inherently queer:

> as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities (88).

Yet in my role as both scholar-archivist and storyteller in choosing what to include and to exclude, and in attempting to create from these unruly texts and their clandestine history, a convenient, normative linear narrative I am aware of my contradictory role as truthmaker. Further, as a feminist project in which I am the archivist narrator, at what point does this thesis then become my narrative? We are encouraged to think of our work and ourselves as distinct entities, but the two are resultant, co-dependent, entwined rather than separate. To try to untangle, or to make the two distinct creates a false binary, and as Waite (2015) explains, such

> binary logic is precisely the kind of logic that dictates we must either look inside or outside; we must choose either theory or practice; we must either write narrative or scholarship; we must be men or women, scholars or poets. So, with queer values in mind, I want to propose there is a way we can both look at ourselves *and* outside ourselves at the same time; there is a way we can look forward in time and simultaneously problematize the notion of the future; there are ways to embrace the contradictions in our field, in our scholarly writing, and in our classrooms. (Waite, 2015: 52, emphasis in original)

When Waite exposes the false dichotomy between scholarship and narrative, scholars and poets, I see in this thesis the blurring of my own voice with the texts' and discourses'. At times, when I am in conversation with different authors and scholars my writing style shifts. There is a tendency perhaps to view this as the loss of my own authorial voice, but throughout the thesis I consider that am always in conversation with different concepts, ideas and texts and here I am therefore speaking their language. Further, at times, I have felt the burden of responsibility to these texts, the need to make sense of them and to give them voice – to give them *my* voice. The resultant thesis is one which

treads the difficult boundaries between criticism and narration; and I understand this process to be part of the queer mode of reading, which blurs, disturbs, unsettles and destabilises the positions of author—text—reader. This is a mode, as Deer (2016) writes of Wood (2014), which interrogates questions of 'mastering'[3] the text; as she asks, 'What would it mean to read and write without mastery? To think without mastery? And to recognise this lack not as a deficiency but as a necessary, inescapable condition, and, further, as a positive force?' (Deer, 2016: 197).

Similarly, I have tried in vain to master the *Story of O*, its paratexts and adaptations throughout the course of this research, through a potentially queer method of producing hundreds of thousands of notes, transcribing and analysing each text and in so doing hoping that by immersing myself in the texts that I would unlock their meaning. What resulted however, were as many questions as answers. My analysis therefore offers both dominant and alternative readings, drawing attention to ambivalences and contradictions which undoubtedly reflect my own positionality and ambivalent relationship to (and with) the text. I hope that the resultant position of the thesis is one too which is

> [c]omplex and playful, it calls for the same close attention that she gives to the texts she reads. Her readings are not just readings *of* her chosen texts, but also readings *with* [her which] bring out the ways in which writing disturbs the relation between authority and reception, fiction and reality, knowledge and the future (200, my emphasis).

Rationale For Text Selection

Principally, this thesis focuses upon the 1954 French BDSM novel, *Story of O*. It is worth declaring my relationship to the text. Unlike other scholars' PhD theses, the focus upon *Story of O* is not because it is my favourite text. I am neither an 'acafan' or 'fan scholar' (see Hills, 2002) nor am I an 'anti-fan' (see Cornell, 2005; Grey 2012; Haig, 2014; Jones and Harman 2013; Click 2019) of the *Story of O*. My relationship is instead more ambivalent. I first encountered the story, I think, through the 1970s adaptation which we stocked at Forbidden Planet,

where I had worked during my Master's degree. It resided in a dark corner of the Shaftesbury Avenue branch's basement alongside other softcore titles such as *Deep Throat* (1972) and *Flesh Gordon* (1974). I had also read the novel prior to undertaking this research, of course, and had mixed feelings about the experience. On the one hand, I have always been interested in SM literature, and *Story of O* offers a unique female (arguably first person) narrative, which stands out against its contemporaries. Yet I took very little erotic pleasure in reading the novel, and this is to some extent reflected in the resultant thesis.

Instead, I was frustrated by *Story of O* – by its cold characters lacking in depth, its fixation upon love and romance, its glamourisation of a bourgeois elitest society and problematic representations of class and race, and its abrupt ending/s which frustrated me as a reader. More so, I was frustrated with O. I wanted to like her, and I wanted to see in her an agentic perverse libertine and instead found a nothingness which at that time underscored the story for me. Some ten years later, most likely in a mode akin to cabin fever I have in many ways grown to love O, and have grown to appreciate the complexities of the novel and its author. I am no closer to being a fan of *Story of O*, however I now have a much greater appreciation of the importance of text in spite of, and because of its problems and limitations.

Ultimately, the main rationale for this thesis' focus on *Story of O* is quite simple – although penned under nom de plume, it is the first known female authored text to explore female submission and masochism. It thus occupies an important (and under-researched place) in the pantheon of SM literature. As noted previously, this is a relatively recent discovery, with its author, Pauline Réage, having been 'unmasked' in *The New Yorker* in 1996 (de St. Jorre, 1996a) as Dominique Aury; four decades after *Story of O*'s initial publication. For this thesis' enquiry, focused as it is upon the construction of female sexuality under patriarchy, this female authored novel offers the opportunity to examine how woman writes herself, her gender and her sexuality.

Further, this, I argue is a rich text, which has been largely ignored, or derided in feminist criticism (see Chapter Five) and shrouded in mystery. This in turn

warrants a close textual analysis to understand the text's story, its major themes as well as its ambivalences, absences, contradictions and cognitive dissonances. Thus, the notion of the novel as a distinct 'intact' entity is called into question; the monolithic linearity of text and its reading blurred (see Chapter Four). This destabilisation I argue occurs both as inherent interior properties of the text itself (Chapter Four); as well as through exteriorly positioned processes (chapters five, six and seven). Further, the limitations that literature holds both in how language constructs the subject, and the confines of the patriarchal industry of publishing as mediation, are explored.

While this thesis is concerned with *Story of O* as its key text, I have tried however to be careful of positioning Réage's narrative as a sacrosanct 'whole'. Drawing on Kristeva's (1980) notion of the text as a 'continuous productivity', Jonathan Gray (2010) argues that 'a film or program is but one part of the text, the text always being a contingent entity, either in the process of forming and transforming or vulnerable to further formation or transformation' (Gray, 2010: 7). While Gray's principle 'text' here is film or television, I would argue that this can also be applied to other media. *Story of O* as a novel is but one part of the text and its continuous productivity, in numerous manners. Firstly, while Gray's focus upon continuous productivity through elements such as trailers, advertisements and fan activity typifies our contemporary understanding of paratextuality; Genette (1997) instead defines the term more broadly, to potentially comprise 'a title, a sub-title, intertitles; *prefaces, postfaces,* notices*, forewords* etc.; marginal infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs, illustrations, blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic' (3, my emphasis). These paratexts, so often ignored, are thus examined and reintegrated back into the text to return the reading back to that which the reader experiences, rather than operating a focused, selective reading on the "clean" text within. I am however less interested in what the publication of these texts may do for a phenomenology of reading, than I am in how they expand the texts' continuous productivity of meaning.

Accordingly, this expanded definition of 'text' vis-à-vis paratexts enables an enquiry in which we can resituate *Story of O* in conjunction with its accompanying postface, the essay *A Slave's Revolt* (1954) – also titled in varying translations as *Happiness in Slavery* – by Jean Paulhan. This essay's inclusion is integral to our [un]making sense of the text, for two reasons. Firstly, it offers an explanation of the novel, making claims to the meaning of the text, and how we should read its sexual politics. Secondly, with historiographically afforded hindsight, it offers us a metanarrative of the story of *Story of O* once we understand that Paulhan was in fact Réage's lover, and the novel a love-letter from her to him. Furthermore, this research examines *Story of O*'s much lesser known sequel, *Story of O Part Two* (1969) and its preface, *A Girl in Love* (1969); both attributed to, and I am confident to have been authored by, Pauline Réage. If *Story of O* as love-letter was the sub-text to *A Slave's Revolt*, here it is the overt focus of *A Girl In Love*, hence furthering the metanarrative that accompanies this text and shapes our understanding. Additionally, *Story of O Part Two*, published 15 years after *Story of O*, furthers and destabilises the text. Yet there exists no critical discussion, scholarly or otherwise upon it. This thesis thus addresses that absence.

Additionally, there is another set of texts which this thesis draws upon to make sense of *Story of O* and its meaning: both interviews with the author and her reflections of her text, alongside opposing feminist criticism (Chapter Five). When grouped as a whole, these texts comprise competing discursive frameworks which shape our understanding of the text/s. Here I am interested in how these discourses enable us to make sense of this story, or indeed to problematise it. However, I am attempting not to privilege Réage's voice as author and her story and understanding of the text as a singular 'truth', but instead to create a further pluralism and expansion of *Story of O,* which I argue is defined by its very contradictions and ambiguities (as below).

To summarise thus far then, this thesis focuses upon *Story of O* as a key text for exploring female submission and masochism, and how it functions as a sexual practice under patriarchy. This is owing to the publication's status as the first female authored BDSM novel. In addition to *Story of O*, I also analyse and

discuss the paratexts of *A Slave's Revolt*, *A Girl in Love,* and *Story of O Part Two* which expand both the *Story of O*, and the story of *Story of O*, in order to further unpack the text's representations and meanings. Further, this thesis examines the discursive frameworks that surround these texts, to evidence how competing discourses have attempted to exercise a fixity or 'truth' upon a text marked by its plurality.

In addition to these literary texts, this thesis also examines two cinematic adaptations of *Story of O:* 1974's *Histoire d'O* (Chapter Six) and 2007's *The Training of O: The Training of Madison Young* (Chapter Seven). Here I am interested in the transformative nature of adaptation, and how the performative medium of film may open up or close down potentialities of *Story of O*'s narrative potentiality; how they may negotiate the problems of the novel, and yet in turn be problematic in their own normative and recuperative narrative functions. I am less interested then, in how 'successful' these texts are at adapting *Story of O*, than I am in exploring the affordances these filmic texts offer both to the expansion of O's storyworld, and our resultant understanding of the complexities of female sexuality under patriarchy. Here *Histoire d'O* and *The Training of O: The Training of Madison Young* are both rich texts for exploration. Principally this is owing to their chronological positioning in *Story of O's* historiography as the earliest, and one of the most recent. This is not however arbitrary, as I am as much interested in what these texts say in their own rights, as I am in seeing how the passage of time has affected the way in which we understand, mediate, or rewrite the story of O and its meaning.

Accordingly, in selecting two feature length (or longer) rich texts that allow for a sustained close reading from two differing time periods (1974 and 2007), we can observe how pornography as a paradigmatic medium has evolved from erotic literature to cinematic softcore and again to hardcore in web 3.0. (By which I mean its occupation in the mainstream imaginary – hardcore has of course run parallel to softcore). Additionally, these texts offer us the opportunity to examine how meaning and representation have been negotiated under shifting socio-political temporal contexts. In so doing they are thus also

articulations of historically situated discourses on female sexuality that are shaped by patriarchy, feminist theory, and reactions to both.

Story of O's earliest adaptation, *Histoire d'O* (1974) – explored in Chapter Six – is particularly interesting both in its narrative (in)fidelity and in its reception. Through textual analysis I examine how *Histoire d'O* mediates, adapts and destabilises the fluidity of its source text, imposing upon it a new narrative denouement. Furthermore, having been refused a certificate in Britain, but exhibited internationally, the film is thus I argue historically located both within a particularly British cultural anxiety around female sexuality and BDSM, as well as in a particular theorisation of texts and harm. This is particularly notable given that the novel has never fallen afoul of the Obscene Publications Act (1857; 1959; 1964), but its adaptation was deemed too dangerous by the BBFC to exhibit; despite I argue, a desexualisation of the text. As I explore through original archival research at the BBFC, this 'banning' of the text is a direct result of the previously examined discursive frameworks. However, upon the film's resubmission to the board in 2000, the film was passed largely uncut and deemed to no longer pose any harm to audiences. Such a shift in attitude reflects the way in which our culture and its ideas around gender and sexuality (as well as pornography and audiences) is not fixed, but instead fluid; and exposes the socio-political discursive frameworks that shape how we think about texts and their representations. I underscore this assertion with an examination which contrasts the film's two different receptions in film criticism in the 1970s and the 2000s.

The Training of O: The Training of Madison Young (2007) – explored in Chapter Seven – however has never had theatrical release and instead finds its home online in the subscription access model of hardcore BDSM pornography giant, Kink.com. Unlike *Histoire d'O,* it does not suffer from a process of desexualisation to appease censors (though its content is more tempered than the novel, avoiding such acts as piercing and branding that could fall foul of the law). At first glance, the *Training of O* is, in terms of fidelity an exploitation text with little in common with *Story of O* outside of its promotional materials. Indeed, it is not a retelling of the novel's narrative, its storyworld is populated

with none of the characters, dialogue, or settings of the novel. However, I argue that the themes of *Training of O* are absolutely in keeping with its source text, and through an exploration of *The Training of Madison Young*, an episodic four-part series within the *Training of O*, I draw attention to the similar themes and problems across the texts as a continuum. This is punctuated through an examination of Young's autobiography *Daddy* (2014a), in which we gain valuable insight into the impetus of this adaptation, as well as Young's performance. Further, like *Story of O*'s paratexts before it, *Daddy* acts as an additional narrative in which we understand that she and her co-performer, the creator of *Training of O* are lovers, like Réage and Paulhan before them.

Conclusion

This thesis offers an original contribution through its theoretical framework of (queer) feminist post-structuralism, which is achieved through both textual analysis and discourse analysis, to examine a number of texts and paratexts, both literary and filmic, as well as their discursive frameworks. These are, principally: *Story of O* (1954); *A Slave's Revolt* (1954); *Story of O Part Two* (1969); and *A Girl in Love* (1969); *Histoire d'O* (1974) and *The Training of O: The training of Madison Young* (2007). Together these texts have been selected for their importance in constructing and deconstructing *Story of O* as an expanded storyworld through which to explore representations of female submission and masochism. In the next chapter, before beginning to examine *Story of O* it is necessary to historically situate its representations of female sexuality through a literature review examining two key discourses which have shaped our understanding – psychology and feminism.

Notes

1. I must therefore resist the temptation to apply a poststructuralist deconstruction of my own methodology (and thesis), which is beyond the purpose of this chapter. I do however return to discuss the relationship between myself and my thesis as text in what follows.

2. Here I admittedly pointedly referring to the reception of Routledge's *Porn Studies* journal, and the pre-emptive petition of 888 signatories to rename the journal 'Pro-Porn Studies'; See Cadwalladr (2013) for an example of press coverage of the debate, and Attwood and Smith (2014a and 2014b) for the editors' ripostes.

3. 'Master[/y]' here is fully utilised in its gendered implications – that it chimes with the language of BDSM is also telling.

Chapter Three –
Literature Review: The Social Construction of (Sado)Masochism

Introduction

To establish how masochism and submission (alongside sadism and sadomasochism) has been historically constructed, this literature review thus overviews the foundational ideas of two discursive modes which have shaped our enduring cultural understanding: firstly, in the masculine discourse (see Millett, 1970; Chesler, 1972; Daly, 1978; Daly and Caputi, 1987; Dworkin, 1987; Busfield, 1989; and Grosz, 1990; cf. Jordanova 1989) of psychiatry and psychoanalysis in the 1880s to 1950s; and secondly in the feminine discourse of 1970s to 1980s pro- and anti-SM feminism. Thus, these are explored as two distinct but overlapping historical discursive frameworks.

While it should be noted that no neat parallel can be made between the two, I argue that these frameworks have similarities, in that both are reliant upon the operation of a number of binary modes: male/female, masculine/feminine, active/passive, sadist/masochist, aggressor/victim, natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, right/wrong, procreative/perverse, normative/subversive and liberatory/oppressive. While these binaries are presented as immutable, they are rooted in, and ultimately reinforce, a flawed construction of gender and sexuality. It is not therefore this thesis' contention that either discourse reveals a 'truth' of femininity, masochism, or submission nor of BDSM acts or practices. Instead, the purpose of this chapter is to examine how these regulatory frameworks attempted to construct this 'truth' and to point towards the inherent problems of these discourses.

(Psychology and) Psychoanalysis

This section chronologically overviews key literature from the evolving psy-disciplines' theorisation of masochism and submission (alongside sadism and

sadomasochism) 1880s to 1950s. Beginning with psychiatry and medicine, this then moves to the emergent discipline of psychoanalysis. Through this timeline, we can observe a discursive shift towards SM from an attitude of taxonomic observation and pathologisation towards therapeutic resolution. This reflects broader cultural shifts away from the asylum carceral model, towards modern psychiatry with its emphasis on treatment and rehabilitation (cf. Foucault, 1960; Jordanova, 1989).

Constructing Masochism

In defining 'masochism' in 1886 psychiatrist Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing decreed it to be '*passively* endured cruelty […] the opposite of sadism. While the latter is the desire to cause pain, the former is the wish to suffer pain and be subjected by force' (Krafft-Ebing, 1886: 86, my emphasis). Sadism and masochism are thus described as 'perfect counterparts' (213; 214). Furthermore, the author genders the positions of sadist and masochist, stating that:

> [w]hile sadism may be looked upon as a pathological intensification of the *masculine sexual character* in its psychical peculiarities, masochism rather represents a pathological degeneration of the *distinctive psychical peculiarities of woman* (133, my emphasis).

Here sadism is squarely positioned as masculine, and masochism distinctly feminine. It is this underlying paradigm which is crucial to an understanding of how masochism is fundamentally gendered within the discourse of psychology – and in turn how this has shaped our cultural understanding.

Krafft-Ebing furthers his positioning of masochism as biologically determined as follows:

> In woman voluntary subjection to the opposite sex is a physiological phenomenon. *Owing to her passive rôle in procreation and long existing social conditions, ideas of subjugation are, in woman, normally connected with the idea of sexual relations.* They form, so to speak, *the harmonics which determine the tone quality of feminine feeling* [. . .T]*he passive rôle with which woman has been endowed by Nature has given her an*

> *instinctive inclination to voluntary subordination to man*; he will notice that exaggeration of customary gallantry is very distasteful to women, and that a deviation from it in the direction of masterful behaviour, though loudly reprehended, is often accepted with *secret satisfaction*. Under the veneer of polite society the *instinct of feminine servitude* is everywhere discernible. (130, my emphasis)

Female sexual submission or 'servitude' is thus positioned as natural, 'instinctual' and passive, conflating both supposed biological and social factors. Continuing in this vein, he cites xenophobic ethnographic 'data' to evidence the social normativity of female masochism in 'primitive' groups: '[a] Hungarian official informs me that the peasant women of the Somogyer Comitate do not think that they are loved by their husbands until they have received the first box on the ear as a sign of love' (131); and '[a[mong the lower classes of slavs [sic] it is said that the wives feel hurt if they are not beaten by their husbands' (ibid).

Female masochism, like female submission then is therefore positioned as normal unless it is an 'antipathic sexual instinct' (212) i.e., non-reproductive and thus non-normative. Therefore, only three cases of female masochism are analysed by Krafft-Ebing: Case 86, "X", a heterosexual 'girl' with a desire for (violent) gynaecological exams; Case 85, "Miss v. X" a non-sexually active lesbian with a desire to be flagellated by women; and Case 87, "Miss X", a lesbian masochist who enjoyed flagellation and coprolagnia and 'felt quite happy in her perverse homosexual existence' (213). All three are positioned as deviant in their anti-procreative (and thus non-heteronormative) drives, yet they are (sadly) mentioned only briefly. It is instead the presentation of masochism in men that most troubles Krafft-Ebing, evidenced by his analysis of 34 male cases as opposed to the three female; thus centring masculinity.

Indeed, having coined the term from Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1870), as per the recommendation of patient Case 57, he elucidates his gendered definition of the paraphilia as follows:

> I feel justified in calling this sexual anomaly "Masochism", because the author *Sacher-Masoch* frequently made this perversion, which up until this time was quite unknown to the scientific world as such, the subject of his

> writings [...] During recent years facts have been advanced which prove that Sacher-Masoch was not only the poet of masochism, but that he himself was afflicted with this anomaly [...] As an author he suffered severe injury in as far as the influence and intrinsic merit of his work is concerned, for so long and whenever he eliminated his perversion from his literary efforts he was a gifted writer, and as such would have achieved real greatness had he been actuated by normal sexual feelings. (87)

That Krafft-Ebing regarded Masoch highly enough to describe him as the '*poet* of masochism' and yet mourned the literary contribution he could have made without it is somewhat of a curious contradiction. The language chosen here however is telling: it is a 'perversion', an 'anomaly' and 'injury', an affliction, and abnormality. Male masochism is thus positioned as Other to a normative, gendered paradigm of sexuality. This othering is achieved through the characterisation of male masochism as aligned with the feminine: it is an 'effemination' (211); 'supported by the fact that heterosexual [male] masochists consider themselves endowed with feminine feelings [and] observation shows that they really possess feminine traits of character' (211—212).

Conversely essayist and physician Havelock Ellis (1903) argued that the cultural presentation of sadism as masculine (and thus masochism as feminine) deviates instead from a natural 'feminine organization',

> [in] nature *it is nearly always the male who is the victim of the female*. It is the male spider who impregnates the female at the risk of his life and sometimes perishes in the attempt; it is the male bee who, after intercourse with the queen, falls dead from that fatal embrace, leaving her to fling aside his entrails and calmly pursue her course (123, my emphasis).

This is a highly selective reading underscored by misogyny, and further he argues such an inversion be viewed as a 'very slight counterpoise to that cruelty which has been naturally exerted by the female on the male long even before man began to be' (ibid.,). For Ellis, then, woman as victim of male sadism is payback. He thus justifies a male cultural sadistic drive which he ethnographically locates in: violent 'marriage by capture' in 'primitive' tribes

(71—77); the European world including domestic violence amongst the working classes of London (79); and even among aristocratic circles(!) (78).

Despite this desire to locate sadism and masochism within an (inverse) biologically determined gender binary, Ellis' work holds a crucial point of contradistinction to Krafft-Ebing, in his problematisation of these positions as distinct, gendered drives:

> Careful consideration of the phenomena of sadism and masochism may be said to lead us to the conclusion that there is no real line of demarcation [...T]he distinction between "sadism" and "masochism" cannot be maintained; not only was even De Sade himself something of a masochist and Sacher-Masoch something of a sadist, but between these two extreme groups of phenomena there is a central group in which the algolagnia [desire for inflicting pain] is neither active nor passive. "Sadism" and "masochism" are simply convenient clinical terms for classes of manifestations which quite commonly occur in the same person. (164)

Here the potentiality of what would later be termed sadomasochism as concurrent is presented; an observation that would shortly thereafter be picked up by neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud.

Freudian Psychoanalysis

Freud composed four critical papers exploring sadomasochism, sadism, and masochism; the impact of which upon psychoanalytic diagnostics and, importantly treatment, cannot be underestimated. These are in chronological order: *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905); *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915); *"A Child Is Being Beaten": A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion* (1919); and *The Economic Problem of Masochism* (1924). *Three Essays* first considered sadism and masochism, positioning them as component instincts of the childhood anaclitic bond, and naturally occurring elements of pre-pubescent sexual development. Like Krafft-Ebing before him, Freud aligns sadism with masculine activity in a framework of biological determinism:

> *The sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness – a desire to subjugate; the biological significance of it seems to lie in the need for overcoming the sexual resistance of the sexual object* by means other than wooing. […] In ordinary speech the connotation of sadism oscillates between, on the one hand, cases merely characterized by an active or violent attitude to the sexual object, and, on the other hand, cases in which *satisfaction is entirely conditional* on the humiliation and maltreatment of the object. Strictly speaking it is only this last extreme instance which deserves to be described as a perversion. (Freud, 1905: 86, my emphasis)

This is crucial in exposing the underlying presupposition that sadism is a natural paradigm, only of concern when it is found in excess. This excessive sadism, Freud asserts like Krafft-Ebing before him, becomes only a problem when it interferes with a normative sexual drive.

However, Freud introduces a new compound conflation, what may effectively be considered Sadomasochism:

> [T]he most remarkable feature of this perversion is that its *active and passive forms are habitually found to occur in the same individual*. A person who feels pleasure in producing pain in someone else in a sexual relationship is also capable of enjoying as pleasure any pain which he may derive from sexual relations. *A sadist is always at the same time a masochist*, although the active or passive aspect of the perversion may be more strongly developed in him and may represent his dominant sexual activity (87, my emphasis).

It is important to note that Freud repeats here the masculine third person term 'he' throughout, for, like Krafft-Ebing before him his focus was upon males, and the consideration of femininity and masochism is something Freud would not take up until 1919. Nonetheless, what is of crucial importance here is that in asserting that a subject can be contemporaneously both passive and active, both sadist and masochist, Freud proposes a potentially revolutionary distinction from the previously gendered binary of male-active-sadist and female-passive-masochist. Furthermore, Freud's second paper on sadomasochism, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915) put forth a further

exploration of sadism and masochism, fixing the two concepts as indivisible, proposing that 'masochism is actually sadism turned round upon the subject's own ego' (Freud, 1915: 91), attributing the emergence of this process to repressed infantile desire. Yet this argument would later be renounced, as Freud returned to resituate the object as external, and in so doing created a fixed gender binary in the infantile psyche's object relations.

This theorisation of sadism as primary drive and masochism as secondary, is furthered in *“A Child Is Being Beaten”: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion* (1919); here masochism is made central to the formation and resolution of the Oedipus complex. Freud postulates that this occurs through three stages of the child's fantasy of being beaten. Firstly, the boy or girl desires their father and fantasises his beating of another child, displaying his love for them. Secondly, for boys the father becomes the mother in order to repress their homosexual oedipal desire for the father, and for both sexes the child becomes the one being beaten. This is asserted as a normal passive position for the female, but problematic through feminisation of the male. In the third and final stage both genders are positioned as the 'phantasist' becoming the spectator, and the female child being beaten becomes a boy. Freud suggests that this final stage is crucial, 'as both sexes hasten to get free from this attitude by repressing phantasy' (Freud, 1919: 180).

The validity of the Oedipal complex aside, the implications of this gendering of sexuality is as follows: Freud believes that homosexuality is feminine, emerging from the repression of object relations and the inability for resolution, while femininity is a much less problematic act of masochistic passivity. However, yet again this femininity must be denied and rejected, as the female seeks not to be feminine and passive, but instead masculine and male (thus whole and 'right' through the phallus). Thus, we can see the development of Freud's theorisation of masochism evolving to include the addition that '[t]he transformation of sadism into masochism appears to be due to the influence of the sense of guilt which takes part in the act of repression [of Oedipal desire]' (172).

Freud's fourth and final paper on sadomasochism, *The Economic Problem of Masochism* (1924) presents a splintering of the term 'masochism':

> Masochism comes under our observations in three forms: as a condition imposed on sexual excitations, as an expression of feminine nature, and as a norm of behavior. We may, accordingly, distinguish an erotogenic, a feminine, and a moral masochism. (Freud, 1924: 276)

Erotogenic masochism is here defined as a natural, feminine 'pleasure in pain' (277), a conscious guilt arising from conflict between the libido and death drive. In moral masochism however, '[t]he suffering in itself is what matters; whether it is decreed by someone else is of no importance' (279), and it is this which arises from an *unconscious* guilt from the repression of oedipal desires, and the need for punishment.

Feminine masochism, most important to the concerns of this thesis, is presented as 'the least problematical [...] the manifest content is of being gagged, bound, painfully beaten, whipped, in some way maltreated, forced into unconditional obedience, dirtied and debased' (276). Freud asserts that these *male* cases of feminine masochism while appearing to desire 'to be treated like a small and helpless [naughty] child' (277) in fact 'place the subject in a characteristically female situation; they signify, that is, being castrated, or copulate with, or giving birth to a baby' (ibid.,). Thus, two assumptions underlie Freud's theory: firstly, that feminine masochism is only worthy a study in men; and secondly and not unrelated, that the experiences of being 'copulated with' and giving birth, are both quintessentially feminine, and masochistic. Both are interrelated concepts of gendered sexual practice and therefore, under Freud's schema, to be female is to be masochist. This is a stark evolution in thought from the earlier assertion that subjects are both sadist and masochist, both active and passive; and thus works to close down this potentiality, reinforcing instead a distinct gender binary.

Female Psychoanalytic Perspectives

As the first female psychoanalyst with a specialisation in women, it perhaps comes as some surprise that not only does Helene Deutsch agree with Freud, but further roots masochism in the very Freudian world of penis envy:

> There are women who have strong sexual inhibition and intense feelings of inferiority, the origin of which lies in penis envy. In such cases it is evidently the task of analysis to free these patients from the difficulties of the masculinity complex and to convert penis envy into the desire for a child, i.e., to introduce them to accept their feminine role. (Deutsch, 1930: 418)

Thus for Deutsch, we may consider that masochism lies not in an essential femininity as such, but in an unresolved infantile femininity – in which to be feminine is to *not be masculine* – is a position of lack. Thus, masochism may be resolved by the substitution of a child instead of the penis, in order to give phallic power to the incomplete female body, and feminine position. Woman therefore is here defined by her supposed lack; she is incomplete, defined by her absence. Deutsch thus posits that not only do women suffer from penis envy, but furthermore a resulting castration anxiety and desire:

> In place of the active urge of the phallic tendencies, there arises the masochistic phantasy, 'I want to be castrated' and this forms the erotogenic masochistic basis of the feminine libido. Analytic experience leaves no room for doubt that the little girl's first libidinal relation to her father is masochistic, and the masochistic wish in its earliest distinctive phase is: 'I want to be castrated by my *father*' (414, emphasis in original).

In her consideration of the causal origins of female 'frigidity', Deutsch argues that a ‘masochistic triad’ can be observed: ‘castration, rape and parturition’ (419). She asserts therefore that when the masochist woman

> conceives the desire to be castrated and raped, she also conceives the phantasy of receiving a child from her father. From that time on, the phantasy of parturition becomes a member of the masochistic triad and the gulf between instinctual and the reproductive tendencies is bridged by masochism. The interruption of the little girl's infantile sexual development by the frustration of her desire for the child gives to the sublimation tendencies of the woman a very definite stamp of masochistic maternity

> [... Thus] in coitus and parturition the masochistic pleasure of the sexual instinct is very closely bound up with the mental experience of conception and giving birth; just so does the little girl see in her father, and the loving woman in her beloved – a child. (419—20)

Therefore, for Deutsch, the genesis of feminine masochism lies in the irresolution of the masculinity complex, resulting from the female child's desire for parturition with the father in order to replace this phallic loss. Yet this masochism only becomes problematic when the need for masochism in sexual pleasure creates 'frigidity', damaging the potential for procreation. This procreative drive is that which justifies masochism, as reflected in her conclusion:

> Women would never have suffered themselves through the epochs of history to have been withheld by social ordinances on the one hand from possibilities of sublimation, and on the other from sexual gratifications, were it not that in the function of reproduction they have found magnificent satisfaction for both urges. (422)

Masochism is thus positioned as integral to female (hetero)sexuality.

Psychoanalyst Annie Reich's *A Contribution to the Psychoanalysis of Extreme Submissiveness in Women* (1940) builds upon Deutsch's theories of female masochism through case studies, focusing on the pervasion of these qualities into masochist relationships and character. Like Deutsch, Reich's analysis concerns women's submission and masochism as emanating from infantile phallic anxiety and loss. Reich theorises that these conflicts give rise to ‘Hörigkeith’ (extreme submissiveness) emerging from frustrated relations with the mother as disappearing care giver, as well as a dysfunctional desire for phallic power. Thus ‘masochistic submissiveness in women is one way of attempting to solve these conflicts’ (Reich, 1940: 431). It is important here to note the contradiction in depicting this masochism as extreme passivity, while at the same time characterising it as an active attempt to resolve these conflicts.

Reich positions sex as an attempt towards the obtainment of phallic power through the sexual act as a violent reification, and thus masochism the pleasure therein. Here masochistic female submissiveness elevates the male as a

relinquishment of the patient's own narcissism, so that the phallus imparted to her through intercourse becomes all powerful:

> these women consider intercourse to be an act of violence, or in a more sublime way the act may be experienced as a mystic dissolution of the person which has its climax in death during orgasm (425);

and further she asserts that ‘in describing this ecstatic state we emphasize repeatedly that individuality is dissolved in complete union with this man’ (427). For the female masochist, we are told, this is a desire that pervades not only her sexuality but her life moreover: 'The submissive woman wants to remain passive far beyond the realm of sexuality. The inclination to be passive reveals a very intense sexualization of the whole life' (426). Female masochism is thus not limited to a sexual perversion but characterises her entire way of being.

The problem of sadism as active, and masochism as passive drives is furthered in psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte's *Some Biopsychical Aspects of Sado-Masochism* (1952), which revisits Freud's 1905 and 1915 theories of sadism as primary, and masochism as secondary instincts. The 'vital importance' of sadism (Bonaparte, 1952: 447), which Bonaparte once again positions as ‘essentially male’ (ibid.,) is attributed to the biological function of the male, as penetrator, traced back even to its cellular existence (443). Here, in the multicellular organism, masochism is positioned as the experience of the female cell caught somewhere between a resultant 'terror of infraction and wounding that may cause suffering and death' (ibid.,), and the ‘undergoing penetration by another living cell; be impregnated by the male cell' (ibid.,). Thus, masochism is once again situated as a fundamental feminine mode.

Bonaparte posits that this conflict is resolved via the process of eroticism:

> Eroticism, however tends to bind this terror of infraction and often succeeds, either by largely masochizing the confusion between wounding and erotogenic penetration, or by establishing such penetration as pre-eminently erotogenic. Nevertheless, some homeopathic dose of masochism remains needful for acceptance of even the most erotogenic of feminine penetration. (444)

Revisiting Freud's assertions of sadism as primary, and masochism as secondary drives, she asserts:

> [w]hatever he may have first thought, sadism could never be primary, for how could pleasure be felt in inflicting pain if one had not already experienced both these antagonistic and mysteriously linked sensations? (434)

Bonaparte argues instead that 'passivity, generally, precedes activity' (ibid.,) and that:

> Since all beings are basically bisexual, however, every masochist is more or less a sadist [. . .] Depending on whether the sadist, innately, is more or less masochistic, i.e. ready to cathect the experienced pain with pleasure, he will likewise enjoy inflicted pain by imaginatively placing himself in the position of the victim. (446—467)

Bonaparte attempts not only to ground the origins of sadomasochism in biology, but also in what Freud termed 'the primal scene' (1918), attributing these positions to gendered identifications;

> Psychoanalytic observation enables us to establish that coitus is always interpreted, by the childish observer, as a brutal, aggressive act, committed by the male on the female; that is the sadistic concept of coitus. Then, depending upon the amount of femininity or masculinity it includes, the child will thenceforth identify itself predominantly with either the man or the woman, but given its original bisexuality, in some degree with both. If the child is a girl, fear of male aggression may result [...] Unless, that is, a truly feminine masochism is constituted. If the child, however is male, his masochism, also may become strengthened, depending on the degree of innate femininity present, though sadism should predominate in some acceptable form. As though the little male already felt that penetration would be spared for him; that, like the spermatozoon which would later shoot from his body, he too, luckier than the female, would not be penetrated but penetrate. (Bonaparte, 1952: 467)

Therefore, it seems that while every person, and even every organism has an essential gender and correspondingly is either sadistic or masochist, there also lies an irrefutable bisexuality that through the predominant gender of the

individual dictates the prevalence in which the element of sadomasochism dominates. Here, then, as in Freud, Bonaparte's study highlights the problematic contradictions that occur in the meeting of biological and social gender determinism.

Summary

Psychology (and psychoanalysis) is a masculine discourse that aims to speak to a truth of gender and sexuality marked by phallocentricism and a theorisation of woman as defined by her 'lack'. Further, it constructs a binary of normative heterosexual procreative sexuality, against abnormal, deviant perversions. Thus, it is principally concerned with what it perceives abnormal presentation: non-procreative drives. In the most part it claims that masochism, submission and passivity are biologically determined characteristics of femininity; and that sadism is an essential character of the masculine. Thus, it is principally concerned either with the presentation of submission or masochism presentation in men – for whom it seeks to cure – or where in women such drives are non-reproductive and thus non-normative. However, I have also pointed to inconsistencies in this gendered binary paradigm, namely in the compound theorisation of 'sadomasochism' co-occurring in the same individual; both active and passive.

Sadomasochism and Feminism

Radical Feminism

With the emergence of second wave feminism, sadomasochism entered into the socio-political domain. In keeping with a rising anti-psychiatry movement (cf. Foucault 1976, 1978, 1988), for feminists such as Kate Millett masochism became a key concept in the obtainment of female emancipation. Millett's polemic *Sexual Politics* (1970) refused the psychoanalytic establishment's conceptualisation of femininity and gender difference;

> The lines of influence which psychoanalysis will exercise over sexual politics are set; generations of practitioners will follow, reputable or

> ridiculous. Yet more effective even than penis envy is the school's tendency toward a pseudoscientific unification of the cultural definition of masculinity and femininity with a genetic reality of male and female. Dressing the thing up in jargon – “passivity”, “low libido”, “masochism”, “narcissism”, “underdeveloped super ego” - one gives the old myth of feminine “nature” a new respectability. Now it can be said scientifically that women are inherently subservient, and males dominant, more strongly sexed and therefore entitled to sexually subjugate the female, who enjoys her oppression and deserves it. […P]sychoanalysis promised fulfilment in passivity and masochism, and greater fulfilment, indeed, the very meaning of woman's life lay in reproduction and there alone. (Millett, 1970: 203)

Masochism, then for Millett, was the means by which women were oppressed by men, through a constructed 'pseudo-scientific' social process. Further, Millett argued, it was through this process that women accepted and invested their own fulfilment in their subjugation. However, while such a theorisation of gender as constructed may point towards the work of queer post-structuralists such as Judith Butler (1990; as discussed in the previous chapter), Millett makes the following essentialist assertion: ‘[s]ex like race, is something one cannot really change. [..I]t is futile to hope to escape one’s birth caste’ (203). In this rhetoric, then, while gender is socially constructed, Millet’s logic implies that the process of being sexed is not a discursive construction of the sexed subject; but that it is innate, inescapable; we are born into our identities through our sex.

Similar rhetoric was to be found in Andrea Dworkin's radical feminist works. Like Millett before her, Dworkin also cited masochism as the principle socio-cultural process of female oppression, and key to emancipation:

> I believe that freedom for women must begin in the repudiation of our own masochism [...] I believe that ridding ourselves of our own deeply entrenched masochism, which takes so many tortured forms, is the first priority; it is the first deadly blow that we can strike against systematized male dominance. (Dworkin, 1976: 111)

However, crucially, for Dworkin it is not just a patriarchal construct to be refused, but a 'deeply entrenched' feminine identity which must be purged from

the female self, again speaking to an essentialist conceptualisation of the feminine. This however is fundamentally contradictory to her earlier assertion that:

> The object is cultural transformation [...] The way from here to there will not be easy. We must make a total commitment – no longer to take refuge in the scenarios of man-woman violence which are society's regulators, no longer to play the male-female roles we have been taught [...] We must refuse to submit to all forms of behavior and relationship which reinforce male-female polarity, which nourish basic patterns of male dominance and female submission. (Dworkin, 1974: 192)

In this mode, as Linda Williams (1989) notes, in Dworkin's rhetoric woman can only ever be theorised as the victim:

> For only by casting her archetypal "suffering woman" in the role of the absolute victim of history can Dworkin utter her appeal to the compassionate man who will rescue her. [. . .] As long as we emphasize woman's role as the absolute victim of male sadism, we only perpetuate the supposedly essential nature of woman's powerlessness. (Williams, 1989: 21—20)

Dworkin therefore refuses to recognise that her own mobilisation of gender and sexuality ultimately 'reinforce[s] male-female polarity, which nourish basic patterns of male dominance and female submission' (Dworkin, 1974: 192).

While for Millett psychiatry was the locale of women's oppression vis-à-vis masochism, Dworkin declared pornography to be the enemy. In *Intercourse* (1987) man-as-sadist and woman-as victim emerges as the core element of her conceptualisation of pornography, stating that '[a]ny violation of a woman's body can become sex for men; this is the essential truth of pornography' (Dworkin, 1987: 164). Further, she asserts that:

> The word *pornography* does not mean "writing about sex" or "depictions of the erotic" or "depictions of sexual acts" or "descriptions of nude bodies" or "sexual representations" or any other such euphemism. It means the graphic depiction of women as whores [...] Contemporary pornography strictly and literally conforms to the word's root meaning [...t]he only

> change in the meaning of the word is with respect to its second part, *graphos*; now there are cameras – there is still photography, film, video [...] With the technologically advanced methods of graphic depiction, real women are required for the depiction as such to exist. (200)

While Dworkin earlier argued that literary pornography oppresses women, citing *Story of O* as the quintessential text in this regard (as will be examined later in this thesis); here we can observe a crucial shift: the progression from pornographic abstraction to pornography as the actualised and documented site of sadistic violence.

This is a perspective which in fact characterised her work at large, as she later explained in *Letters From a War Zone* (1988),

> A doorway is a doorway. One walks through it. A doorway takes on a different significance when one sees woman after woman hanging from doorways. A lighting fixture is for light until one sees woman after woman hung from lighting fixtures. The commonplace world does not just become sinister; it becomes disgusting, repellent. […] As a worldly writer--mired in time and meaning, infatuated and obsessed with the muck of real life--I decided *that I wanted women to see what I saw*. […] I, the author, insist that I stand in for us, women. In so doing, I insist on the ultimate social meaning of writing: in facing the nightmare, *I want another generation of women to be able to reclaim the dreams of freedom that pornography has taken from me.* (Dworkin, 1988: 33—36, my emphasis)

For Dworkin pornography is not a fiction but an active process of violence and oppression. It is thus *the* active abuse of women, in which men's essential violent sadism manifests; and in this mode her rhetoric reinforces the same gender essentialism (man as sadist, woman as victim) previously critiqued in psychoanalysis.

Accordingly, Williams (1989) however has also noted the problematic framework upon which Dworkin's argument lies, wherein:

> women are viewed as colonized victims of male aggression, victims of the “brutality of male history” [...] Women have no choice but to live in this history. […] The implications of Dworkin's argument – and of the anti-

> pornography feminist position in general – is that men are carnal, perverse, powerful violent beings who “love murder”, while women are asexual or gently sexual and even inherently lesbian beings. This argument suggests, erroneously I believe, that if female sexuality were ever to get free of its patriarchal contaminations it would express no violence, would have no relations of power, and would produce no transgressive sexual fantasies. (Williams, 1989: 20)

Thus, Dworkin's assumptions of scribing a truly 'feminine' sexuality simply in fact replicate the dominant masculine discourses she seeks to evade. Further, by representing woman in patriarchy as the 'passive victim' of male brutality and theorising her free of 'patriarchal contaminations', Dworkin envisions a female sexuality as that which is not male (that which is not sadistic, that which is not violent etc.). Her rhetoric thus reinforces that which she principally aimed to disrupt: a polarising gender binary.

Pro-SM Feminism

While both Millett and Dworkin situated masochism as the principle mode and locale of women’s oppression, for pro-SM feminists it was instead heralded as a subversive, or even transgressive act. This inversion is reliant upon a strikingly complete reconfiguration of heteronormative sex as distinct from and opposed to sadomasochism. This then is an opposing operational discursive framework that seeks to deny radical feminists’ theorisation of the sexual politics of heteronormative power relations. That two completely oppositional claims could concurrently be made as to the nature of heteronormative sexuality, is essential to understanding these as discursive frameworks, and not instead immutable truths about gender and sexuality.

In this new mode Gayle Rubin’s ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a radical theory for the politics of sexuality’ (1984) asserts a ‘charmed circle’; a binary in which heteropatriarchal normative sex and sexuality are positioned as privileged, whilst other sexual acts are distinctly Othered. Rubin’s diagrammatic circle comprises an inner ‘charmed circle’ of normative acts which is labelled ‘Good, Normal, Natural, Blessed Sexuality’ and comprises a sexuality or sexual acts

which are: Heterosexual, Married, Procreative, Monogamous, Non-commercial, In Pairs, In a Relationship, Same generation, In Private, No Pornography, Bodies Only and Vanilla. The outer circle, which Rubin terms the ‘outer limits’ of sexuality, are labelled ‘Bad, Abnormal, Unnatural, Damned Sexuality’ and comprises sexualities and sexual acts which are: Homosexual, Unmarried, Promiscuous, Non-procreative, Commercial, Alone or in groups, Casual, Cross-generational, In public, [In or with] Pornography, and [with] Manufactured Objects.

In positioning sadomasochistic sexuality in 'the outer limits' of the 'sex hierarchy', therefore, Rubin therefore asserted that the positioning of sadomasochism as abnormal, or perverse, was a political conceptualisation which privileged 'heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial […] blessed sexuality' (281). Thus, she argued that: ‘[p]romiscuous homosexuality, sadomasochism, fetishism, transsexuality, and cross-generational encounters are still viewed as unmodulated horrors incapable of involving love, affection, free choice, kindness, or transcendence' (283). For Rubin then the disavowal of sadomasochism was the restraint of heternormative sexuality, and the inability to embrace sadomasochism as non-perverse or deviant constrains liberation through sexual expression.

Like Rubin, Pat Califia saw the opposition to pro-SM feminism and sexual practice as another attempt at oppression:

> The women's movement has become a moralistic force contributing to self-loathing and misery experienced by sexual minorities. Because sexual dissenters are already being trampled by monolithic, prudish institutions, I think it is time the women's movement started taking more radical positions on sexual issues. (Califia, 1980: 169)

For Califia then, sadomasochism was a position of sexual ‘dissent’, practiced by ‘sexual minorities’, and its support a radical movement. Here female masochism and submission was not oppressive, nor was the female masochist her own oppressor in the process. Further, the author's paper dismissed the anti-sadomasochism feminists’ perspective head-on:

> A woman who deliberately seeks out a sexual situation in which she can be helpless is a traitor in their eyes. Hasn't the woman's movement been trying to persuade people for years that women are not naturally masochistic? Originally, this meant that women do not create their own second-class status, do not enjoy it, and are the victim of socially constructed discrimination, not biology. A sexual masochist probably doesn't want to be raped, battered, discriminated against in her job or kept down by the system. Her desire to act out a specific sexual fantasy is very different from the pseudopsychiatric dictum that a woman's world is bound by housework, intercourse and childbirth. (173)

Sexual practice for Califia (as for Rubin) is not a means of oppression, but a

> subversive, transgressive or radical locale where choice is invoked, and fantasies and desires could be enacted. It is positioned as being fundamentally outside the socio-political concerns of everyday life, principally because Califia is speaking to lesbian sadomasochism, a practice viewed as outside of heteronormative power relations.

Lesbian sadomasochistic sex, indeed, is asserted as being quite distinct from gendered – or even racial (a key concept we will return to) – subjugation;

> [T]he dynamic between a top and a bottom is quite different from the dynamic between men and woman, whites and blacks, or upper- and working-class people. That system is unjust because it assigns privileges beyond race, gender and social class. During an S/M encounter, roles are acquired and used in very different ways. The participants select particular roles that best express their sexual needs, how they feel about particular partners, or which outfits are clean and ready to wear. (ibid.,)

Sadomasochism is therefore positioned as an almost utopian feminist expression of personal choice and agency and Califia is resolute that while

> [s]ome feminists still find S/M roles disturbing because they believe that they are derived from genuinely oppressive structures [...] S/M is more a parody of the hidden sexual nature of fascism than it is a worship or acquiescence to it (174).

This assertion would later be a battle ground on which to critique contemporary sadomasochistic practice. In sum, Califia refused to recognise any negative

impact on women, or upon feminism that consensual lesbian masochistic sex could hold, ultimately concluding that '[b]anning S/M porn is the equivalent of making fantasy a criminal act. Violence against women will not be reduced by increasing sexual repression' (179). However, it should be noted that Califia uses the terms 'female masochist' and 'sadomasochist' interchangeably, and the importance of this delineation is neither acknowledged nor investigated, under this schema to be a masochist is to practice sadomasochism. Yet the statement that '[t]he participants select particular roles that best express their sexual needs' (173) suggests a sexual fluidity that is indeed the underlying politicised sexuality that Califia is championing. In doing so, the restrictive nature of such a 'sexual identity' and its political ramifications are ultimately avoided.

For Rubin and Califia, the 'fantasy' of female sadomasochism was more than simply abstract academic debate, as the personal truly became the political (and vice versa) they set up and began publicising their lesbian-feminist SM group 'Samois' (which ran from 1978-1983 before disbanding into splinter groups)[1]. In 1980 the group published their guide and manifesto, *What Color is Your Handkerchief: A Lesbian S/M Sexuality Reader* as followed by *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M* in 1983. Samois' project was to represent female (lesbian) (sado)masochism, and demand space both in the public consciousness, and feminist thought:

> We are a group of feminist lesbians who share a positive interest in sadomasochism. We believe that SM must be consensual, mutual, and safe. SM can exist as part of a healthy and positive lifestyle. We believe that sadomasochists are an oppressed sexual minority. Our struggle deserves the recognition and support of other sexual minorities and oppressed groups. We believe that SM can and should be consistent with the principles of feminism. As feminists we oppose all forms of social hierarchy based on gender. As radical perverts we oppose all social hierarchies based on sexual preference […] While other SM organizations share the goal of demythologizing SM, Samois particularly wishes to instigate dialogue and discussion of SM within the lesbian and feminist community. We have a double focus. We will work to promulgate feminist

> awareness among SM people and we will struggle to end the stereotyping and stigmatizing of SM among feminists. (Samois, 1980: 2—3)

Thus for Samois, not only were female lesbian sadomasochists not engaged in oppressive sexual practice, they were ‘an oppressed sexual minority’, whose practice was in fact feminist, and thus not distinct from or contrary to feminism’s project of emancipation.

Anti-SM Feminism

Samois received a hostile reception, primarily from lesbian feminists which culminated in the publication of *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis* in 1982. The book's purpose as a direct response to Samois' politic was far from veiled. In Robin Ruth Linden's introduction to the anthology, Califia is openly criticised as 'a spokeswoman for Samois and a sadist herself' (Linden, 1982: 9), whose writing evidences that 'sadists who regularly practice dominant roles [...] become habituated to sadism, perhaps failing to comprehend its extremity' (ibid.,). Thus Linden is not only suggesting that sexual preference and choice cannot be isolated to sexual practice alone, she also posits that Califia has lost any sense of perspective due to her involvement in sadomasochism.

Jeanette Nichols, Darlene Pagano and Margaret Rosoff's ‘Is Sadomasochism Feminist? A Critique of the Samois Position’ (1982) articulates the key positions of anti-SM feminist discourse by examining what they consider to be seven key fallacies in the pro-sadomasochism position: free choice; lack of societal context '[m]any of the articles in the Samois pamphlet are written in a social vacuum' (Nichols, Pagano and Rosoff, 1982: 138); naturalisation of gender roles; disempowerment; the paradox of eliminating oppression via oppressive behaviour; and lastly the idealization of violence. Further, in ‘A Response To Samois’ Jesse Meredith writes:

> It disturbs me deeply that lesbian-feminists are advocating sadomasochism as a valid sexual practice. I have read writings by Samois members and listened to their public statements, often feeling sickened and angered. . . I am appalled by Samois' advocacy of “dominance” and

> “submission” between lesbian-feminist lovers, and by Samois' advocacy of the cultivation of pain. (Meredith, 1982: 96)

Meredith's paper therefore responds from both an emotive and moralistic perspective. It is emotive, by both describing the impact Samois has had upon Meredith and thus the reader; and moralistic, by being founded through constructed ideologies of both what is wrong, and what is the correct way to react.

In so doing, Meredith presents herself as both the victim, and the morally justified onlooker. This vilification can be seen to be reflected in her comparison of Samois to the Nazis,

> To advocate pain for its own sake is, at best, incomprehensible to me, sheer evil at worst. I associate the cultivation of pain with the horrors of the Nazi Third Reich and the medieval Inquisition. Historically, cultural desensitization to pain has led to incredible butchery. (ibid.,)

While the intent of the statement is asserted as an investigation of the author's reaction, the implication of this as an analogy to Samois clearly borders a ‘masked-man’ fallacy, for emotive impact. She continues,

> Samois members claim that they are feminists, advancing the struggle for liberation into the arena of sadomasochism. Sometimes I think they are quite sincere in this conviction and that I can disagree about this but unite with them on other feminist issues. At other times I wonder. I am deeply distressed that Samois embraces whips and chains as symbols, which are the tools of those who rule by force and terror. I am confused and disturbed by Samois' doublethink terminology: pain - is - pleasure, enslavement -by- consent, freedom- through- bondage, reality-as-game, equality-through-role-play. I protest the claim that enactments of humiliation and pain bring catharsis, because I know that repetition of a behavior, especially eroticized repetition, will more likely cause habituation or addiction. (97)

To paraphrase the position which underlines Meredith's response: *She knows* what feminism is, and it is not Samois. It is wrong because *she feels* that it is. *We know* that sexuality is a slippery slope, and especially where ‘amoral’ sexuality is concerned. Yet no evidence is offered other than knowing and

feeling, and indeed this knowing and feeling is offered as the markers of truth. This importance of this paper is thus the demonstration of emotive response of distaste and Meredith's refusal of Samois on ideological, moral grounds.

A similar response can be found in Paula Tiklicorect's parodic piece 'Smokers Protest Healthism' (1982) which projects Samois' politics onto a fictional group, Smolda – 'a lesbian-feminist smokers' liberation group'. Gayle Rubin is similarly mirrored under the opaque guise of 'Guile Rusin', and Pat Califia as 'Pod Clonfia' in order to be made figures of mockery,

> "Inhalation of smoke acts to purify the lungs of the pollution we experience as a result of patriarchal society." Although she could cite no research to substantiate her position, Rusin stated that she knows the cathartic nature of a good smoke through her own experience. "It is anti-feminist of other sisters to invalidate my experience," Rusin told this reporter. "Repression of the desire to smoke is unhealthier than smoking could ever be. And since so many lesbian-feminists smoke, it should be obvious that smoking is a feminist activity". (Tiklicorect, 1982: 164)

The clear assumption underlying this analogy is that the danger of smoking, and the danger of sadomasochism are elemental truths, and to deny either is simply absurd. This comparison is clearly a fallacy, the former being accepted as truth due to the abundance of scientific evidence, the latter being postulated as truth without justification. The success of this parody aside, Tiklicorect's piece clearly demonstrates the personal antagonism Samois faced.

Beyond this problematic mode of personal attack, *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis* does raise ideologically salient critiques of Samois and the pro-SM movement. In Darlene R. Pagano's conversation with Karen Sims and Rose Mason titled 'Racism and Sadomasochism: A Conversation with Two Black Lesbians' (1982), sadomasochism is powerfully put forward as 'a white woman's issue'; and thus a racial issue:

> Rose: I think it's racist for them to even call themselves an oppressed minority. I am very much insulted that they would align themselves with me as a Third World woman in terms of being oppressed. They don't know oppression […]

> Darlene: The examples that have been given as to the oppression of sadomasochists have been […] confusing not getting your own way or not being accepted with oppression. (Mason, Pagano and Sims, 1982: 101)

For the authors the adoption of an oppressed identity is in SM a highly problematic, privileged choice:

> [Karen:] These women are also taking on sadomasochism as their total being. They're saying that *that* comes before how they are oppressed as women [...]
>
> [Rose:] I think it's a real luxury to sit around and say “I'm going to experiment on how much power I can have, or how much control I can give up.” That's so absurd when people are trying to survive [...] I've never had a choice as to whether I want to deal with power issues around my life. And there are white women in the movement who are very unaware that […] it is a privilege that goes along with your skin color, being able to make that choice and then to make it in a decadent way is disgusting. (102—3, emphasis in original)

This 'luxury of choice' becomes a key contention in their discussion, particularly when they discuss SM practitioners’ ‘play’ in 'master and slave' roles:

> [Karen:] Think of the master and what occurred so often for Black women – being raped – and the total power that white men on plantations had overcoming Black women. There was no doubt that the woman wasn't exploring her sexual feelings.
>
> [Rose]: He was taking his power....
>
> [Karen:] She was staying alive.
>
> [Rose]: She was surviving. It was not a choice. (104)

For Mason, Pagano and Sims, sadomasochism is therefore not solely a gendered, feminist issue, but an issue of racism and white privilege, and 'playing at' being oppressed.

Similarly, two additional papers in this volume further critique SM culture's appropriation of controversial symbolism. In ‘Swastikas: The street and the university’ Susan Leigh Star writes:

> I hear sadomasochist theorists saying this about swastikas and lesser symbols of violence: when you set the rules of the context, it's OK to use

> any symbol within that context (or for that matter to perform any activity). When sadomasochism is consensual, the symbolic level changes *because* the context changes [...] The idea that symbols or experiences can be amputated from their historical and social context, and that material consequences can be designated a priori, has worked out historically against the best interests of women and all non-dominant peoples. (Star, 1982: 132—134)

Again, the politics of sadomasochist feminist identity is expressed through the following terms, 'your emancipation is based on my historical oppression' as SM is once again aligned with Nazism. This is furthered in Sarah Lucia Hoagland's paper, ‘Sadism, Masochism and Lesbian-Feminism’:

> Have we forgotten or failed to inform ourselves that some nazi [sic] men found the torture of Jews highly erotic? Have we forgotten or failed to inform ourselves that some nazi [sic] men experienced orgasm while watching Jews being beaten, tortured, mutilated, gassed, destroyed? It is just not true that all areas of eroticism should be explored by Lesbian-feminists or anyone else. (Hoagland, 1982: 155)

Thus for Hoagland, as for Star, the re-contextualisation of sadism away from historical oppression, for purposes of role-playing transgression cannot be abstracted. She therefore rejects the practice of sadomasochism by anyone entirely.

Hoagland goes on to examine the sadomasochist claim that this role-play has an important political purpose; as parody in order to disempower those roles and their hierarchy. She writes:

> The idea that nazi [sic]/Jew, master/slave scenes parody the Holocaust and slavery and therefore do not contribute to the context which allows such institutions to flourish, indicates a failure to understand a fundamental principle of separatism: to parody an institution is nevertheless to reinforce its world view... and hence to validate it... And in fact, some of the parodies I've seen appear more like emulation. Sadomasochism is no more capable of calling the foundation of patriarchy into question than is androgyny: any ideology which *presupposes* the

> context of dominance and submission (masculinity and femininity, master and slave) is hardly capable of breaking free of it. (159)

In light of this discourse, it is apt that we return to Meredith's comparison of sadomasochism to the actions of the Nazis, and it is perhaps within this discourse's locale that her argument takes on further dimensions. While the subject is fascinating – and no doubt could sustain a thesis of its own – it is most of relevance in conjunction with Mason, Sims and Pagano's critique (1982) of what Califia (1980) championed: the importance vs. impossibility of choice, flexibility and fluidity in sadomasochistic practice. What emerges through this discussion is instead a problematisation of fluid adaptation, and contextualisation of what for others are a binary of fixed immovable concepts. As Grant (1993) aptly observes, in this division

> The question becomes, Which feminists are more feminist? […] On almost any level the question of who is more feminist is an undesirable one. First, it is conceptually impossible to answer it using the standard of women's experience. There is nothing that prevents lesbian s/m groups like Samois from claiming that their experiences are authentically female and feminist, while anti-s/m people can just as easily make that claim. (Grant, 1993: 87)

This therefore creates a paradoxical multiplicity of simultaneously exercised 'truths'.

Summary

Masochism thus is a key division in feminist thought, central to ideas around gender, sexual practice and pornography; seemingly divided by a gulf of irreconcilable difference. For Dworkin, as we will return to examine in Chapter Five, pornography is sadomasochism, and sadomasochism is a gendered violence. Here man is sadist and woman is his victim; and thus she must purge masochism from herself. Conversely, queer pro-sadomasochism feminists, here illustrated by Pat Califia and Gayle Rubin alongside their group Samois, conceptualised lesbian sadomasochism as a locale of transgression, freedom and liberation through which patriarchal power is parodied and undermined, in a destabilising step towards emancipation. This theorisation is reliant upon a model of heteronormative sexuality distinct from that of radical feminists',

marked by a paradigm of ‘vanillaness’ which constructs sadomasochism as Other. Yet still, anti-SM feminists attacked and remonstrated this theorisation, stating instead that sadomasochism ratifies these patriarchal institutions, thus standing in the way of women’s liberation. Both narratives seek to speak to a ‘truth’ of femininity through personal experiences, presenting a concurrent, unresolvable contradiction which in turn exposes the impossibility of such a singular ‘truth’.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed two distinct discourses that while not parallel have both shaped our cultural socio-political understanding of femininity, masochism and submission. Firstly, through a discussion of psychoanalysis as a masculine discourse it has been argued that (sado)masochism has historically been constructed through a biologically determined gender essentialism, in which man as sadist, and woman as masochist is presented predominantly as the natural order of things. As a phallocentric discourse woman is here marked by her absence both in her perceived phallic lack, and largely absent from the concerns of psychoanalysis as androcentric. However, I have also pointed towards the inherent contradictions such a binary conceptualisation attempts but fails to circumnavigate. Namely, in the figure of the sadomasochist which embodies concurrently both the sadist and the masochist, both passive and active, both feminine and masculine. In so doing, such binary divisions are blurred, and troubled and thus exposed as indistinct.

Secondly, this chapter has also explored feminist thought as a discursive framework which I have argued places (sado)masochism at the polarising centre of sexual politics. On the one hand radical feminists ultimately reinforce the same gender essentialism and binarism as was to be found in psychiatry before it (man as sadist, woman as victim); despite paradoxically seeking to undo the cultural constructions of gendernormativity. Conversely, in sex positive pro-SM lesbian feminism, sadomasochism is positioned as antonym and Other to heteronormative sexuality, which is instead constructed as fundamentally

‘vanilla’. Through this counter-narrative, sadomasochism is thus portrayed as fundamentally queer, and its practice a revolutionary act by ‘sexual minorities’.

Thus for pro-SM feminists, anti-SM feminism was an act of oppression and exclusion. As I have asserted, these polarised paradigms, like psychoanalysis before it, makes concurrent yet paradoxical claims to the ‘truth’ of female masochism. In so doing I have argued that the discords in the discursive framework point towards what Butler has termed the ‘regulatory fictions’ (1990: 44) of binary conceptualisations of gender and sexuality. Accordingly, the purpose of this thesis is not to have a definitive ‘position’ on, or speak to a ‘truth’ of female masochism but is precisely to explore this complexity through a detailed examination of *Story of O,* its paratexts, and adaptations in a post-structuralist framework. This analysis begins in the following chapter.

Notes

1. It is notable that the group ‘Samois’ took its name from a location in *Story of O,* to which we shall return in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four – Stories of O[1]

Introduction

Story of O offers a fascinating case study for the exploration of female masochism and submission as the first female authored novel to take this as its focus. Since its release the novel, and its heroine – if such a term can be applied – have been the subject of great debate, crystallising the concerns which surround this sexual problematic explored in the previous chapter. This is furthered no doubt by the clandestine ambiguity which has shrouded its pseudonymous author, Pauline Réage. As will be explored, contradictions herein are rife, and this is not limited to the progenitor text and its authorship alone.

Feminist criticism (as will be examined in Chapter Five) has focused thus far upon what I would argue is a very narrow, reductive reading of the text. In accordance with the debates explored in Chapter Three, we find that O is constructed as the victim of a violent, patriarchal male sexuality – a prisoner of her own false consciousness. In order to support such claims, focus therein is given only to the book's very first and last sections (*I: Lovers of Roissy* and *VI: The Owl*); a focus which I want to highlight as deeply problematic. Therefore, this chapter begins with a necessary overview of the novel's overall narrative, drawing attention to plot points and characters crucial to an in-depth, informed and nuanced understanding of the text. It is my contention that viewed through such a lens *Story of O* unfolds to reveal a complex, interwoven and at times contradictory exploration of sadomasochism, agency and consent and subjectivity and desire (both heteronormative, and queer). Thus, a close textual analysis follows, exploring these themes and how they illuminate our understanding of how female masochism and submission function within patriarchy. I argue that these themes anchor around a deeply problematic patriarchal notion of love, and that it is instead this which a feminist reading should take issue with rather than the sexual acts, practices or cultures portrayed.

In addition, by moving beyond *Story of O* as source text and into its expanded storyworld, we are able to contextualize and thus further our understanding of what 'truths' O's story may offer. By first examining the novel's accompanying essay *A Slave's Revolt* by Jean Paulhan, we are offered a framing device of patriarchal desire. Whether we choose to hold these two texts in tandem or to dismiss Paulhan's 'insight' is, I would argue, literally in the hands of the reader. We may also choose to read this extra-textually as 'avid readers' with the retrospective knowledge of his being Réage's lover. This framing I suggest offers a possibility of re-contextualising S*tory of O* – to what extent is this novel then a truth of fantasy, or reality? How does his patriarchal reading potentially limit the possibility of utilising a feminist [counter] reading? These questions are furthered in the examination of *A Girl in Love*/*Une Fille Amoureuse*, the prefacing essay to *Story of O Part Two*/*Return to Roissy/Return to the Chateau/Retour à Roissy*. In essence a love letter to Paulhan, and to their past selves, the essay recounts the novel's inception, exploring the author's motivations. How then do/es the/se text/s function as both love story and love letter? How does the expansion of *Story of O* through this effect our reading and understanding of O, of Réage and the text itself?

Textual analysis in this chapter concludes by examining *Story of O Part Two*, which I argue offers a further multiplicity and complexity of the text. Whereas its predecessor offers a rich text in which key themes are interwoven around the central privileging of monogamous heterosexual love, this sequel offers a much darker world for O into sex work and, the story posits, fundamental loneliness. How Roissy as brothel thus functions not only broadens O's storyworld, reshaping our understanding of the source text, but also seemingly abandons both O as an (arguably) agentic character, and love as a potentially 'redeeming' force. I suggest that this is telling of the author's changed relationship to O, and of her desire to finally lay the novel to rest through a purposefully designed rejection of the character and her readership.

The *Story of O*

Narrative overview

Story of O is a novel structured around four chapters or 'acts': I: *The Lovers of Roissy*; II: *Sir Stephen*; III: *Anne Marie and the Rings*; and IV: The Owl; with each section functioning with its own distinct identity and role within the overall narrative. We first meet O (in *I: The Lovers of Roissy*) through the omnipresent narration which offers us two different, but not necessarily contrary beginnings. The function of this dual narrative structure will be explored later, but for now let us focus our understanding of O and her relationship with René, intertwined as they are. In the first beginning, O's lover (after strolling the streets of Paris) hails a taxi, bound for (as yet unknown to O), Roissy:

> 'Listen', he says. 'You're ready. Here is where I leave you. You're going to get out and go to the door and ring the bell. Someone will open the door, whoever it is you'll do as he says. You'll do it right away and willingly of your own accord, else they'll make you, if you don't obey at once, they'll make you obey. What? No, you don't need your bag anymore. You don't need anything, you're just the whore, I'm the pimp who's furnishing you [...] now go.' (Réage, 1954: 12)

Immediately this dialogue seems at odds with the previously painted scene, of quaint Parisian romance, and René's language in addition to O's reactions inform us of a pre-existing potentially abusive *or* sadomasochistic relation between the two: '*She doesn't dare* ask why René is so quiet, so still, or what all this means to him [... h]e hasn't told her to do anything or not to do it, but *she doesn't dare* cross her legs or sit with them held together' (10—11, my emphasis). As such René appears not only in control of O but also of the narrative as protagonist.

This is a curious structure to find in what we are told is O's story. Yet this is not the only start to her journey, as:

> Another version of the same beginning was simpler, more direct: similarly dressed, the young woman was taken off in a car by her lover and a second man, an unknown friend of his. The stranger drove, the lover was seated beside the young woman: and the one who did the talking, the friend, the unknown stranger in the front, explained to the young woman that her lover's task was to prepare her […] that afterwards she would be

> taken to the chateau were she would receive instructions in due course, as events required. (12—13)

Whether her lover, after an afternoon's courtship stroll through the Parisian streets, or Renè and 'the stranger' without discussion deliver her to the château, O arrives at Roissy where she is to be trained to be sexually submissive and masochistic. While O finds some solace in the precursory slave ‘sisterhood’ of Andree and Jeanne, this is limited. Instead she spends her days submitting to the men’s rules (and whims) struggling with her own enjoyment and desire, and pining for her lover René. As stated, much has been made of Roissy as the focus of *Story of O,* as will be explored in the following chapter – and while it is no doubt both a catalytic event and microcosmic heterosexual, heteronormative and patriarchal ‘brotherhood’ (247), implied in the second opening – her internment there lasts only for two weeks in a narrative that in fact spans years. It follows her however, in the wearing of a ring adorned with the Roissy emblem recognisable to those outside of the chateau walls, that O is a slave.

After Roissy (in *II: Sir Stephen*), O returns to work as a fashion photographer, wherein it is asserted that her colleagues ‘were truly astonished at the change that took place in her’ (83). It is here, and especially through the introduction of the beautiful model, Jacqueline, that we begin to learn more about not only O’s life, but also of O herself. ‘During the next few days O made some fifty photographs of Jacqueline. They were like none she had ever taken before’ (85); as O dresses her as the Roissy women**,** she is enchanted by the vision before her. Later, what might have begun as a mirrored narcissistic desire develops into first sexual desire, and later O suspects, love. Another important character within this act is the British aristocrat Sir Stephen, who explains his relationship to René: ‘‘[S]trictly speaking, I am in no way related to René, and yet we are brothers, after a fashion’’ (97). The closeness of this brotherhood unfolds when O is told that she is to be shared sexually between the two. She responds not with aberration but with reification of René’s love for her: that he values her enough to want to share her. As the object of this non-monogamous arrangement, O’s desire is torn, and what begins as disinterest in Sir Stephen soon develops into desire, revulsion at his mistreatment and later, love. The

movement into Sir Stephen's 'ownership' of O begins with his being given a key to her apartment by René, wherein we find O waits with an 'incomprehensible serenity' (148), seemingly happy in her servitude. The section concludes by ratifying both the emerging primacy of O and Sir Stephen's relationship, and of his expectation of her to fulfil her role as slave: including the seduction and induction of Jacqueline to Roissy, thus expanding the walls of Roissy to envelop her own known world.

To prepare O for this role, and to enable Sir Stephen's ownership as legitimised within this expanded world, now two years after Roissy – and jubilant in Jacqueline's having 'ceded' to O by 'letting herself be kissed but not kissing in her turn [sic]' (169) – O is taken to Samois. '[T]his house full of women' (198), run by the dominant Anne-Marie offers a curious potential counter to the hetero-patriarchy of Roissy, as she

> felt it important to make each girl who entered her house and who thus entered an *entirely feminine society* sense that her condition as a woman would not lose its importance from the fact that, here, *her only contacts would be with other women*, but to the contrary would be increased, heightened, intensified. […] That a woman was so cruel, and more implacable than a man, O had never once doubted. But O had thought that Anne-Marie was seeking less to manifest her power than to establish a *complicity* between O and herself (204, my emphasis).

At night Anne-Marie had sex with the girls on rotation, and by day they drew lots to see who would be whipped. Then, holding a marble in one clenched fist '[t]he wrong guess, meant a flogging, the right one no flogging' (209), setting Samois as a curious space of perhaps democratic – yet not egalitarian – sisterhood[2]. At the end of her stay Sir Stephen's ownership of O is indelibly confirmed, as she agrees to the piercing of her labia adorned with long, obtrusive rings and of the branding of his name upon her buttocks.

After Samois, O's status as his submissive and object of his will is further ratified, through her sexually 'servicing' men of his choosing (a precursor, perhaps for the sequel in which Roissy functions as brothel, and her the

‘prostitute’ therein). One of these men, Eric, having fallen for O begs Sir Stephen ‘“to give [her] back [her] freedom”’ (224) so that they can marry. O laughs, making overt her desire to stay in Sir Stephen’s ownership. The end of this third part thus solidifies (and not for the first time) O’s consenting masochism and submission.

In the novel’s final act, *IV – The Owl*, we observe the irreversible fusion of O’s life both old and new. Holidaying beside the sea, Sir Stephen and O are joined by Jacqueline and her fifteen-year-old sister Nathalie. Whilst the vacation was planned as a rouse to both seduce and persuade Jacqueline to Roissy to fulfil Sir Stephen’s desires, the model’s reaction to O’s rings and branding is unexpectedly one of disgust – and as Ahmed (2004) notes, disgust and desire are markedly contradictory impulses (84). Thus, whereas she had previously felt guilt in her desire, now:

> O tasted a sweet pleasure in thinking of how she would betray Jacqueline, for she had felt it an insult, the scornful manner in which Jacqueline had eyed this condition of a branded and flogged slave, this condition of which O was proud (Réage, 1954: 231).

A later chance encounter in which Nathalie discovers O’s modified body however, produces in her a reaction quite contrary, as the ‘child’ responds with both awe, and desire. While both Jacqueline and Nathalie function as character foils, it is undoubtedly this sexualisation of the young Nathalie which unsettles readers, framing O in a much more predatory role. Indeed, Sir Stephen decides that Nathalie’s wish may be granted to go to Roissy, but ‘without having been touched by any hands or lips whatsoever’ (237). But this is not to protect the girl, but instead to keep her ‘purity’ intact until her arrival. Yet she does witness O’s having sex with Sir Stephen and it is decided that Nathalie will be whipped by him, or his housemaid Norah (another important foil to which we will return). René’s distancing his self from O is further punctuated as it becomes clear that he loves Jacqueline more than he has ever loved before. Jacqueline however, having fallen in love with a director leaves to elope. Nathalie is thus left in the hands of O, and Sir Stephen.

The narrative's denouement arrives when O, masked as an owl and led on a leash by Nathalie, is taken by Sir Stephen to a party. There:

> O stared at them through her plumage, stared at them with wide-open eyes, eyes as round and as open as the night bird she represented, and so strong was the illusion that it struck everyone as completely natural that, when questioned, this owl prove truly what it was, deaf to human speech and mute. (260—261)

With the shedding of her job and the layers of her fashionable Parisian clothing that adorned her in the first pages of the book, O has now shed her old life, and here with the addition of the mask, obtained her desired [non] subjectivity. Two alternate endings are also proffered. In the first, O accepts her sexual submission:

> Sir Stephen and the Commander rousing Nathalie, who was asleep at O's feet, had O get up, led her to the centre of the courtyard, detached her chain and took off her mask: and, laying her down upon a table possessed her, now the one, now the other. (262)

Yet the novel's final page also informs us that '[t]here existed another ending to the story of O. Seeing herself about to be left by Sir Stephen, she preferred to die. To which he gave his consent' (263). Regardless of O's fate, she has undertaken a seemingly irrevocable transformation from which she cannot return.

Sadomasochism, agency and consent

Let us return now back to the novel's first pages. While the opening scene is our introduction to the lovers, it must be remembered that this is not their introduction to each other. In fact, as is later revealed the two have been dating for just under two years (126). While O's experience at Roissy is subject to no discussion or negotiation, as per how sadomasochism is now commonly theorised, I want to argue here that by focusing on the text, consent may be seen to exist a priori. This is both through our knowledge of both O and René's relationship before the novel's beginning, and in the dialogic discussions and internal reflections which follow.

René's assertion in the opening pages that '[y]ou don't need anything, you're just the whore, I'm the pimp who's furnishing you' (12) is not simply plot device to gratuitously startle the reader. We also know that:

> [f]or a long time he had desired to prostitute her, and it was gladly that he now discovered that the pleasure he reaped from it was greater than he had even dared hope [. . .] and that [their] attachment would be the greater the more her prostitution would humiliate and soil and ruin her (48).

The necessary step in contextualising this into a sadomasochistic backstory is the later asserted insight that '[g]reat was his dread of beating her, so great that he'd never been able to bring himself to do it; no less great was his pleasure at seeing her struggle and at hearing her scream' (146). In short, the story begins not at the start, but at a certain stage in their pre-existing relationship, one which seems to bring with it a historicised sadomasochism. This in turn thus reflects on Roissy as seemingly a place O has arrived with no consensual foreknowledge.

There is however no question of a lack of contract or negotiations at Roissy, just rules that O is expected to follow: 'to observe during her period at the chateau and also during her everyday life once she'd returned home from the chateau (not, however, that she was going to recover her former freedom)' (23). Further, these rules are explained as follows:

> Your hands are not your own, neither are your breasts, nor above all is any one of the orifices of your body, which we are at liberty to explore and into which we may, whenever we so please, introduce ourselves. [...Y]ou have lost the right to withhold or deny yourself, in our presence (25).

Thus, 'her own body was inaccessible to her' (36), and René

> told her that he intended that from now on she be held in common by him and by others of his choosing and by others still whom he didn't know who were affiliated with the society that owned the chateau. (47)

Additionally, we are informed that outside of Roissy, those who found her to be uncooperative in her sexual servitude would bring her back there (28).

While I do not wish to distance this enquiry from the 'reality' of the both monoganormative and orgiastic sadomasochistic acts visited upon O's body – and there are many – the inventorying of these multiple acts for the purpose of rehearsing and thus foregrounding their potential abhorrence is not within the intentions of this chapter, nor of this thesis moreover. Instead, it is more pertinent to ask in what follows, whether such acts can be considered consensual, desired, and pleasurable; since this is a great grievance levied by feminist criticism as shall be examined. That is to say, whether O enjoys the sexual treatment she experiences is for her to say.

It can be noted however that the novel does not adhere to the contemporary standards of ethical or indeed 'proper' BDSM practice, in its absence of defined 'limits' or indeed the utilisation of safewords (see Downing, 2007; Williams et al., 2014). In fact, for O she derives pleasure in their unbeknownst absence:

> Would she ever dare tell him that no pleasure, no joy, nothing she even imagined ever approached the happiness she felt before the freedom wherewith he made use of her, before the idea that he knew there were no precaution, *no limits* he had to observe in the manner whereby he sought his pleasure in her body. (246, my emphasis)

While over the course of the novel we admittedly learn very little of O's subjectivity contextualised socially or historically through her life beyond these relationships and sexual encounters, it is not only her relationship with René that has a backstory. Indeed, the flashbacks to her youth tell us much about her desire (as discussed in the following sub-section) as well as her submissive and at times, masochistic motivations. The following quotation regarding her friendship/relationship with Marion (its queer dimensions further discussed below) is particularly illuminating:

> When she'd been fifteen, her best friend, who'd been thirty and with whom she'd been in love, had worn a ring with a huge hematite set in a cluster of diamonds. O had always wanted a necklace of those black stones, but without diamonds, a tight-fitting necklace, a choker, who knows? A very tight-fitting choker, perhaps that's what she'd always wanted. But the collars they gave her now – no they didn't give them – would she have

> exchanged them for the hematite necklace, the choker, the one she'd cherished in her adolescent dreams? (95)

At first glance this reflection seems childish but it is also far from vacuous, keying into O's very clearly articulated understanding of herself: 'submissive as she certainly was' (114).

That O, as implied here, recognises her own desire to be submissive – both in the past and present – does not necessarily mean that she knows why. Indeed, much of the book is spent questioning herself and why it is that she finds pleasure in this masochistic submission:

> O had never understood, but had finally come to recognize as an undeniable and very meaningful truth, the contradictory but constant entanglement of her feelings and attitudes: she liked the idea of torture, when she underwent it she would have seen the earth go up in fire and smoke to escape it, when it was over she was happy to have undergone it, and all the happier the crueller and more prolonged it had been. (204)

Herein lies a fundamental contradiction of her experience, that two seemingly incompatibles states may be held concurrently. Such a reading concurs with Baxendale's (2009) assertion that *Story of O* offers a case study *par excellence* in cognitive dissonance, yet I would argue that such a psychological approach not only seeks to pathologise O, but further her construction of O as thus 'psychologically uncomfortable' (Baxendale, 2009: 217). This discomfort, I believe, is not borne out in the text. However, contradictions may be observed in O's accounts both that 'her *pleadings for mercy had been genuine* and her *final thanks authentic*' (Réage, 1954: 204, my emphasis); and further that 'before turning out the light, she glanced at the dressing-table mirror and saw her reflected gaze: *bold, mild and docile*' (91, my emphasis). In addition, Anne-Marie further punctuates this interwoven dichotomy at Samois, when she and O discuss the dis/pleasure to be found in being whipped: ''This is terrible', O said, 'it hurts terribly'. 'Exactly'. Said Anne-Marie, 'and that is why you are much more lovely now' (199). Such statements thus work to construct O's submissive and masochistic experiences as intermediary, transitory, and necessary to achieve the higher state of being, of being 'bold, mild and docile', 'authentically thankful', and all the more 'lovely.' Such statements key into larger narratives of BDSM

practice (and particularly in the case of submission and masochism) of being transcendental. For Dymock (2012), the experience of female sexual submission is one of obtaining 'Jouissance' which acts as a threat or disconnect from, the symbolic order (see Chapter Five) and thus I would argue stands as an act of transcendence, or 'becoming' (cf. Carlström, 2018). Dymock writes:

> Let us say that a woman is bound and confined in a small space and would most definitely prefer not to be there, but has agreed at some point prior in the relationship that she will have no say in such moments. Her desire to uphold this promise is greater and perhaps more erotic than her discomfort and suffering. *Jouissance* entails that she is forced to acknowledge the materiality of her existence through her discomfort, that the upholding of her promise is/feels nigh on impossible because it is threatened by the reality of her predicament and all its ties to the prohibitive qualities of the pleasure principle. [. . .] In the confined woman's attempts to cut her ties to the symbolic order, her *jouissance* and its failure are experienced as a kind of ecstatic suffering, a 'symbolic death'. (Dymock, 2012: 11)

It is this seeming paradox of 'ecstasy in suffering' which is necessary for O's transcendence through death, through suffering to an ecstatic place of being, moving against and through the symbolic order.

Similarly, O's simultaneous positioning as both subject and object is seemingly diametric – not only in the narrative, but also in the eyes of those around her**.** Thus: 'O felt herself being weighed and hefted for the instrument she very well knew she was' (Réage, 1954: 92); 'O felt him watch her the way an animal-trainer keeps an eye on the animal he has trained' (141); and Anne-Marie:

> raised her rump and spread her legs and, ordering her not to move, seized her two labia. This, O said to herself, is how they open the gills of fish at market, and pull open the mouths of horses to show you the teeth […] she was no longer her own, and what of hers belonged least to her was, very assuredly, that outer half of her body which could be put to use independently of her, as it were (190).

Yet I would argue, it is this very objectification that O subjectively desires, thus curiously reifying her agentic status. But for what reason would O desire the subjugation of her self?

The text explains:

> Each wish she surrendered to was her guarantee that another surrender would be required of her, each of his wishes she complied with was for her like *some debt whereof she acquitted herself; how strange, that her indebtedness was immense, it was infinite* (183, my emphasis);
>
> [O]ne thing was certain: that she was guilty, and that, without wanting to, René was punishing her for a sin he knew nothing of (for it was entirely inner sin) but which Sir Stephen had detected instantly**:** her wantonness (129).

Further, her treatment thus 'seemed to be the very absolution of her sin' (ibid., my emphasis); and having 'groaned under the stranger's mouth as never she had under René's [...] She was profaned and profoundly guilty' (46). That O finds her treatment vital as pious punishment no doubt denotes a theological theme recurrent throughout the narrative as Shullenberger (2005) asserts (cf. Price, 1983 on masochism and religious piety; Bean, 1991, Ganymede, 1991, Beckmann, 2007, and Klement et al., 2016 on BDSM as spiritual practice; and Fennell, 2018 on spirituality and scepticism in BDSM communities); but moreover keys into the common theme of BDSM and redemptive narratives of 'healing' (see Kleinplatz and Moser, 2006; Barker, Gupta and Iantaffi, 2007; Henkin, 2007; and Klement et al., 2016). Through this lens however, regardless the validity of her perspective (problematic as it may be) we can establish O as concomitant in both her treatment, and her consent.

O's consent moreover, contrary to popular readings as will be examined in the following chapter, is asserted clearly within the novel just not necessarily when one would expect. Its first mention in fact is to be found on page 107 in the statement: 'She finally said that she consented' (Réage, 1954: 107). Primarily however the overt discussion of consent surrounds the expansion of O's shared 'ownership' from René to both Sir Stephen and René; and later Sir Stephen alone. In one key scene, Sir Stephen explains the 'brothers' intentions:

> Will you consent to common ownership? I do very much hope that you will, and I am posing the question because your acquiescence will require much more on your part than did passive endurance of an imposed condition. We should like to move beyond that stage, you see. (98)

This juxtaposition of requesting an *active* 'acquiescence' is a recurrent important theme to be further examined in the following chapter, but it is also useful here to draw out the differences between O's sexual submission to René at Roissy, and this more informed request for consensual servitude. It is therefore also important to pay note to O's internal monologue regarding her response therein:

> Did she consent? But she couldn't talk. This will that they were all of a sudden asking her to express, it was the will that wills self abandon, that says yes in advance to everything to which, oh yes, she very surely did want to say yes, but to which her body was saying no, at least in so far as the whip was concerned. (104—5)

While certainly contrasts can be drawn against the notion of 'will' and 'consent' – just as they will be against 'desire' in the sub-section that follows – its centrality within this dialogic exchange is further foregrounded:

> Consent, O was telling herself, consent wasn't the difficult part, and it was then she realized that neither of the men had for one instant anticipated the possibility of her not consenting; neither had she [. . .] this time what they wanted from her was not obedience to an order, it was that, voluntarily, she come forward and acknowledge herself a slave and surrender herself as such. That's what they called her avowal of consent. René's eyes remained fixed upon her; under those gazes she went to her doom, slowly repeating the phrases her lover dictated. (100—101)

Further, the clarity of O's consent within the narrative is reconfirmed in her dedication to Sir Stephen alone, 'She would have to consent, in the true sense of the word consent […] she could refuse, nothing obliged her to remain a slave, nothing except her love and slavery itself' (164). This is additionally and finally compounded by Anne-Marie who later asks: ''O, do you consent to wear the rings and the insignia Sir Stephen desires you to wear, without knowing beforehand how they will be put upon you?' 'Yes,' said O'. (198) Indeed, when

examined closely, it is O and O only who expresses her consent within this tangled web of love and desire. This is compounded as she ruminates that '[i]f her abasement, her abjection were sweet to her? If so, then the baser, the viler she was, the more merciful was René *to consent* to make O the instrument of his pleasure' (130). While we can infer from his position as dominant that at times he is consensually complicit, this is notably never made overt. Neither is it for the other characters who inhabit O's world.

In summary, both O's desire to be the submissive masochist of René and Sir Stephen, and her consent therein is, contrary to popular belief made abundantly clear within *Story of O*. Her motivations however seem more of a matter of intrigue for the character – a line of self-enquiry that would later be taken up within the sequel. In the section that follows I will argue that her impulsion stems less from a predetermined pious Catholic guilt, and more from the complexity of her own desire, rooted in, and complicated by a problematic notion of love.

[Queer/] Desire

In order to begin thinking about desire in *Story of O*, we must first turn to the most obvious of questions, that is: what, whom and how does O desire? While others have projected their own abhorrence and horror upon Roissy and O (see the following chapter), her own experiences differ wildly: 'O wondered why such a great mildness mingled with the terror within her, or why terror should have such a sweet taste.' (35) The 'sweetness' of this terror is, I argue, the manifestation of her desire:

> A hideous satiety of pain and joy ought, one would have thought, to have edged her further and further along that gradually declining slope at whose lower depths are sleep and somnambulism. But to the contrary, the corset which held her upright, the chains which maintained her in subjection, silence, her sanctuary – perhaps these had something to do with it, as may have had the constant spectacle of girls being pressed to use, the spectacle of their at all times accessible bodies. The spectacle also and the awareness of her own body. (63—64)

Instead of fear, O desires to masturbate, aroused at her forced position therein which she awaits whoever might penetrate her (36). O takes joy in the fact that:

> Daily and, as it were, ritualistically soiled by saliva and sperm, by sweat mingled with her own sweat, she sensed herself to be, literally, the vessel of impurity, the gutter wherein scripture makes a mention. And yet in all, those parts of her body which were the most continually offended, having become more sensitive, seemed to her to have become, at the same time, more lovely and as though ennobled [. . .] However astonishing it were, that from being prostituted her dignity might increase, the crucial point was nonetheless one of dignity. It illuminated her as if from within, and one could see the calmness in her bearing, upon her countenance the serenity and imperceptible inner smile one rather guesses at than perceives in the eyes of the recluse. (64)

For O, her time at Roissy is not a matter of imprisoned torture but more perhaps a personal vassalage, a pilgrimage into her own 'wanton' (117, 129) desire. As Macy (1975) explains:

> [D]esire is, at root, a felt need for something, a wanting of something which is not yet in existence or not yet a part of oneself, it is the urge to remedy the sense of one's own incompleteness; it involves, therefore by definition, an internal separation, a sense of duality between the subject and the object for which desire is felt. (Macy, 1975: 146)

For O, therefore, the 'object' of her desire is both simultaneously embodied in the characters of René and Stephen, but also embodied in herself – it is this 'oneness' or completion of the self (whether a spiritual transcendence or one of 'jouissance') that she seeks and actively desires, thus again, simultaneously she is both the subject and object, of her own desire.

While O acknowledges that 'at Roissy, she had [. . .] been shielded by a feeling of the fantastic, of the incredible, had been able to hide behind the feeling that she was undergoing some other existence or perhaps that she wasn't existing at all' (Réage, 1954: 102—3), and that there 'she had always been the *lucky captive* upon whom everything was inflicted, of whom nothing was asked' (108, my emphasis); the clarity of her personal sexual desire continues throughout

the narrative. With René and Sir Stephen, this desire is entangled with both resentment, and shame:

> The liberties René was taking with her body, his enthusiastic commentary upon it, Sir Stephen's replies, the coarseness of language the two men were employing, hurled her into a fit of *shame,* so violent, so unexpected, that the desire she had for Sir Stephen vanished, and she began to long for the lash as for a *deliverance*, to long for pain and screams as for a self-justification. (ibid., my emphasis)

Perhaps it is this notion of shame that explains O's earlier feelings of guilt – and that which most complicates our understanding of her desire. Nonetheless, O is thus undeniably both desired and desiring, both subject and object.

But she is not the only one, and throughout the novel many character foils exist which both mirror and distort O's desire. In the following section their desire will be therefore examined in terms of how it might problematise this concept which has, up until now, been exclusively heterosexual. I want then to challenge Tsaros' (2013) assertion that *Story of O*'s 'samesex encounters are aimed at pleasing men' (867) and to instead open the text up to an additional queer reading, or indeed, queer potentiality. In so doing, space can be made for a distinct development of O's own sexuality working further to explore *Story of O* as deeply contradictory – at once hyper-heteronormative and yet still, concurrently potentially progressive and transgressive. As a result, the potential for a truly counter or indeed parallel reading can be formed thus opening up the complexities and contradictions of the text. This is achieved through in what follows, an examination of: Sir Stephen and René's relationship as homoerotic/incestuous vs queer/queer kinship; O's desire for her childhood friend Marion and the men and women that followed in her youth; and her desire for Jacqueline; Jacqueline's desire or lack thereof for O; and lastly, Nathalie's desire for O.

As has been mentioned, the relationship between Sir. Stephen and René is constructed intentionally ambiguously as two step, if not half, brothers. Nonetheless, as O herself notes, their relationship is even more complex in that the two share a powerful psychical connection; for 'she had perceived the

indication perhaps of a tendency: that she meant less to her lover than did Sir Stephen' (Réage, 1954: 113). This is something other than familial love however, and is perhaps better expressed as a homoerotic, or queer kinship (see Weston, 1991 and Butler 2002). For O,

> [I]t was very plain that he wanted to share her with him, not in order to obtain more from her, but to share with Sir Stephen what at present he cherished most, when in past days, when they were younger, they had shared a journey together, or a boat, or a horse. And this present sharing derived its meaning much more from René's relation to Sir Stephen than from René's to her. That which each of the two was going to seek in her would be the mark of the other, the trace of the other's passage (Réage, 1954: 111).

This statement punctuates how any desire that René and Sir Stephen may hold for each other must be forced into a heteronormative paradigm, especially given the incestuous inflection of their relation, and of the hyper-masculine and heteronormative realm of Roissy. O's body here stands in as an intermediary force, a surrogate for their queerness. Further, this is a desire beyond the comprehendible realms of heterosexuality, as O 'realized that through the agency of her mutually shared body they attained to something more mysterious and perhaps more intense than an amorous communion' (142). From this we must also infer that this 'mysterious' and 'intense' communion' is something unknown to O, unobtainable in her coition either with the two 'brothers' or with the other men that she encounters.

For O, Marion is the central locus of her queer desire and the character appears tormented by this missed opportunity, its memory haunting O:

> Once again she'd saw the mean, shoddy room Marion had taken her to, behind the Turbigol intersection, and visualized how she, O, not Marion, had undone her two large school-girl braids after Marion undressed her and had her lie down on the iron bedstead. When caressed Marion was beautiful and it's perfectly true that eyes can look like stars; hers had resembled trembling blue stars. (95)

When asked by Sir Stephen to masturbate before him, O refused, the spectral memory returning once more yet more truthfully:

> She'd had the same nauseous sensation she'd had when she'd actually witnessed it when she was fifteen years old, Marion slumped in a leather armchair in a hotel room, Marion, one leg flung over an arm of the chair and her head sagging down towards the other arm: caressing herself, and moaning, in front of O. [...] O had been overwhelmed with admiration for what she'd considered Marion's courage, and with horror, and had shyly but stubbornly refused to caress herself in front of Marion, and had sworn that she'd never caress herself in front of anyone else [...] lest she see dawn in [their] eyes the same look of disgust she herself had felt while watching Marion. Which was absurd. (118—119)

Returning then to the earlier established component of O's sexuality as interwoven with feelings of guilt and shame, we can posit that this not only emanates from a profound loyalty to René and the monogonormative framework of their love, but instead from her own chagrin of this failed yet desired encounter.

With age however, O grew in confidence of her sexual abilities with both men and women, perhaps adopting a position of dominance to correct this perceived previous failure and perhaps further to protect herself from the associated pain she encountered through her own vulnerability. This is likely the only defence for her treatment of one young lover, driven to attempt suicide for O's love:

> [W]hen he'd come back from the hospital where he'd been taken, she went to see him at his place, peeled off every stitch of clothing and, forbidding him from laying a finger on her, lay down on his divan. Ghostly white with desire and pain, he'd stared at her for two hours, silent and petrified by the promise he'd made. She never wanted to see him again. It wasn't at all that she didn't take seriously the desire she aroused in him. She took it seriously enough, for she understood it, or thought she understood it, since she experienced a (as she thought) similar desire for her girl friends or for unknown young women. (126)

Here we see an emergence of O as potentially predatory – a far cry from the victim role feminists have cast her in (see next chapter). Here 'O was fit for the hunt, she was a naturally trained bird of prey that would rise and strike and bring home the quarry, every time.' (253) No, O acts on her own desire:

> O had a fairly clear idea of what she was looking for in the young women she pursued. It wasn't at all that she was seeking to give herself the impression of being on a par with men, she wasn't trying, by means of masculine behavior, to compensate for some female inferiority she didn't in the slightest feel. [...T]hat liking was strong, it was real, and it was profound. [...] Very few were the women, moreover, in whom she failed to find some element of beauty. (133—134)

Indeed, the profundity of O's queer desire here recalls that powerful connection held by René and Sir Stephen.

Yet in Jacqueline, O meets a formidable challenge to her desire, offering none of the fervent fulfilment she so desires. She had accepted lovers 'to prove to herself that she was capable of inspiring love and desire' (176), yet Jacqueline also fundamentally 'liked pleasure, and found it agreeable to receive it from a woman in which she ran no risks' (180)[3]. For Jacqueline then, sex exists purely in a functional context and with O she found no danger of pregnancy that would jeopardise her sovereignty and thus maintain her destined course for future stardom. For her, 'a woman's desire can neither be dangerous or have any dangerous consequences' (170). Despite her being oblivious of the danger O and Sir Stephen's desire holds for Jacqueline (as it pertains to their plan to take the model to Roissy by choice or by force), Jacqueline is fundamentally disinterested in O (195), marrying instead a man who can offer her a more potentially 'fruitful' future (243).

That O is ultimately unsuccessful in her seduction of Jacqueline however, seems of little consequence, especially when Nathalie's desire for O, and her want to emulate her are made clear:

> what had revolted Jacqueline had left Nathalie wonderstruck, smitten with desire and curiosity; she had questioned her sister. Jacqueline, relating to her just what she had learned from O herself, supposed that Nathalie would be horrified, as she herself had been; but far from it, it in no way altered Nathalie's emotions. She had fallen in love with O (233).

She continued:

> ‘If you had a dog you’d take care of him, wouldn’t you? If you don’t want to kiss me but if you’d want to beat me, you can, but don’t send me away, let me stay here.’ […] Nathalie didn’t move; she raised her head towards O, and O met her gaze. It was one of total adulation. (236);
>
> ‘Teach me, O, please teach me**,**’ she said, ‘I want to be like you, I’ll do everything you tell me to do. Promise to take me with you when you go back there where Jacqueline said you were going to go.’ ‘You’re a little girl’, said O, ‘you’re too little.’ ‘No I’m not, O, I’m fifteen, I’m not too little.’ (237)

As earlier stated, Nathalie’s desire is perhaps the most difficult to accept. The politics and concerns of child sexualisation make any positive readings of Nathalie’s ‘pure’ desire virtually impossible. But it also perhaps reveals an unexpected, yet fundamental truth about O – that she is not intended to be liked. For all her pious reverie, O is not designed to be a moral barometer or upholder of a conscious feminist libertarianism. She is, like the other characters that inhabit *Story of O*’s world, I argue, purposefully flawed and contradictory.

O’s disinterest in Nathalie, as with her waning desire for Jacqueline illustrates a fundamental difference in her potential queerness:

> […N]o, O was not so much in love with Jacqueline, nor for that matter with Nathalie, nor any girl in particular, but simply with girls because they were girls, the way one can be in love with one’s own image – always finding the others more arousing and lovelier than one finds one’s own self (251).

Is this the profound connection earlier desired? The ability to physically connect with and realise one’s own self? To fuck one’s self? To be simultaneously the object and the subject of one’s own desire? How might this – albeit reductive – conception of queerness actually problematise the fundamental heteronormativity of *Story of O*? The narcissistic qualities of O’s queer desire is thus made overt, problematizing the paradigm through which as Ahmed (2004) has noted, desire in ‘compulsory heterosexuality shapes bodies by the assumption that a body ‘must’ orientate itself towards some objects and not others, objects that are secured as ideal by the fantasy of difference’ (145).

In the following sub-section, these tensions between other and self, object and subject and the heterosexual imperative of difference will be explored, through an examination of the social construction of 'love' as a social inevitability of desire within a framework of patriarchal compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). To this end I refute Tsaros' statement that in *Story of O* 'heteronormativity or monogamy are not important, or indeed, even seem to be desired' (Tsaoros, 2012: 866), instead arguing that this is in fact the novel's central focus. As a result, the narrative thus attempts to close down the queer potentialities inherent in the text, and thus, O's potential for transgressive transcendence through the aforementioned queer framework.

Love

O's submission, masochism and desire are all prefaced on a distinct problematic definition of love. It is this which she seeks and as will be explored it is this which limits her. *Story of O* hinges upon a patriarchal Western (see Karandashev, 2015; Jankowiak and Fischer, 1992) notion of romantic love as the *idealisation* of love (Karandashev, 2015: 8). This is characterised by the following key attributes of courtly love:

> an elevation of the status of the woman, a suffering caused by passionate attraction to and separation from the beloved, and a transformation of the lovers which elevates them onto a separate plane of existence, the world of lovers, in which life is experienced more intensely. (4)

For O, obtaining what is unobtainable to her through love is the full and unequivocal realisation, and justification of her self. Yet it is exactly herself that she fears being left alone with: 'she abhorred this freedom. Her freedom was worse than any conceivable chain' (Réage, 1954: 140); establishing O as wholly dependent and relinquishing any potential power her desire might hold. ''I love you René, I love you', she repeated, whispering to him in the solitude of her room, 'I love you, do what you want with me, but don't leave me, my God don't leave me.' (125) As a result she seeks constant reassurance of her state of being loved, using it to justify the choices she makes: 'O listened and trembled

with happiness, *since he loved her, she trembled, consentingly* [. . .] she dwelt joyfully in bondage' (48, my emphasis); and 'if torture were the price she was to have to pay for her lover's continuing love, then she only hoped he would be happy because of what she had undergone' (40). How can it be that O's submission and masochism in which she has stated she finds pleasure, can contrarily yet concurrently be described as necessary torture endured?

This cognitive dissonance, I would argue is central to understanding why *Story of O* is so marked by ambivalences and contradictions. It aligns the text precisely with one of the many cultural constructions of love (see Karandashev, 2015 for a historical transnational overview): love as passion. As Luhmann (1986) argues, here 'excessiveness itself becomes the measure of all behaviour [… and l]ove can now be depicted as a sort of superpassion which engages all else in its service, or simply as the quintessence of all passions' (Luhmann, 1986: 62). Such 'paradoxicalisations' – 'conquering self-subjugation, desired suffering, vision in blindness, a preference for illness, for imprisonment, and sweet martyrdom' (67) – are absolutely fundamental to the codification of this mode, wherein: 'love is not desire, but by its very nature it creates the desire to be loved, and this desire in turn, to the extent that it remains unfulfilled, creates all the lover's joy and suffering' (65). As a consequence and precursor, love is constructed as being contrary to, and thus distant from, if not outside of, reason and the rational self (67). Yet it is very much a construction, a discursive framework that attempts to suppose a 'truth' of love, passion, and desire as phenomenological; and not instead a historically positioned response to, and agent within, a heteropatriarchal, culturally constructed narrative.

In this paradigm of love, O therefore 'considered herself fortunate, was happy to find that she was important enough to him to enable him to find pleasure in outraging her, as believers thank God for having humbled them' (Réage, 1954: 114). Is it possible here that O nullifies her own consent by basing it upon a condition that she knows to be false? This problematic privileging of love as paramount, and key to her consent, is demonstrated fully in René's statement at Roissy; 'From now on, that is to say, she was not free; or rather she was free in one sense, only in one: to stop loving him and to leave him immediately. But if

she did love him, if she were going to, then she wasn't free at all' (76). And O did love him, or so she thought:

> she was buoyant, a cloud-dwelling goddess, a swift-swimming fish of the deeps, but deep-dwelling, doomed to happiness. Doomed because those powerful ligatures, those hair-thin cables whose ends René held in his hand were the only lines by which life-giving energy could reach her (127—8).

The introduction of Sir Stephen however worries O in her love for René: '[h]ad he so thoroughly given her to Sir Stephen that he had reached the stage of not loving her any more? What was going to happen if he didn't love her any more? O was gripped by such a panic' (192) that she raced to René's work (192—193) and he then 'took' O '[…] and in this she found a proof of his love.' (194)

For O then love is seemingly a very simple thing – its doubts easily allayed by the simple act of penetration. It is here where *Story of O*'s concept of love becomes clearly problematic. Having her fears of losing René's love realised, no great time passes before O is able to view this love as flawed, and inferior to the new love she holds with Sir Stephen. This is explored in the following internal monologue, which I repeat herein at length:

> 'Ah', thought O, 'here it is, come at last, the day I've always been afraid would come: when for René I'd turn into a shadow belonging to a past life, a life that has been led and that now is gone be [sic]. And I am not even sad, now that it has come, and I only feel sorry for him, pity is all I feel, and I can see him everyday without feeling hurt that he no longer desires me, without bitterness, without regret. And yet, is it not odd that, only a few weeks ago, I ran halfway across Paris to beg him to tell me that he loved me. *Was that my love for him? Was that all it was? So light a thing, so easily consoled?* Consolation? But it does not even require that. I am happy. Had he then but to give me to Sir Stephen, was that enough to detach me from him? Has new love come so easily in another's arms? But, objectively now, what was René next to Sir Stephen? Threads of paper, strings of straw – such in actual truth were the ties whereby he had bound her to him, and which he had so quickly severed; and that quick, that easy sunderance was what those so frail ties symbolized. Whereas

> what peaceful serenity, what reassurance, what delight, this iron ring which pierces and weighs eternally, this mark that will remain forever, the master's hand which lays you down to rest on a couch of rock, *the love of a master who is capable of pitilessly appropriating unto himself that which he loves. And, by way of final conclusion, O told herself that she had only loved* René *as a means for learning of love and for finding out how to give herself better, as a slave, as an ecstatic slave, to Sir Stephen.* (239, my emphasis)

While O may reason that her love with René was flawed in its infantile development, reliant upon an insecure over-dependency, it would be easy to level such an argument against her new serenity under Sir Stephen's loving control. Perhaps it is simply yet another way for O to hide from herself – just as she is unknown to us, she is also unknown to herself – this time by giving up her 'self', irrevocably. But this 'self' giving could be read more transgressively, through her obtaining of a *jouissance*, not possible in the retention of her self, and reliant upon her connection with another, resulting in a reduction of her agentic status as individual. As Karandashev explains,

> [E]ach person is a separate entity; from a collectivistic view, the individual is a part of more extended relationships. When one perceives him/herself as an individual with boundaries and separate from other people, loving for someone else is the chance to break through those boundaries and escape the loneliness caused by being a separate individual. Love becomes the bridge that connects a person to another one. (Karandashev, 2015: 12)

It is this reliance upon another to reach a status of self-actualisation, realisation and fulfilment located here through this process of patriarchal and heteronormative love, that I contend is the central problematic theme of *Story of O*.

A Slave's Revolt **(1954)**

As previously outlined, it is crucial to note that the novel however does not exist in isolation, and in its published form is proceeded by Jean Paulhan's 'A Slave's

Revolt: An Essay on The *Story of O'* (1954). The essay, rather than simply functioning as prologue on the importance of the novel as literary work, creates instead a further compounded and more troubling context for its problematic sexual politics. Describing it as 'surely the most fiercely intense love-letter a man could ever receive' (Paulhan, 1954: 282), the renowned critic speculates upon the author's identity:

> I have very little doubt but that you are a woman. What makes me sure is not so much the details you delight in employing – green satin dresses, wasp-waist bodices, multiple petticoats, a ringlet of hair caught in a curler – as this: upon the same day René abandons her to further torments, O keeps her wits sufficiently about her and to be able to observe that her lover's slippers have been scuffed and frayed, that a new pair must be bought for him. (271—272)

Here Paulhan offers us a clearly gendernormative, heteronormative and patriarchal reading of the novel, grounding both the author and her character's femininity squarely in the domestic. Further assertions, contrary to the expectations of such an essay's function, say nothing at all of her writing ability: 'A woman knows about a *thousand* things that are beyond me. Generally, she knows about sewing. She can cook. She knows how an apartment ought to be arranged and which styles wont clash.' (285) To punctuate the bizarre in Paulhan's speech let us indulge in imagining such irrelevant gender normative comments made of male authors: *this writer is remarkable because he knows how to operate a drill, how to change the oil on a car, and how to manage the household's finances. All tasks which are beyond me*. What function then, do such remarks perform?

This question is integral further still, as Paulhan's interpretation leaps beyond the microcosmic locale of *Story of O* and its author, to an altogether broader concern, the very definition of female desire:

> Here we have at last: a woman who admits it! Exactly what women have always – and never more so than today – forbidden themselves to admit. Exactly what men have always accusingly said was true about them: that they never cease slavishly to obey their blood and temper; that; in them,

> everything, even their minds, even their souls, is dominated by their sex […] That, in a word, one must have a whip in hand when one goes to visit them. (272)

This reductive and essentialist gender dichotomy that lays claim to an infantilising 'truth' of femininity seems again strikingly removed from the nuance of Réage's text as manifested in both O's contradictory interior monologues, and of the experiences of those characters which surround her. However, *A Slave's Revolt* is not without its own reflections, as Paulhan notes: 'I even wonder, when all is said and done, whether she doesn't exaggerate somewhat**:** *whether her fellow-women are indeed as much alike as she supposes*.' (276, my emphasis) Nonetheless, *A Slave's Revolt* undeniably attempts to offer a dominant reading in key with patriarchal hegemony, to which we must respond by probing Paulhan's investment in such narratives.

That Paulhan was Réage's lover would not be known until much later (in St. Jorre, 1994b), yet this following passage is clearly revealing:

> It is as if you are twin-natured, or as if the person for whom the letter is intended were at every moment so near, so present that you borrowed his tastes, assumed his voice. But what kind of a woman, and who are you? […] who is Pauline Réage? A dreamer or no more? (272)

This direct address is more than simply stylistic – it clearly demarcates the essay not as literary criticism but instead as riposte. Whilst one wonders how romance functions here between the two in his perhaps teasing accusations that the authoress has borrowed *his* voice, it is in no doubt that Paulhan's essay functions as a call to arms, or dare: *are you but a dreamer, are these simply words designed to please me, or the promise of something more…?* It is this blurring of fantasy and reality to which I will return.

Despite the essay functioning as love-letter returned, Paulhan does offer a useful counter-reading which would seem to offer a potentially less patriarchal gender-normative understanding, arguing that it is not Sir Stephen and René who are actively sadistic towards O, but instead that '[e]verything happens as if from the outset it were O alone who *demanded to be hurt*, flushed from her

retreat by punishment' (277, my emphasis). This seems at odds with the narrative as written upon the page. For, whilst certainly O embraces her servitude in the scenes, it is difficult to imagine her as an unproblematically active protagonist, after all Roissy is unknown to her upon her arrival and she plays no active role in her training (an important point of contradistinction to the narratives of chapters 6 and 7). What this demonstrates, I would argue, is the first demonstration of how *Story of O* lends itself to re-contextualisation through readers' interpretive repertoires, albeit in this instance, a perhaps unexpectedly taunting yet celebratory patriarchal 'gaze'.

A Girl in Love **(1969)**

Accompanying the publication of Réage's lesser-known second novel *Story of O Part 2: Return to the Chateau* (1969), *A Girl in Love* (1969) acts in some ways as a preface, proceeding as it does the main body of text – although it should be noted that they were written separately. Since much has been written about the first novel, but little attention paid to the authors *words* (if such a distinction can be made) I wish here to give air to her voice by quoting – at times quite lengthily – her reflections. The short piece, which explains *Story of O*'s genesis in third person form, tells the story of two lovers who in their intermittent stolen time together escaped the world around them. Punctuating her loneliness, she writes that after such meetings 'he, in his room, was not alone. She was alone in hers' (Réage, 1969a: 9). During the course of their illicit romance this unnamed female tells him that she could write the kind of stories that he likes. 'Do you really think so?' he replies. She explains that '[b]ooks were their only complete freedom, their common country, their true travels' (8); thus whilst with retrospect this speaks to their passion for literature as scholars, it also paints a world in which the lovers longed for escape.

Addressing the reader directly, and thus inviting us into the mystery of both this clandestine relationship and of the novel, Réage asserts that 'if you are reading this it means you have already taken the trouble to read the entire tale and therefore know more about it today than she [sic] knew at that time' (10—11). Cautious to state unequivocally that '[t]hey are not memoirs**'** (20), it is not

however the novel only that is unknown to her, but also seemingly herself: ‘one day this girl for whom I am speaking, and rightly so, *since if I have nothing of hers she has everything of* mine […] began to write the story she had promised*’* (9, my emphasis). Such a statement is curious in its initial appearance as double speak, for at once, it is both a blurring, and a separation of the two selves: past (girl) and present (woman). This chimes with her assertion that ‘[b]esides nothing is more fallacious and shifting than an identity’ (14). But this also speaks of loss, twinged with jealousy, Réage is also giving voice to the loss of love, of *their* shared love yet to come.

Returning to the matter of the author’s penning of the novel, Réage recounts the pursuing in this labour of love unaware of its destiny, for her nameless lover:

> *The girl was writing the way you spoke in the dark to the person you love when you've held back the words of love too long and they flow at last.* For the first time in her life she was writing without hesitation, without stopping, rewriting or discarding she was writing the way one breathes, the way one dreams. […T]he first night entirely spent the way sleepwalkers doubtless spend theirs, *wrested from herself, or, who knows, returned to herself*. (9–10, my emphasis)

Once again encased here in twilight-lit somnambulant metaphor, reality and fantasy are blurred, whilst the process of writing is simultaneously painted as dissociative and compulsive. So compelling in fact, and so shrouded in illicit secrecy that she wrote in a secret notebook, and fearing its discovery sent to her lover:

> [t]en pages at a time, or five, full chapters or fragments of chapters, she slipped her pages […] into envelopes and addressed them to the same General Delivery address. No carbon copy, no first draft, she kept nothing**.** But the postal service came through. (13)

The distinction between her past self as both real and imagined, is punctuated in her fear of her lover’s reaction to what would become *Story of O,* for ‘everything was a risk [… and] what if the phantasms that it revealed were to outrage her lover or, worse, bore him, or, worse yet, strike him as being ridiculous? […] She was wrong to be afraid’ (12). While her lover was enamoured by her text, the author herself struggled with its content. Scribbling

such ‘phantasms’ by the candlelight of her darkened room had been one thing, but ‘owning’ those words was quite another,

> The man asked her to read sections out loud to him, as she wrote them […] T]he girl who was reading had to stop, break off, once or more than once, because it is possible silently to imagine the worst, the most burning detail, but not read out loud what was dreamt in the course of interminable nights. (14)

Story of O here functions as a ‘dream’, ‘phantasm’ and reverie spectrally haunting a past self, long departed. But is this simply a distancing technique, utilised by the author to both romanticise the past and to obfuscate or indeed abdicate from her own authorship? Or herself from her subconscious vis-à-vis pseudonymous character of Pauline Réage?:

> Who am I finally if not the long silent part of someone which has never betrayed itself in public by any thought, word, or deed, but communicates through the subterranean depths of the imaginary with dreams as old as the world itself. (ibid.,)

The implication of *A Girl in Love*’s insights is manifold. Firstly, Paulhan’s assertion that the novel functions as a love letter is confirmed, perhaps more literally than expected. Secondly, while the narrative herein omits any editorial changes that may have happened after this clandestinely penned first draft, its conception clearly keys into the novel’s mystique as a ‘subterranean’ ‘imaginary’ that this enigmatic author felt compelled to write. More importantly however for our considerations is the author’s explication of her relationship to the text – a subject drawn upon further in the following chapter by examining extra-textual sources outside of this literary canon. Herein, the contradictions observed in O are, perhaps not unexpectedly also found in Réage. The dualism of both her past and present self, along with the blurring of reality and fantasy, of ‘Réage’ with Aury, and of the ‘waking conscious self against the somnambulant imaginary’ making positioning of her authorship pointedly nebulous. In which case, what can we infer that Réage’s gaze, whether interior or externalised tells us about *Story of O* and its intentions? I suggest that its status as love-letter is precisely key – for whilst Réage found herself different, if not distinct from O,

one thing held in common for both is the dominant motivation of love, and the notion that love justifies all.

Story of O Part Two (1969)

In the novel's sequel, *Story of O Part 2* no such theme is apparent. Gone is the light-hearted joy with which Réage originally wrote, its foreword here stating instead that: '[t]he pages that follow are a sequel to *Story of O*. They deliberately suggest the degradation of that work, and cannot under any circumstances be integrated into it [signed P.R.]' (Réage, 1969: 23). Here we find O with Nathalie [henceforth 'Natalie' in concurrence with the unfortunate Anglicisation of this edition] with Sir Stephen, as though O's figurative or literal death had never happened. Yet this is the least of O's concerns. Suspecting Sir Stephen's (previously resolute) love to be waning, she has made herself indispensable by grooming Natalie, or so it seems. She 'caresses' (fucks) Natalie and, we are told '[i]t was not long before her hand was covered in blood' (41). If O's complicity in Natalie's sexualisation painted O as a dislikeable character in *Story of O*, this turn creates an even darker O and world for her to inhabit.

Soon after Sir Stephen decides to send the (still teenage) Natalie to boarding school, and O worries as to their future and her potential dispensability:

> The irons that lay heavy on her belly, the brand which had been seared into the flesh of her buttocks, were for her, had always been for her, marks of pride, because they proclaimed that the person who had imposed them upon her loved her enough to set her apart from all others. Would she now feel obliged to be ashamed of them, or, if he no longer loved her, would they still remain as the proof that she still belonged to him? For it was apparent that he still wanted her to belong to him. (34)

Whereas O previously felt fulfilled by obeying her 'master' in sexually servicing those of his choosing, her perspective has now seemingly changed, indicating a more significant shift both in her relationship to Sir Stephen, and to herself:

> how could O blot out her memory the feeling of despair she felt when she saw herself, in her own room, and in his presence, being treated in a way

> few whores were treated in the meanest brothels, and, worst of all, being treated by him as though he took her for one. (32)

This insight is proved astute, as Sir Stephen reveals his grander plan for O, to send her back to Roissy, this time as a brothel. Not satisfied thus far with the 'degradation' of her work, the author adds a further darker twist to confound her expectant readership: O is raped (63) by the driver on her way to the chateau.

Upon hearing this news Anne-Marie laughs, responding that she will tell Sir Stephen so he can have a 'good laugh'. O is finally by herself but this is not the positive and transformative experience we expected, instead she is vulnerable and alone. She explains further as to O's being 'prostituted', 'If Sir Stephen wants you to go to bed for money, he's certainly free to do it. It's no concern of yours' (77). Her only solace is in hoping that Sir Stephen will visit, justifying those actions done to her through his transformative love:

> sometimes she had the feeling that quite simply, she had been abandoned, and that Sir Stephen had sent her to Roissy, turned her over to Roissy as Anne-Marie had put it, in order to get rid of her. And then again she imagined the opposite was true, that he had done it because he desired her all the more. Then Anne-Marie was right. Whatever he wanted was of no concern of hers, nor were his reasons any of her business, all that mattered was that he had his own reasons. (82)

But O is ultimately abandoned, both by Sir Stephen and by the author, in an extremely odd plot twist involving a customer called Carl, Africa and some stolen diamonds. Sir Stephen, having absconded presumably forever, thus relinquishes by default his ownership of O. The novel concludes in the following open-ended manner:

> 'You're free now, O', said Anne-Marie. 'We can remove your irons, your collar, and bracelets, and even erase the brand. You have the diamonds, you can go home.' O did not cry, nor did she display any sign of bitterness. Nor did she answer Anne-Marie. 'But if you prefer,' Anne-Marie went on, 'You can stay here.' (159—160)

The novel ends with the potentiality of O's agency.

Conclusion

Story of O is a rich text, which has much to tell us about female masochism and submission under patriarchy as an individuated case study. Principally this hinges on O's complex and contradictory motivations rooted both in desire, and in love – yet can also be found mirrored and contradicted in the characters that populate this initial storyworld. It offers the potential to be read, re-read and counter-read, including through a queer framework which may open up the possibility of understanding this text as being at once at odds with, and in coalition with the predominant heteronormative patriarchal paradigm. Thus *Story of O* is, I have argued, inherently pluralized, a complex and contradictory text. Where one looks to the expanded storyworld for answers, few can be found. While the understanding of the original novel as love-letter is indeed illuminating, it does nothing still to explain to us why love is so problematic throughout. It is my contention that *Story of O* is much less a fantasy than a distinctly modern fiction, grounded in the realities of dominant patriarchal hegemony, in which heteronormative romantic love is first idealised, and then later killed off in its sequel. The text, and O are thus very much products of our culture.

In the following chapter, I turn to Pauline Réage once more to contextualise the novel through her extra-textual opinions, and responses to received criticism to ask, can we conceive of a 'truth' of O? Moving beyond these source texts therefore, I examine the feminist readings and potential re-readings of *Story of O*, drawing upon the research contained herein to problematise dominant understandings of the novel; and to ask what this text might say about a female 'truth' of submissiveness and masochism more broadly in a macrocosmic context of the dominant culture. To this end it is necessary to situate Réage's storyworld within the real world, including understanding these texts as mediated by the industry of literary publishing, which this thesis contends, may ultimately additionally confines it, reinforcing its location within compulsory heteronormativity and patriarchal culture.

Notes

1. Elements of this chapter have been published previously as 'Returning to Roissy: Kink.com's The Upper Floor and The Training of O as adaptations of the Story of O' (2013) see appendix.

2. As discussed in Chapter Three, that pro-SM feminists would thus name their group after Samois may appear logical, but it also indicates a particularly selective reading. Firstly, of course, the feminine site of Samois is located in the greater masculine locus of Roissy. Further, their omitting of the fact that we are told ‘O had shared the life led in that house, a life of absolute and mandatory idleness received by monotonous distractions’ (Réage, 1954: 208) is curiously striking.

3. Tsaros (2013) infers that *Story of O* is comparatively less realist and more fantasy than E. L. James’ 2012 novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Tsaros 2013: 873) in part due to the absence of contraception in the narrative (866). This however is addressed in the *Story of O Part Two*:

> Roissy was officially ignored and unofficially tolerated. One of the reasons for this […] was doubtless that there had never been any complaints about Roissy about venereal disease, nor had there been any scandals about unwanted pregnancies or abortions. O had always wondered how it was possible for girls who sometimes slept with as many as ten men a day […] to avoid getting pregnant. They couldn’t all *be lucky, as was O. She had a physical anomaly that practically eliminated any possibility of pregnancy*.’ (Réage, 1969b: 107 my emphasis)

Furthermore, the narrative informs us that Anne Marie ‘operates’ on the girls (abortions), and ‘disease’ (STIs) is treated by internal pills, prophylactics, douches and isolation if contagion (108). I would argue that not only does this additional text ground O’s storyworld in realism, but further that the anti-futurity of such narratives – though steeped in heterosexual imperative – offer yet another way in which we may view the text as queer/ed.

Chapter Five – Problems of O[1]

Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter's analysis of *Story of O* and its paratextual storyworld, this chapter examines the novel's reception by feminist critics to evaluate *Story of o* as a potential feminist text. Focus herein therefore is upon the discourses which construct 'truths' of the text(s) meaning. Analysis begins therefore with an overview of the radical feminist criticism of *Story of O* – since little exists of its sequel – to examine the myriad ways in which it has been found problematic. This hinges upon: the rejection of pornography as a patriarchal violence, and of *Story of O* as pornographic text par excellence; and of O as object, rather than subject of the text and genre moreover. Arguing that their criticism is characterised by a refusal to engage fully with the text, the following sub-section therefore constructs and examines the author's own reading of the text, in conjunction with the according feminist criticism of Susan Sontag (1969).

In the second half of this chapter, having addressed feminist criticism over the narrative content, we move to the argument of *Story of O* as problematic in form as advanced by Kaja Silverman (1984), who cites O as captive of literature, and language. To this end, the chapter critically overviews the concept and limitations of Écriture Féminine, finally asking whether the text can potentially be understood as belonging to this feminist practice, through an appraisal of the novel's form and content, and what more we can know of O therein.

Feminist criticism

'Story of O', writes Andrea Dworkin in her first monograph, *Woman Hating*:

> is more than simple pornography. It claims to define epistemologically what a woman is, what she needs, her processes of thinking and feeling, her proper place. It links men and women in an erotic dance of some

> magnitude: the sado-masochistic complexion of O is not trivial – it is formulated as a cosmic principle which articulates, absolutely, the feminine (Dworkin, 1974: 55).

Whilst the author had originally been 'very moved' (Dworkin in Dworkin and Wilson, 1982: 23) by the novel and had thought it 'very profound, and very full of ideas about sex, and very full of ideas about what love really was' (ibid.,), after fleeing an abusive marriage Dworkin revisited *Story of O* with an aim to examine her earlier self-perceived 'complicity' (Dworkin, 1974: 27) with the narrative. Dworkin now saw it instead:

> from the perspective of a woman who had genuinely been regarded in the way the woman in that book had been regarded. And as a woman who despite all of her radical ideas, all of her radical politics, had in fact accepted those definitions of her being (24).

Woman Hating, then, is an unashamed polemic. Its foreword declares its author's intentions as anti-academic; as an 'action' whose purpose it is to 'make a difference' (24) against the scholarly 'horseshit' (17) that Dworkin saw as typifying male dominance; viewing writers as 'cowards, clowns and liars' (25). To this end therefore, there is a potential to read her works as a form of écriture féminine – a subject to which this chapter will later return – or at very least not to simply disregard it. In opposing academe – a realm from which she, as a woman felt disconnected if not excluded from – the resultant writing instead captures her lived experience as feminist rhetorical device.

It is this which forms the fatal flaw within her writing – whilst *she* may see the patriarchal world as inescapable and aggressive to the point of militant oppression, she silences the voices of other women through speaking for them. Further, this is vastly contradictory to her concurrent discussion of feminism's own marginalisation through the dominance of white middle-class figureheads (22—23) with no seeming acknowledgement of her problematic self-appointment as representative of women as a homogenous concept. She laments that the 'analysis [of sexism] is useless unless tied to a political consciousness and commitment which will totally redefine community' (22). Yet she lacks the political awareness to understand the hugely problematic

ramifications of her equating the oppression of women with that of people of colour: ‘The nature of women’s oppression is unique: women are oppressed as women, regardless of class or race’ (23); and further, ‘[w]e saw that we were the ultimate house niggers, ass-licking, bowing, scraping, shuffling fools’ (21).

Through denying the *Story of O* its potentiality as a complex text— ‘Q. E.D. pornography is never big on plot' (57) – dismissing it instead as a story of 'infantile abandon' (55) aligned with 'children's fairy tales' (ibid.,) she ignores that this ‘fairy-tale’ is undeniably one of whiteness; of the fur draped, rouged nipples of white upper-class bodies embroiled in white upper class pursuits in the chateaus of the white upper class (recall Mason, Pagano and Sims, 1982 on race and BDSM; see Dyer, 1997 on whiteness and representation; and Ying-Chao, 2013 on whiteness in BDSM research). Its racial politics are far from invisible, yet Dworkin makes no mention of this nor of the character foil of Sir Stephen’s maid, ‘the negress’, Norah (and in fact she is entirely absent from all of the feminist discussions examined herein) [2]. Here Dworkin at once aims to deconstruct the myriad ways in which patriarchy operates as a system of oppression, yet ultimately reinforces oppression through the privileging of her own voice and concerns, which simply pit homogenous Woman against homogeneous Patriarchy. It is this oversimplification, of course, which makes her ‘herstory’ all the more compelling. The simpler the taxonomy, the easier it is to envision – one enemy is easier to defeat, one dictatorship all the more easy to overthrow; join the army, for this is a just and winnable war.

For Dworkin (as discussed in Chapter Three) patriarchy’s most heinous weapon is pornography, which she describes herein as ‘the structure of male and female mind, the content of our shared erotic identity, the map of each inch and mile of our oppression and despair’ (Dworkin, 1974: 54). She crucially cites literary, rather than audio visual pornography as the *coup de grâce* of oppression, as the ‘cultural truth’ of ‘male/female’ relations, ‘of the collective scenario of master/slave’ (53). Dworkin declares, therefore, that *Story of O* – a novel she presumes authored male (see Wilson and Dworkin, 1982: 29, n.1) – is ‘a book of astounding political significance’ (Dworkin, 1974: 58), which she argues constructs O as simultaneously occupying the roles of: a possessed body (58—

60); a mythological figure (57); a prostitute (61); and a surrogate 'that the two men love each other and fuck each other through' (62—63).. This potential queering of the text – as argued in the previous chapter – is obfuscated by Dworkin however, who I would suggest here instead seeks to emasculate and feminise Stephen and René.

Above all for Dworkin, O is an object (58). Yet she does not seek to liberate O from the confines of her abject 'objectness'. Instead, Dworkin's rhetoric, based as it is upon a linguistic order that makes O the subject of passive past participles wherein actions are *done to* her, thus refuses to re/construct her as the agent of her narrative:

> This is, then, the story of O: O is *taken* by her lover Rene [sic] to Roissy and *cloistered* there; she is *fucked*, *sucked*, *raped*, *whipped*, *humiliated*, and *tortured* on a regular and continuing basis – she is *programmed* to be an erotic slave, [...] *branded* with Sir Stephen's mark and to have rings with his insignia *inserted* in her cunt; she serves as an erotic model for Jacqueline's younger sister Natalie [sic] who is infatuated with her; she is *taken* to a party masked as an owl, *led* on a leash by Natalie [sic], and there *plundered*, *despoiled*, *raped*, *gangbanged* (56—57, my emphasis).

Dworkin implores her reader to accept that it is in fact O who can be seen as nothing more than the victim within patriarchy. She asserts that her 'values of service and self-sacrifice and universal notions of womanhood [form] a logical scenario incorporating the psychology of submission and self-hatred found in all oppressed peoples' (56).

Thus, the *Story of O* comes to stand as the oppressive text *par excellence*, and O its Stockholm Syndrome suffering symbol – a notion shared by Carol Cosman in her analysis of the same year. She argues that, '[i]n a distorted way she merely acts out the so-called male role' (Cosman, 1974: 28), for

> she is the image of a woman trapped between cultural oppression and the force of her self hatred […] her story is a metaphor for our own, pre-liberation. She becomes pure cunt, just as men would have her, a being defined solely by her sexual function and her subordination to masculine will (29).

Similarly, in ‘Teaching about Women and Violence’ (1985) Kathy White’s radical feminist pedagogy cites *Story of O* not as ‘Fiction by Women’ but as ‘Violence in Literature’ under her bibliographic schema. She asserts that *Story of O* is a

> classic example of what Adrienne Rich calls the real subject of pornography, the crushing of the soul […] whether parody of straightforward pornography, it is representative of the humiliation, degradation and finally dehumanization of women that is standard fare of such material. […It is] an extreme manifestation of a variety of violent attitudes towards women, illustrating the contention that pornography frequently depicts a destructive and dehumanizing connection of sex and in violence (White, 1985: 24).

The idea again here is solidified, that *Story of O* is the supreme pornographic text, and pornography the foremost mode, the model of patriarchal expression. She even goes as far as to add without equivocation that ‘some students have nightmares after reading the novel, and others cannot finish the book’ (25). This statement is undoubtedly fascinating in not only the temptation to deconstruct such a student-given narrative within the dynamics of classroom feminism and pedagogy – a consideration beyond the concerns of this thesis and its line of inquiry – but further in its perception of the *Story of O* as holding the potential for real and demonstrable harm.

For Susan Griffin in *Sadomasochism and the Erosion of Self: A Critical Reading of the Story of O* (1982), as for Dworkin before her, the novel epitomises and indeed is emblematic of the experience of the feminine in patriarchy:

> Even if we have not read *The Story of O*, our minds have been shaped by the same culture which shaped this tale. [...] Like O, as we impersonate the pornographic idea of women, we betray ourselves, and someone within us, who is condemned to silence, begins to die. (Griffin, 1982: 199)

Whether one has even read the story or not, then, we nonetheless live it, along with O. This is quite a claim and one that denies both the potentiality of O’s voice, and of any potential fluidity in both narrative and reader, as I have argued for in the previous chapter. The novel, asserts Griffin, is therefore unquestionably pornography and the ‘pornographic idea of women’ is as

submissive masochist, engaged in a sadistic sex that reflects and reinforces cultural imperatives of female oppression that work to obliterate the feminine. Whilst Griffin thus implores us to actively reject *Story of O* and pornography, contra Dworkin, woman is perhaps inscribed a position of agency in that the perceived patriarchal pornographic imagination can be rewritten, and femininity thus reshaped.

Similarly, psychoanalyst feminists such as Jessica Benjamin (1988) intent to 'challenge the hegemony of the phallus as the sole embodiment of desire' (Benjamin, 1988: 86), have read against O concluding that in the novel:

> O's loss of self is *his* gain, O's pain is *his* pleasure. For the slave, intense pain causes a violent rupture of the self, a profound experience of fragmentation and chaos. It's true that O now welcomes this loss of self-coherence, but only under a specific condition: that her sacrifice actually creates her master's power, produces his coherent self, in which she can take refuge. Thus in losing her own self, she is gaining access, however circumscribed, to a more powerful one. (61)

This power, under Benjamin's schema, is the phallus as she argues:

> The symbolization of male mastery through the penis emphasizes the difference between them and her […] the penis symbolizes the master's resistance to being absorbed by the thing he is controlling: however interdependent the master and slave become, the difference between them will be sustained (57);

and further:

> Her masochism is a search for recognition through an other who is powerful enough to bestow this recognition. This other has the power for which the self longs; and through this recognition she gains it, though vicariously. (56)

Such tracts however are paradoxical in nature – in locating power squarely within the phallus this phallic power is therefore reinforced, and woman consequently is sequestered in a space wherein she is constantly seeking a phallic power that she ultimately cannot wholly obtain.

While the criticisms wielded by feminists so far have argued a monolithic interpretation, reading strategy and thus meaning of the text, Michelle A. Massé writing in 1992 offers us a potential alternative:

> Each [reader] must decide whether to identify with the beater, or beaten, and each must be aware, if the act of reading continues, of assenting to the voyeur's role just as O consents to every stage of her progress. To continue reading, a woman must agree to be the beaten in her own identification with O, or must be a spectator to another woman's being beaten, a position the third person narration encourages. (It is also possible, although less likely, for her to identify with the men who are beaters. Later in the novel, the option of identification with women who beat is also offered). (Massé, 1992: 108)

Thus, while she notes the multiple positions of identification and therefore possibility for multiple reader interpretations, presenting a potential if minimal fluidity, she limits this to a simple either/or option ('the beater, *or* beaten, *or* […] spectator to another woman's being beaten'). Thus, we as readers may identify with the beaten (assumed passive) or the spectator (assumed passive), and unlikely the beater (active), but certainly no combination of the three.

Such a reading thus denies the novel's patent structural multiplicity, and the simultaneously passive and active sadomasochistic identificatory positions available to the reader, not to mention their interpretive repertoires and active capacity to choose with whom to identify, or not. By closing down such positions of identification to an 'either' 'or' selection, the narrative is reduced to a monologue which again simply reinforces the binary positions of 'female victim' and 'male sadist.' As with the preceding feminist criticisms examined herein thus far, the author therefore appeals to the reader to reject this text – which she asserts constructs O as oppressed object, and its reader complicit – as patriarchal pornography, to necessitate our own emancipation.

Seemingly in contrast, Amelia Ziv (1994) argues that:

> While it is true that Story of O provides a symbolic representation of the construction of the female subject, and that this representation is eroticized, it is not necessary to assume that the effect on the reader is

> oppressive – not even when one 'collaborates' with the text and internalises its eroticism. In a sense, since the text exposes and dramatizes the hidden assumption of patriarchal ideology, it facilitates their identification and even compels the reader to confront them. […F]emale masochist fantasy should be understood not as a product of construction, but as a reaction to construction. Masochism is the trace of the gap between the female subject and the construct 'woman' which she assimilates. (Ziv, 1994: 68)

But how, then, if something is the representation of construction and reaction to constructions, is it not a product of construction? How does it evade this position? Ziv locates therefore, masochist desire (and *Story of O*) as being *between* gendered subjectivity and construction – but how is it that masochism can be divorced from its historical status as the construction of discursive frameworks, as advanced in Chapter Three? Her position, therefore I would argue mirrors the pro-SM feminists who problematically re-conceptualised masochism as separate from, and outside of patriarchal power relations but gave no rationale as to how it can thus be situated ahistorically.

Ziv continues,

> The masochistic fantasy functions as an attempt to resolve the tension between the subject's identification with patriarchal culture and her frustration and humiliation at being objectified by that same culture. [..T]he pain and the humiliation scripted by the fantasy are a transposition of the psychic pain caused by these ideas and indicate the ongoing resistance to them. As a form of representation, female masochistic fantasy retains the tension at its base, and hence cannot be reasonably said to 'promote' the objectification it depicts. This is not to say that we should advocate masochism as a form of resistance, but that works like Story of O should not be regarded as complicit in the patriarchal construction of womanhood since, mixed in with the poison, they already contain a dose of the antidote. (67—68)

Her metaphor is compelling. However, despite positing *Story of O* as potentially blurring such positions, Ziv's rhetoric still speaks to the same binary mode of thinking characterised by feminists explored in Chapter Three – SM as either

oppressive or liberatory. It is either the poison or the antidote. That is to say, snake venom contains its own antidote, yes, but it is still venom. And in this mode, she as with the other feminist critics examined herein still makes claim to a 'truth' of *Story of O* based upon a binary discursive frame. But, as I have endeavoured to ask in the previous chapter in my own analysis: can we rethink *Story of O*, rather than through its reception but [re]turning instead to its inception?

Authorial Intent

The feminist criticism examined thus far herein is marked largely not only by a refusal to engage fully with *Story of O*, but also a refusal to engage with the author who (from 1974 on) gave interviews, shedding light on her text. In what follows, I wish to draw attention to Réage/Aury's authorial intent that, while at times ambivalent and ambiguous, nonetheless acts as a counterpoint to much of the criticism levelled at the text by feminist critics. To this end, this sub-section draws upon interviews in both print and film. Namely in: the (1975) French full length publication *Confessions of O: Conversations with Pauline Réage by Regine Desforges* ('*O m'a dit*'/'*O told me*'), translated by Sabine d'Estree, a figure to which we will return); the English *The New Yorker* article 'The Unmasking of O' (1994a) and overlapping book *The Good Ship Venus: The Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press* (1994b) both by John de St. Jorre; and the 2005 American docudrama *Writer of O*, directed and produced by Pola Rapaport (including the Zeitgeist Video DVD bonus material of an interview with John de St. Jorre). Additionally, this argument draws upon the scholarly article *The Story of Two Women: Dominique Aury and Edith Thomas* (1998) by Dorothy Kaufmann. In collecting these interview sources together for the first time, we are therefore provided with a unique insight into Réage's – and/or Aury; for the two are here blurred— life and text in her own words.

It is not this thesis' contention to privilege the author's understanding of O and her story above the critical readerly interpretations, nor to suggest that Réage offers us a 'truth' or an 'answer' to the questions and concerns posed by feminist criticism. Instead, this sub-section seeks to offer the author's voice

space within this discussion, where it has been excluded elsewhere. In so doing, Réage's understanding of the text adds to the feminist discourses that surround the novel. To this end, it is pertinent to examine the following central contentions, which as previously discussed, characterise this criticism. Firstly, recalling the additional debates of Chapter Three, that is the question of pornography, and its positioning as patriarchal and (whether directly or indirectly) as causing harm. Endemic to this is the notion that *Story of O* therefore, is a potentially harmful fantasy writ large on women. Secondly therefore we ought also to investigate the feminist criticism surrounding O as the passive, submissive object and victim of patriarchal narrative drives.

On pornography, Réage explains her position:

> I have yet to know of a single instance of any crime committed as a result of erotic literature. The idea of supressing pornography is utterly scandalous, let the people read whatever they want, no matter how base or vulgar. They aren't the ones who go out and commit crimes, any more than people who read Sade go out and build concentration camps. No, the people who go out and build concentration camps *don't* read Sade. In fact, they probably don't read at all. When you have guns, who reads books? is their opinion [sic]. (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 131—32, emphasis in original)[3]

Putting aside the curious fact that Réage felt that her second novel should be suppressed, the author thus takes a libertarian position that pornography is a right of speech, whose suppression causes more damage than its circulation might. In her assertion that she 'knows of no such crime' Réage advances an argument responding directly to the feminist utilisation of the hypodermic needle model of consumption, evoking, in part the question of evidence for such a paradigm. Yet as we have seen in Chapter Three, such feminist critiques argue that representations, whether directly or indirectly contribute to a macro cultural oppression. For Réage however, the defence of literature in the face of censorship is relative to her own politics of anti-fascism (as evidence by her role in the French resistance, and furthered by her evocation of concentration camps in this rhetoric) and her position as a 'woman of letters' during a particular socio-political climate in France's history. Indeed, she passionately refuted the moral

burden of texts, asserting that 'to bring a moral judgement on ideas [was] "idiocy' (Aury in Kauffman, 1998: 890).

Yet by defending what she pointedly terms 'erotic literature' and 'pornography no matter how 'base' or 'vulgar'', the author implies that these are lesser texts within the grander hierarchy of literature, and this is reflected in the dismissal both of her own novel: "*C'etait une letter d'amour* […] Nothing else […] Much ado about nothing" (Aury in de St. Jorre, 1994a: 50, emphasis in original); and her position as author: "I didn't know how to end it, so I left it open. Why not? I am not a novelist, you know." (Aury in de St. Jorre, 1994b: 224) Such statements highlight a tension both between her identity as Aury and as Réage, as well as between author and text as demonstrated in the following quote, which recalls the magical origins of the text offered in *A Girl In Love*: 'Story of O is a fairytale for another world, a world that no longer exists except between the covers of the book. *The book of an unknown woman, and that that woman is I continues to amaze me*' (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 149, my emphasis). Accordingly, the author later ruminated that: "One can recount things that are not true but it's not possible to disguise oneself when writing. That does not exist. You give yourself away, you always speak your truth" (Aury in *Writer of O*, 2005); yet later adding: "Of course it in no way tallies with the life that I have led […] people's fantasies… have as much reality – well, no, they're not real – but they have a reality which is often contradictory to their lives." (ibid.,) The author here punctuates the aforementioned tension, that of the novel's liminal status as part reality, part fantasy. Its ambiguity and ambivalent status is further foregrounded in her statement that '[f]antasies are unliveable, but they help in living' (Aury in Kaufmann, 1998: 45).

When asked whether these fantasies were gendered male, Aury asserted

> That's what everybody says […] I've always been reproached for that. All I know is that they were honest fantasies – whether they were male or female I couldn't say. There is no reality here. Nobody could stand being treated like that. It's entirely fantastic (Aury in de St. Jorre, 1994a: 45).

Whether it was the author's intention here to be contrarian, or whether she truly believed that the fantasy world is removed from the real-world reality of

oppressive paradigms is not clear, and it is no less apparent from her assertion that “[i]t was just saying in plain words what had been going on for centuries. Why make such a noise about it? It was just human nature, human conduct, the good and the bad together” (Aury in de St. Jorre, 1994b: 231). It seems preposterous to assume that the author, a self-identified feminist (Kauffman, 1998: 897; Desforges, 1975: 212) is here suggesting that human nature is not gendered. One could infer, perhaps, that instead it is these gender politics which typify such relations especially extending to the sexual, to which here she might be referring; though such a heteronormative perspective is surprising for a woman who, through Kauffman we understand to have been bisexual – an important counterpoint to the dominant narrative of her love affair with Paulhan – which would be additionally congruous to a paradigm of biological determinism.

Here we have more questions than answers – in keeping with the mystery that surrounded both the text and its author – though we can extrapolate some key arguments in Réage/Aury’s understanding of the text and in defence of the preceding feminist criticism. Firstly, the author defends pornography as speech, and denies any potential harm associated with these texts, whether direct or indirect. Secondly, this is maintained through an assertion that the text is purely fantasy, and that (whilst concurrently contradictorily acknowledging her conduit nature as author in bridging the two) fantasy is separate and distinct from reality.

Moving from form to content, we can seek to address the second main criticism levelled at *Story of O* by feminist critics, that of O’s status as a passive object, subjected to the desires and will of men (and thus patriarchy) of which she is the victim. While Réage to some extent acknowledges the presence of such themes within the text, she attributes the confinement of her character within the narrative not to the gendered politics of sex through SM, but, partially echoing an argument of Chapter Four, of love. ‘To love’, Réage asserts, ‘is to live on the precipice’ (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 71); O ‘wasn’t free, since she loved someone else. One never is, under those circumstances’ (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 98), for ‘[i]f you care enough about something, you have to pay the price.

One pays for it by silence, patience and darkness' (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 53). Where the author's reading differs from this thesis' understanding of love in *Story of O* however is that she does not position love as a socio-political and historical construct, nor does she acknowledge the gender politics thus present, both created and reinforced by such a paradigm. Instead, she asserts this love (as alternately 'care' and in what follows 'passion') as an undeniable universal truth.

She continues, elucidating that "I think that in all true passion, there is a quest for the absolute that can only be attained through a feeling of abandon, of a total dispossession of self" (Aury in de St. Jorre, 1994b: 225). This 'dispossession of self' however, is understood by Réage not as a process of objectification – of 'becoming object' – to which she is subjected by others, but instead, a subjective and active drive. She asserts, 'O is trying to be destroyed' (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 23), she is 'trying to see how far she can go, to test the limits of herself; she seeks to attain the absolute that life gives her […] O is looking for deliverance, to thrust off this mortal coil' (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 142). Here she acknowledges the annihilatory drive and 'tragic' trajectory of O, but contrary to feminist criticism she attributes this to the agentic will of the character, and not the narrative that the author again distances herself from. Thus, she ruminates that: 'she wants to escape this life, I suspect. I have tried to understand why; there is, I am sure, a reason, but all I can come up with is that it is too much for her' (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 83). This construction of O's active agentic status recalls *A Girl in Love* in which Réage asserts that '[b]efore O, there was nothing further that that death towards she was vaguely racing *with all her might* could do, that death which is *granted to her in two lines*' (Réage, 1969: 14, my emphasis). Again, here O's will is intriguingly constructed as superseding the will of the narrative, and indeed of the author. It is we are given to believe, very much O's story.

For Réage then, O is an active character, in control both of and within the text. That she is submissive in this logic means that she cannot be described as simply passive:

> I think that submissiveness can [be] and is a formidable weapon, which women will use as long as it isn't taken from them. Think about it: is O used by René and Sir Stephen, or does she in fact use them, and all that weighty, solemn organization of the castle keep, all those irons and chains and obligatory debauchery, to fulfil her own dream—that is, her own destruction and death? And in some surreptitious way, isn't she in charge of them? Doesn't she bend them to her will? And the fact is, she does get what she wants in the end: they kill her off, in three lines. (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 140)

Whilst ambivalent and ambiguous, and at times perhaps contradictory, Réage's insights nonetheless accord with Susan Sontag's 'The Pornographic Imagination' in *Styles of Radical Will* (1969). The essay, which cites *Story of O* as a complex text, both 'art' and 'pornography', offers us therefore the potential for a transgressive re-reading. Contrary to the female passivity envisioned by radical feminist critics, Sontag argues that O instead 'does possess a consciousness from which vantage her story is told' (Sontag, 1969: 53) and that she acts 'in quite different ways (including love) to different people, notably to René, to Sir Stephen*, to Jacqueline, and to Anne-Marie*' (ibid., my emphasis), thus queering the text, as argued in the previous chapter. By broadening this emotional scope to include O's multiple relationships, sexual or otherwise, Sontag identifies a potential to re-read the character and her story. Crucially, and in accordance with Réage, she asserts that although 'passive […] O is represented as active too, literally in the seduction of Jacqueline, and most important, *profoundly active in her own passivity*' (54, my emphasis)[4].

In this space, she argues, O can be read as actively working to 'discard her will' (53) and to be 'initiated into a mystery. That mystery is a loss of self' (55). Thus, while she concurs with Dworkin (and, interestingly Réage too) that the only possible interpretation of the novel's ending is of annihilation and death, Sontag reconfigures the narrative as not horizontal, but a kind of '*ascent* through degradation' (55) rather than a *descent* into perversion. A counter-reading is therefore forged which renders not only O's journey as (spiritually) profound, but also offers a radical re-evaluation of her character not simply as passive, as:

‘[s]tep by step she becomes more of what she is, a process identical to the emptying out of herself’ (Ibid.). This is not a process of transmogrification, a journey of becoming [an] other, but rather she is unbecoming, becoming nothing, ‘transcending personality’ (58). This transcendence, Sontag argues, is necessary for the division between her psychical self and sexual – the former precluding the latter. Such claims which elevate sexuality, and in particular female sexuality, into the spiritual however should be regarded with some wariness, for they can potentially render it sacrosanct, echoing patriarchal imperatives.

Whilst it offers a potent counter reading, Sontag’s *The Pornographic Imagination* undeniably seeks too to speak to, and to ascribe a ‘truth’ of O, adding additional weight to her burden of representation, through a rejection of texts as pluralised through interpretation. However, it is in this very divergence, of *truths* concurrently asserted, that we can observe a plurality in O. That is to say that while the radical feminist criticism on the one hand, and on the other the arguments of Sontag and Réage make claim to a singular reading, they can, taken together, demonstrate the potential for multiple readings to exist contemporaneously around the same text, the same characters and their in/actions. This is additionally the case when added to my own reading, as offered in the previous chapter.

Écriture Féminine

For Kaja Silverman (1984) however, the problem of *Story of O* is less about its content and more about its form, in which the text is more than O's story. It is the ‘history of the female subject' (Silverman, 1984: 346); an inherent quality of the text itself resulting from the limitations of its medium. She argues, 'O knows herself to be constituted in and through a discourse that exceeds her – one that speaks for her, in her “place”' (320); and further that 'history will never read otherwise until the female subject alters her relation to discourse – until she succeeds not only in exercising discursive power, but in exercising it differently' (346). Thus, Silverman too denies the reader the possibility of mounting a counter-reading of the text, and indeed of O's subjectivity, because she cites

the very mode itself as that which constrains and thus denies O. What constitutes, then, a feminist writing that can express female subjectivity, evading the constraints of patriarchal discourse? To try to answer this, let us consider a brief exploration of the French theoretical framework of Écriture Féminine and indulge a consideration as to whether *Story of O*'s feminist potentiality could be revisited through this lens, particularly through the problematisation (and thus opening out) of this post-structural theoretical concept.

Écriture Féminine (or the exploration of 'feminine writing') sought to redress literature as inherently patriarchal and phallocentric, through a foregrounding of woman's presence-absence from the symbolic order of language. Thus, écriture féminine not only critiqued the patriarchal dominance of male authorship in literature and language as positioning woman as Other; but further polemically called for a destruction of the mode which they saw as precluding female subjectivity. The goals and aims of écriture féminine were, in accordance with Silverman's critique, 'to break up, to destroy, and to foresee the unforeseeable' (Cixous, 1976: 879). In so doing, women's writing embraced the 'very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures' (Ibid.,)[5]. Hélène Cixous' highly influential 1976 article *The Laugh of the Medusa* – from which the term Écriture Féminine originated – is thus a feminist treatise on the literary world and its [mal]contents. Here she argues that:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (875)

Thus for Cixous, the act of writing itself is a political one, and her polemic calls for the reclamation of said practice as a means by which women can write themselves into history. That is to say, to write themselves as subject rather than object of a patrilineage which has historically spoken about, and for them.

Key to this is the refutation of phallocentric and logocentric masculine thought, through the construction of subjectivity and femininity, as not marked by a fixity,

but, therefore fluidity and plurality: '[y]ou can't talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes – any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible […] their stream of phantasms is incredible' (876, emphasis in original). By focusing on women's 'voice' (a concept to which will be returned), creativity, and fantasy, Cixous opens up writing as a locale of the amorphous imagination – a quality reflected in her own writing as demonstration. This imagination, and thus proposed form of writing however, through her own definition is not a singularity for Cixous (seemingly) invites a plethora of voices, embracing difference and in particular (sexed) sexual difference. She asserts that woman must be written to exist not as symbiotic Other to man, but as distinct and self-defined.

Luce Irigaray's inscription of woman as fundamentally fluid echoes this understanding of the feminine:

> Woman is neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, in-finite [sic], *form is never complete in her*. She is not infinite but neither is she a unit(y), such as letter, number, figure in a series, proper noun, unique object (in a) world of the senses, simple in an intelligible whole, entity of a foundation, etc. This incompleteness in her form, her morphology, allows her continually to become something else, though this is not to say that she is ever univocally nothing. (Irigaray, 1974: 229, my emphasis)

Thus against the masculine, woman evades the imperatives of logocentrism, she exists somewhere outside of narratives which seek to define her, to pin her down and make her finite:

> No one single thing – no form, act, discourse, subject, masculine, feminine – can complete the development of woman's desire. […] Woman is not to be related to any simple designatable being, subject or entity. Nor is the whole group (called) women. One woman + one woman + one woman will never add up to some generic entity: woman. (The/a) woman refers to what cannot be defined, enumerated, formulated or formalized. Woman is a common noun for which no identity can be defined. (229—230)

She is thus incomparable, ‘No metaphor completes her. Never is she this, then that, this and that…’ (ibid.,). Writing her, then, becomes impossible within our patriarchal understanding of subjectivity – of being-subject.

What then, is she? What is a woman if she cannot be defined, if we cannot speak to, or of her? Both Cixous and Irigaray locate femininity outside of masculine rationalist discourses and conceptualisations, by rooting her instead in an em/bodied understanding of subjectivity, which they saw as resisting the phallocentric symbolic order through its difference. Thus, Irigaray wrote that to counter such patriarchal imperatives, woman must write [from/] her body, – i.e. from her sex[ed body]. This hinges on an understanding of a genitally sexed femininity as something distinct from the commonly held patriarchal understanding of woman as vagina, as hole, gap or lack (see Chapter Three), which comes into being through its unification with the phallus. Such a position is accordingly theorised as being alternate – but *not antonym* to the logic of phallocentrism. To this end, therefore, she asserted that woman must write from the ‘two lips’ from which she speaks, i.e., moving her sexual power from the vaginal, to the labial or vulval as a means to reclaim the body through their genital and libidinal difference.

Yet as Kolodny (1980) notes, such an approach is made problematic through an understanding of its erroneous relation to socio-politically limiting biological imperatives, in the definition of the female body which is ‘too unproblematically pleasurable and totalized an entity’ (Kolodny, 1980: 368). She continues,

> What is the meaning of “two lips” to heterosexual women who want to recognize their clitoral pleasure – or to African or Middle Eastern women who, as a result of pharaonic clitoridectomies, have neither lips or clitoris through which to jouir? Does a celebration of the [feminine as reproductively sexed and thus] Maternal verses the Patriarchal make the same kind of sense to white, middle class women who are fighting the right to abortion, to black and Third World women resisting enforced sterilization, to women in subsistence-farming economies where the livelihood of the family depends on the work of every child who is born and survives? (371)

Kolodny thus puts forth a powerful critique of this labial “speech” as gynocentric (184) against phallocentrism, by asserting that such femininely sexed positions aim to speak for all women, yet ultimately exclude the immediacy of concerns of an individual lived experience. That her counter-argument is prefaced by the assertion that heterosexual (cisgender) female lives can, in themselves hold multiple points of difference, of course invites a further understanding that, non-heterosexual women will by oppositional inference, have similarly different imperatives and experiences. Further to this, we can also consider how gender non-conforming and non-binary people may view such definitions of femininity, and how this may inform such a socio-political concern. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that transwomen’s perspectives put forth an understanding of femininity not predicated on biologically sexed paradigms and demand a space in which their lived and embodied experiences inform and contribute to such a practice. However, if Irigaray (and to a lesser extent) Cixous’ prescriptive methodology for writing the female [body] is flawed through a fatal dualism of subjectivity as biologically dependent or essentialist, I would argue that its polemical origins however, need not be. That is to say that the very conception of écriture féminine as fundamentally fluid and multiple, still stands.

Accordingly, let us consider Cixous’ concept of the medium itself as offering a revolutionary counter-voice to the patriarchal medium of literature and the world beyond:

> Write, let no-one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not yourself. Smug-faced readers, managing editors, and big bosses don’t like the true texts of women. (Cixous, 1976: 877)

Here we can observe Cixous’ movement from the medium of literature to the realm of industry. The patriarchal stratagems are here not located simply as belonging to the author, but also to audiences, editors and publishers. This is therefore, a crucial movement from content to form, and it contextualises literature as a mediated and consumptive process. But just how the author

moves from a conceptualisation of the reader presently as female – addressed as you: '[a]nd why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it' (866) – to the 'smug faced' masculine reader of literature as distinct and separate audiences is unclear, just as is, crucially, her intentions for evading the patriarchal machine of the literary industry.

Thus while she acknowledges that '[i]t is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized enclosed, [or] encoded' (883), she nevertheless asserts its existence, identifying three French authors as potential practitioners: the female novelist and performer Collete; female writer and director Marguerite Duras; and the prolific queer male writer, Jean Genet[6]. This equivocation of queerness, or namely male homosexuality, with the feminine is highly problematic, as is potentially the elevation of a male writer above and in place of a female herein. Another problem is the absence of an overt rationale for identifying 'the few rare exceptions' (878) that Cixous deems as having penned the 'true texts of women' that 'inscribe femininity' (ibid.,). Of greater concern however is the conspicuous absence from this list of Pauline Réage. The novel's notoriety and worldwide exportation should alone have guaranteed its author pre-eminence amongst her contemporaries, and with the release of its cinematic adaptation the same year of Cixous' article's publication, her omission from this list strikes me as not merely an oversight. One could venture that its pseudonymous attribution and rumoured male author excludes the text from Cixous' consideration – if it were not for the fact that Genet was included.

Instead one must read between the lines of her argument, and its implied underlying rationale:

> It is well known that the number of women writers (while having increased very slightly from the nineteenth century on) has always been ridiculously small. This is a useless and deceptive fact unless from their species of women writers we do not first deduct the immense majority whose workmanship is in no way different from male writing, and which either obscures women or reproduces the classic representations of women (878).

Hence, we can infer that while supposedly multitudinous in welcoming a plethora of female voices, experiences, and sexualities, *Story of O* is excluded from Cixous' definition of écriture féminine for not being 'feminine' (under her schema); and instead positioned as being no different to male writing in which femininity is represented retrogressively. Again, we reach a paradoxical quandary not dissimilar to that imparted by Silverman: how can an experience of the feminine within patriarchy express its 'true' subjectivity when its confines supposedly prevent it from doing so? When such voices are disregarded, if not refuted, what, if anything, is the alternative?

If the very act of speaking/writing is constrained through a dominant hegemony of patriarchal phallocentrism and logicism, then as Showalter notes, 'écriture féminine […] describes a Utopian possibility rather than a literary practice' (Showalter, 1981: 185); it is 'a visionary ideal of what women ought to write' (205) rather than what they in fact produce. She acknowledges the impossibility of writing the feminine outside of patriarchy, asserting that:

> [w]e must also understand that there can be no writing or criticism totally outside of the dominant structure; no publication is fully independent from the economic and political pressures of the male-dominated society. The concept of a woman's text in the wild zone is a playful abstraction: in the reality to which we must address ourselves as critics, women's writing is a "double-voiced discourse" that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant (201).

Showalter's critique foregrounds that we should hold multiple disparate understandings in tandem; that language as a medium for our experience, and said experiences, is always inextricably tied into patriarchy, and is as such, impossible to escape from. Could women perhaps begin to know theirselves in a post-patriarchy, to construct their understandings in a new language writ new? Possibly. However, since we are availed of none of these deconstructions we must thus simultaneously understand that we are, as is our writing, impossible to explicate from such discursive systems of control. We must then redefine the praxis for a feminist writing. To do so, we must also infer and hold congruent the possibility that in such an impasse, in the here and now, what may lie somewhat

outside of such systems – i.e., language – may still be a ‘promised land’ of fluid, amorphous feminine subjectivity.

What if women were to eschew the past and create a new language? To write anew the feminine on their own terms? As we have seen, no matter the medium, women’s experiences will always be understood through the same patriarchal lens. Even if we turn to another language, a self-made language other than the body (flawed in not being a held in common, nor extricable from Othered imperatives) then it seems we must return to the notion of self-expression articulated vocally, enunciated, uttered, and perhaps most importantly *heard*. For the process of naming cannot be accomplished in name alone, but furthermore, this naming must be heard and understood. What other avenues then, do women possess?

Of speaking in tongues we are told that ‘such ritualized and unintelligible “female” languages are scarcely cause for rejoicing; indeed it was because witches were suspected of esoteric knowledge and possessed speech that they were burned’ (192). Showalter demonstrates two concurrent issues then, that this speech was both ‘possessed’ as associated with a dangerous Other, a demonic feminine and also possessed by its speaker, thus a speech *belonging to them*. Such a speech met with patriarchal violence should however, contrary to Showalter, be understood as powerful. It is its dangerousness, its threat which ‘necessitated’ its punishment, its vanquishing under this schema. So, if in such speech lies a potentiality separate and distinct from writing, we must ask, just how does this differ?

In speech, as in lore and song, woman has historically held a voice, and in Cixous’ understanding the spoken word is no less powerful, and in fact might actually be more so, for:

> It is by writing, from and towards women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence […] Listen to a woman speak at a public gathering (if she hasn’t painfully lost her wind). She

> doesn't "speak," she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies, all of her passes into her voice and it's as with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact she physically materialises what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she *inscribes* what she's saying (Cixous, 1976: 881, emphasis in the original)

Here, speech is privileged as a feminine language through the body (indeed, a 'body language)'; and the author furthermore, therefore asserts that if 'you [c]'ensor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time (880). Thus, there is an integral relation between body, breath and speech that together communicate a higher meaning.

If such non-written, non-verbal languages are communicatory then, perhaps the expression of the feminine lies not in its evocation, but in its obfuscation. Let us return to *Laugh of the Medusa* to consider Cixous' concept of 'white ink' (Cixous, 1976: 881) and its potentiality. If we diverge from the author's definition of this ink as the feminine maternal, as 'mother's milk' (ibid.,), what are we left with? White ink is both indelible and invisible. It is both colour and its antonym; it is the presence-absence of writing-as-speech. By literally inverting the "black ink" of history as his-story, we find a powerful metaphor for the presence-absence of the female voice, of female subjectivity. Similarly, we may consider the textual gaps not only in what is not said, but what is conspicuously unsaid in the text – in the pauses, the ellipses or the blank page which Susan Gubar (1981) argues 'contains all stories in no story, just as silence contains all potential sound and white contains all colour' (Gubar, 1981: 305). Like Cixous however, Showalter refutes such a theorisation, arguing that

> The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution. […] The holes in discourse, the blanks and gaps and silences, are not the spaces where female consciousness reveals itself but the blinds of a "prison-house of language". (Showalter, 1981: 193)

Yet such an understanding presupposes that silence is precisely equivocal with repression and censorship, that it is an empty space rather than a 'negative

space'. An apt example – given the aforementioned role of biological determinism – is the pregnant pause. That is to say that silence – indeed like passivity – can hold within it the potential for the inscription of meaning, not unlike the performativity of speech.

Écriture Féminine, to conclude this overview and analysis, offers a number of possibilities and potentialities. While the practice itself is undefined, perhaps impossible to describe and to circumscribe, there are some distinct realms within which it may be located: in female authored works; in the exploration of female subjectivity; in texts published within, and despite of publishing as a patriarchal strong-hold; in the pregnable spaces of pauses, silences and blank pages; and in the inscription of performative embodied speech.

Story of O as Écriture Féminine?

To what extent are such qualities of écriture féminine present in *Story of O*, and how do such considerations impact the text's status as potentially feminist writing? As Ziv notes:

> It is naive to expect female-authored pornography to function as a locus of pure subversion, since such an expectation ignores its historical positioning within a network of larger discourses from which it cannot simply extricate itself. Further, subversion, by definition, cannot be comprehensive since it relies on the discourse it subverts, a reliance which is also the source of its power. […] It is also erroneous to regard such texts as discursively determined and fail to take into account their female authorship, since, if we discount the agency of the subject and regard her merely as a passive medium, we will have no ground from which to theorize change. Further, only when we take full cognizance of the fact that these texts are written from the subject position of a woman, and a woman in a particular historical positioning – only then can we evaluate them properly as the products of a female subject's negotiation of a dominant ideology under the specific material conditions and a specific discursive regime. (Ziv, 1994: 73)

In order to address these questions there are two main considerations which

form the foci of what follows: firstly, positioning Réage's novel within its industrial constraints through an examination of *Story of O*'s publication house and editorial team (Ziv's 'material conditions'), and a consideration of the impact of such mediation upon the resultant text; and an examination of form, in how Réage explores and gives 'voice' to female subjectivity (within the 'specific discursive regime' that Ziv observes).

Publishing O

Jean Paulhan's role as both inspiration and mediating force has already been noted in the previous chapter, but it is also important to understand how he played a crucial role in *Story of O*'s publication and thus became the 'public face' or 'figurehead' for the novel. As observed in *A Girl In Love*, it had been Paulhan's desire to make this private 'love letter' public, in the form of a novel. Furthermore, he had acted as director to the authoress' narrative, writing notes on the manuscript (St. Jorre, 1994b: 215), encouraging her to continue writing: "Have you got any more? Do you have the next chapter? Keep at it!" (Paulhan in St. Jorre, 1994b: 213) and, as she faced difficulty in concluding the text, advising "it was all right. You can stop now" (ibid.,). Upon its completion, he was so enamoured with the text that he sought its distribution through a number of Parisian publishing houses, acting as, one could argue, both Réage's spokesperson and manager thus protecting her anonymity. It is therefore little wonder that Paulhan was rumoured to be its author (de St. Jorre, 1994b: 210; Réage in Desforges, 1975: 9).

It is worth considering here, in terms of the author's agency and supposed ownership of the text, Réage's comment that 'it wasn't my idea to "go public." It wasn't I who suggested it, and I never imagined for a moment that the manuscript could be published' (Réage in Desforges 1975, :74); its 'publication was a direct result of his feeling that it ought to be published. I didn't care one way or another' (75). Such statements echo the earlier discussed ambivalent distance, or cognitive dissonance between author and text; reflected further in this telling exchange from *Confessions of O*: Desforges: 'I've never known an author so famous who seemed to care less about her work, past or present.'

Réage: ‘I have trouble coping with the notion of my work.’ (121) That the author could not conceive that her work *could*, rather than *would* be published is intriguing. It simultaneously recognises that its publication was an accomplishment, yet also signals self-doubt, that it, or she, *could* be good enough. But which of the two this may be remains unclear.

That she gave the text to Paulhan to seemingly do with it as he pleased, not caring either way, is also a difficult concept to understand unless perhaps we think of it as a gift, as transference of property, from which she relinquishes ownership. Réage elucidates: ‘When you give something, you give it completely; you don’t go back and say, “Sorry, but I didn’t want it used this way or that”; you don’t start imposing restrictions on its use. That seems quite simple to me.’ (76) Yet not all exchanges function in this way. When one gifts a book, it maintains both the property of the item’s owner – “this book belongs to” – and simultaneously still, the author. When an artist gifts an original painting, it is still both ‘a Picasso’ as well as being held in ownership by the giftee; authorship cannot be transferred.

Regardless, with *Story of O* under his guidance or indeed control, having initially been rejected by the French publishing house *Les Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française* (known from 1975 onwards as Gallimard), Paulhan approached publisher Jean-Jacques Pauvert in the winter of 1953. Like Paulhan before him, Pauvert ‘reportedly read the book overnight and said it was a masterpiece’ (de St. Jorre, 1994b: 216) attempting to take control of the novel in telling Paulhan: “It’s my book! It’s my book, the book I have to publish! The book that will revolutionise its time!” (Pauvert in *Writer of O,* 2005) As a known risk taker with controversial texts having published the full works of Sade not long before, Pauvert enabled a limited French print run of 600 copies of *Story of O* accompanied by *A Slave’s Revolt* in 1954. An almost simultaneous initial English language print run of 5000 copies was also published under the title *The Wisdom of The Lash* inspired by Paulhan’s essay, but the translation was poor, rushed out over the course of two weeks, and both Réage and Paulhan were both left unimpressed by the publication (de St. Jorre, 1994b).

Nonetheless, *Story of O* received the distinguished Prix Des Deux Magots award in February of 1955. Yet it also attracted the attention of the French Government and in August of the same year Paulhan gave a deposition to the Brigaide Mondaine (the French Vice Squad). Defending the work, Paulhan asserted:

> About three years ago Mme. Pauline Réage (a pseudonym) paid me a visit in my office at the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, a literary monthly of which I am the editor, and submitted to me a thick manuscript entitled *Story of O*. I receive every day between eight and ten manuscripts, but this one immediately struck me both by its literary quality and, if I may say, in the context of an absolutely scabrous subject, by its restraint and modesty. I had the impression that I had in my hands a work that was very important both in its content and its style, a work that derived much more from the mystical than from the erotic […] I do not believe that *Story of O* is a book one can with impunity give to anyone, any more than *Les Liaisons Dangerous* or *Letters to a Portuguese Nun*, but I think that a careful reading of the text will indicate that it in no way can be categorized as pornographic. If it does present a danger to the reader, it is rather of the violence of the passion depicted, and of the constant reverie in which it seems to bathe. (Paulhan in Desforges, 1975: 5)

As director (1925-40, 1946-68) of the prestigious literary magazine, *NRF* where Réage too worked, Paulhan was known to 'deliberately provoke reactions of principle, tact and taste' (Morino, 1939 in Cornick, 2004: 39) and had a history of publishing controversial texts, unafraid 'to challenge contemporary orthodoxies, whether literary or political' (Cornick, 2004: 53). Yet his testimony sought not to further provoke but instead legitimised *Story of O* as a work of merit, which, to echo Dworkin was 'more than mere pornography'.

The paternalist attitude that Paulhan displays both in speaking for the author from a position of authority, and in elevating the work to an elite readership – foreshadowing discourses that would surrounded its cinematic adaption as shall be examined in Chapter Six – clearly displays how Paulhan was a key force in the mediation of *Story of O*. For Pauvert this was but one of a number of court cases his publications had attracted from a conservative post-war government,

which together spanned 17 cases across a three-year period (Pauvert in *Writer of O*). Réage later explained that: 'what the squad did was focus all its energy on Jean-Jacques Pauvert and Jean Paulhan, and I confess to a feeling of guilt at having left them both to face the music alone' (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 6).

Ultimately however the case was dropped when she met with the newly appointed Minister of Justice for a social lunch outside Paris, arranged by a mutual friend. Réage describes the end of their interaction:

> upon leaving [h]e said "I am delighted to have met you. He kissed my hand and helped me into my car, turned on his heels and left, period. The next day the legal proceedings were dropped. I found that…so extraordinarily eighteenth century! He wanted to see what I looked like. What would a woman who had written such a book look like? (Réage in *Writer of O*)

As Réage asserts there is no doubting that this was a very gendered interaction – far from the masculine and patriarchal realms afforded to Paulhan and Pauvert for the book's defence.

Following what Pauvert described as its initial 'terrible translation' (Pauvert in de St. Jorre, 1994b: 217) – in which Madelaine's name, for example was incorrectly translated as little cake – it was decided that *Story of O* required a new translator for its 1965 American first edition of 500,000 copies with Grove Press. This substantial distribution increase was a decision influenced both by the text's positive French and English reception, as well as its heightened reputation through the novel's French controversy. Here enters the third key figure of the mediation of *Story of O*, Sabine d'Estree. Like the author herself, her translator was clouded in mystery, a clandestine figure with no history, who it seems, simply materialised in order to translate the text[6]. It is widely held that Sabine d'Estree was a pseudonym, over which further speculation flowed; and in the translator's note to the 1965 edition, d'Estree writes:

> *Story of O*, written by a woman, demands a woman translator, one who will humble herself before the work and be satisfied simply to render it, as faithfully as possible, without interpretation or unwanted elaboration. Faced with a work such as *O* [sic], male pride, male superiority – however

> liberal the male, however much he may try to suppress them – will I am certain, somehow intrude. (d'Estree in de St. Jorre, 1994b: 222)

Yet John de St. Jorre in his monograph on the publishing house is confident that this feminist passage was most likely written by Richard Seaver – a member of Grove Press who had lived in France and worked as a translator. In interview however, Seaver provided only further mystery, intriguingly asserting that 'Sabine d'Estree and the author are linked […s]omeone else, apart from Dominique Aury, was involved in writing Story of O' (Seaver in de St. Jorre, 1994b: 223). Regardless as to whether we choose to believe Seaver's refutation of Réage as sole author, inferring perhaps Paulhan to be co-author and translator (explaining therefore his creative control and defense of the novel, yet not explaining the rushed and flawed first translation), or to accept St. Jorre's well documented case towards it being Seaver himself, I feel it safe to assume that d'Estree was likely male[8]. Thus, we see a third key masculine figure in how the patriarchal publishing industry mediated the author's text – literally in the case of d'Estree as translator, through whom the text was 'realised' into English.

If then, *Story of O* is ensconced in, and constrained by, this literary medium and compounded by the patriarchal mediating triad of editor, publisher and translator, must this preclude it from being a potentially feminist text, or of belonging to the concept of écriture feminine? To answer this question we must return to examine *Story of O* as text, and of its form.

[Un]Writing O

While Ziv (1994) in keeping with the earlier examined feminists argues that *Story of O*'s narratologic form has 'merely responsive interiority […] as manifest in third person narration/narrative' (Ziv, 1994: 72), Lucienne Frappier-Mazur's *Marginal Canons: Rewriting the erotic* (1988) suggests instead that 'the special twist of the narration deviates from the model of male fiction' (Frappier-Mazur, 1988: 118). This accords therefore with Cosman's (1974) assertion that O's narrator 'tells the story with all the force of her own involvement and

ambivalence […v]ery quickly however, she slips into the fictional reality and her role as narrator merges with the identity of her protagonist' (29—30); creating a textual ambiguity, or destabilising morphology. As Frappier-Mazur continues:

> The narrative voice blends with O's voice, while performing a dispassionate dissection of her own feelings. This leaves open the question of O's subjectivity: the fact that she may be viewed as a male construct does not necessarily mean that her alienated self is a semblance […] and the emotional distanced intensity of the narration projects an effect of interiority. (Frappier-Mazur, 1988: 125)

It is thus this presence-absence (see Heathcote, 2002) which makes O's story and which, for the feminists examined herein, invited a reading of O as absence; of object and not indeed subject. This 'open question of O's subjectivity' thus points not towards a vacuity, as others have argued but to an ephemeral, fluid unfixity, a potentiality that accords with Cixous' theorisation of woman, and of woman's writing, as one in which '[h]er language doesn't retain […] it makes possible' (Cixous, 1976: 744).

Building on Crowder's (1983) assertion that 'what is missing […] is the presence in language and culture, symbolized in the text by the circle O' (cited in Heathcote 2002: 49), Owen Heathcote (2002) in *Hermeneutic Circles* writes that 'circles and cycles encase (other) women in an aestheticized violence' (49); that O is a circle 'shot through with violence' (48). Thus, Heathcote also observes the contradictory nature of the circle as both container and vacuity, arguing that: 'If O is the name of the protagonist – and the only name revealed to the reader it is a sign of both her *openness* to invasion […] and her *imprisonment* in a closed circle, a sealed universe' (47, my emphasis). O's very name then, is emblematic of this oscillatory presence-absence. O: determined and interminable, zero and the omega, recalls the paradigmatic modes of woman in écriture féminine[9]. As Irigaray (1974) wrote,

> Neither open or closed, she is indefinite, in-finite [sic], form is never complete in her. She is not infinite but neither is she a unit […] This incompleteness of her form, her morphology, allows her continually to become something else, though this is not to say that she is ever univocally nothing (229).

If O's name encapsulates both the text and woman's morphology moreover, then its narratological circles are *Story of O*'s 'white ink' (Cixous, 1976: 881). Therefore, as Duffy (1983) proffers: '[t]he recurrent O points to the gaps in which a female discourse takes root' (Duffy, 1983 in Heathcote, 2002: 49).

It is precisely these gaps which I would suggest both evade and speak to O's subjectivity, and therefore we must examine O's speech, or more specifically O's non-verbal speech. Recall Cixous' assertion that woman:

> doesn't "speak", she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies, all of her passes into her voice and it's as with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact she physically materialises what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she *inscribes* what she's saying (Cixous, 1976: 881, emphasis in the original).

Outside of O's internal reveries and the slippages between her character and the narrator (and perhaps author)'s voice, can we think then of O's non-verbal utterances as an expression of subjective meaning, outside of the patriarchal symbolic order? Of Sade's work Roland Barthes wrote:

> The scream is the victim's mark: she makes herself victim because she chooses to scream: if, under the same vexation, she were to ejaculate, she would cease to be a victim, would be transformed into a libertine: *to scream / to discharge*, this paradigm is the beginning of choice […] Yet this scream which distinguishes the victim is also, contradictorily, nothing but the attribute, the accessory […] as a sonorous fetish. (Barthes, 1976: 143—144)

Of course, in Sade it is the position of the libertine that is privileged, however whilst Barthes ascribes the victim (and her scream) an accessory, he does nonetheless attribute her agency, for she both chooses to scream and to make of herself a victim; a modality in which the libertine sadist is curiously absent. We might also, in the interrogation of the masochist modality wish to problematise Barthes' dichotomy: what of the victim who both screams and ejaculates (*to scream* and *to discharge)*? What if this discharge is in fact a discharge of meaning? What if we privilege not the hearer, but instead the speaker?

Further, we know that silence itself can be both a vacuity and a plenum (Kurzon, 1998) in which we find both dialogical meaning – in the unanswering of a question asked – and syntactic transit — through the agents' silencing of an [O/o]ther (Kurzon, 1998: 3). It is precisely then these gaps and the discharge of meaning which both evade *and* speak to O's subjectivity, as Cosman (1974) observes of the conflated author-narrator role, '[i]t is as if *she loses herself in O's person, in the subjective perception of time passing under duress*, and then, like O, is able to testify only to certain factors in a given order' (Cosman, 1974: 30, my emphasis). Here time, like [non]speech is both the literal textual, and metaphorical psychical ellipses; a 'slippery signifier' (Chamarette, 2007: 36) an in-between state 'between meaning and signification' (34) in which we find, as Jenny Chamarette (2007) writes:

> a slippery interstice between the presence and absence of spatial, diegetic and perceptual logic, which struggles precisely because of this interruption and rupture of sense-making […] remind[ing] the viewer of the impossibility of satisfying our ontological drive toward conclusive meaning or total signification. The continual enfoldment of meaning and non-meaning, betweenness and separation, is key […] it slips between text, language and image without finding a resting place or allowing meaning to come to rest. As such, it remains forever out of contact and beyond our affective grasp, nonetheless reiteratively demanding the elliptical, continually enfolded journey of making sense. (48)

Here then seems to lie O's subjectivity, and whilst we may search for it in the vacuity that is also a plenum, it appears textually forever out of grasp.

Conclusion

Story of O is a contentious text for feminists. Dismissing O as the Stockholm Syndrome suffering victim of a patriarchal pornography devoid of meaning, she is here constructed as the object, and not subject of its narrative. However, as I have argued in the previous chapter, *Story of O* is one of two narratives, firstly and undeniably is a text enshrined in heteropatriarchy, constrained by its dedication to the normative paradigm of love. Yet secondly, and crucially, O's

story is one of cognitive dissonance and ambivalence, its meaning lying within its gaps, the chinks between Showalter's 'prison-house blinds of language' (Showalter, 1981: 193).

If, as I have argued, it is both the patriarchal medium of literature and literary publishing as well as language itself which denies her, I have suggested that we may look outside of this symbolic order to attempt to locate O. To this end, in the chapters which follow I turn to *Story of O*'s adaptations to the extradimensional realms of performativity and embodiment in adaptation and authenticity in the text's pornographic adaptations, to examine their resultant narratological difference as extension to, or transformative of O's story.

Notes

1. Elements of this chapter have been published previously as 'Returning to Roissy: Kink.com's The Upper Floor and The Training of O as adaptations of the Story of O' (2013) see appendix.
2. A criticism also taken up by Christine Griffin (1995) of Ziv's 1994 analysis, to which we will return.
3. That she draws on Sade here, is apt, for not only were Sade's works under post-war re-distribution to a mass audience through *Story of O*'s publishing house, they were also accused of being either excessive, gratuitous, glorifying sadistic pornography which reinforced cultural and state violence or, critical political allegory – both understandings that may be applied to the text at hand. Whilst she read Sade after penning O, of his work Réage opined: 'Sade made me understand that we are all jailers, and all in prison, in that there is always someone within us whom we imprison, whom we silence. By a curious kind of reverse shock, it can happen that prison itself can open the gates to freedom.' (Réage in Desforges, 1975: 14)
4. Sontag's assertion that O is active in the pursuit of Jacqueline however, is complicated by the following quote from the novel:

    > Jacqueline's modest airs – closing the door of the little room with the mirror where she put on and took off her dresses – were expressly calculated to intrigue O, to excite her desire to break down a door which,

wide open, she couldn't make up her mind to go through. That *O's decision was finally not her own but dictated to her by an outside authority*, and did not result from an elementary stratagem, was of all things furthest from Jacqueline's mind.' (Réage, 1954: 167, my emphasis)

Again, here O's agentic status is called into question.

5. There are a number of écriture féminine texts that for brevity and for the consideration of this line of enquiry have from this discussion been omitted. Perhaps most glaringly is Julia Kristeva's work, particularly as it pertains to *Powers of Horror: An essay on abjection* (1980). I am of the opinion that abjection is not an inherent quality of text in which O as object/subject is constructed. However, I would suggest that the earlier examined radical feminist readings of the text in fact make O abject and this is therefore certainly an additional potential line of enquiry. Accordingly, I would welcome a Kristevan reading of the text.
6. It should be noted that the author holds these cited authors and their texts in a weighted site, and one cannot help but wonder which more renowned (translated and thus accessibly distributed, perhaps) Anglo texts might instead have been selected.
7. d'Estree did not disappear after its translation however; they went on to translate for a number of other texts including *L'image* (1956), discussed further in Chapter Eight as an avenue for further research.
8. Novelist John Irving, writing for the American non-profit media organisation NPR wrote an online obituary for Seaver in 2009, in which he asserted that 'his wife of 55 years — Jeannette Seaver, also his colleague at Arcade Publishing for the past 20 years — said after his death this week (of a heart attack, at 82), "He wanted people to guess. But yes, he did it."' (Irving, 2009: online), i.e., he was d'Estree. This is clearly written not as direct quote, yet I find no evidence of this statement elsewhere, and thus as I am unable to verify this as a factual quotation. I have therefore not concluded d'Estree's identity to definitely be that of Seaver. Nonetheless, I feel assured in assuming d'Estree's gender to have been male, in keeping not only with the publishing industry as predominantly masculine at that time, but in how this was reflected in Grove Press.

9. Indeed, the potentiality of “O” as [non] signifier was, I believe, taken up in Emmanuelle Waeckerlé’s *Reading (Story of) O* (2015), reprinting the novel in English and French to be read in parallel, simply (yet intriguingly) emboldening every ‘O’ and ‘o’ found therein.

Chapter Six – *Histoire d'O* (1974)

Introduction

Some twenty years after the novel's initial publication, its first feature film adaptation, a Franco-German production, *Histoire d'O* (1974) was released. Beginning with a consideration of the adaptive process and modes in which adaptations have been theorised, this chapter considers this softcore filmic text not as inferior or denigratory but instead is positioned as an intertextuality and a part of *Story of O*'s 'continuous productivity' (Kristeva, 1980). With a discussion of *Histoire d'O*'s narrative, in terms of narratological (and to a lesser extent, formalist) dissonance, the second half of this chapter charts both how *Story of O* was adapted for the screen, and how its cinematic counterpart deviated from its source text. Here, five central locales of difference are identified: in the supplemental characterisation of Pierre, the valet, and the addition of Ivan; the absence of both Nathalie and Marion, and the re-inscription of Jacqueline; as well as the narratologic dissonance of agency and consent and the dénouement which rewrites O a new ending. However, I argue that rather than opening up the novel's narrative potentialities outside of the constraints of literature and language, the film compounds the problematic ideology of its source text(s) and further, desexualises and de-queers O's agency.

This chapter ends with an examination of *Histoire d'O*'s critical reception in which the adaptation is variously positioned by contemporary critics as 'insanely softcore' (Williams, 1999: online) only of interest to 'particularly bored SM freaks' (Collis, 1999: 39), whilst contrarily having been praised at the time as elevating the text to 'a level of poetry and dreamlike unreality to which the voice-over narration can only aspire […], a true equivalent of Pauline Réage's dislocated prose' (Ellery, 1977: 33). Here, as in the text then, contradictions abound. Similarly, an examination of the BBFC's archive demonstrates their refusal to certificate *Histoire d'O* up until as recently as 2000, further compounds the contradictions of *Story of O*. How is it that a film refused certification with the rationale that it posed a real potential to deprave and

corrupt could later be approved for distribution at certificate 18? Through an examination of first the criminalisation of, and then proliferation of and relaxation to BDSM pornography, I argue that this adaptive text tells us just as much about British cultural shifts in tastes and attitudes to BDSM practices as it does about O and her story. However, as is the case throughout this thesis and in accordance with my methodology, it is not my intention to analyse specific sexual acts, practices or indeed communities, analysis herein is concerned with the textual and discursive constructions of meaning.

Film and Adaptation

Before beginning to undertake an examination of this feature length adaptation of *Story of O* it is necessary to first discuss the issues that surround adaptations, and the study of adaptive texts; in which cinematic adaptations have largely been positioned as inferior, reductive and lacking in fidelity to their source text. As McFarlane observes, such attitudes of privileging the novel are a cultural distinction of taste (Cf. Bourdieu, 1984) in which literature has been historically elevated, and film positioned below it. Key to this is that despite both their position in mass production, literature is (still) largely conceptualised as intellectual high art, and film a lower “mass medium” for uncritical (working class) audiences (see Chapter Six). Furthermore, *Histoire d’O* is not only a filmic adaptation it is also specifically (albeit softcore) pornographic adaptation, a status even lower in the cultural hierarchy.

In the adaptive mode of translating novel to film, cinematic adaptations have, due to this false hierarchical structure, historically been described as ‘'tampering' and 'interference', and even [a] 'violation', giv[ing] the whole process an air of deeply sinister molestation, perhaps springing from the viewer's thwarted expectations relating to both character and event’ (McFarlane, 1996: 12). There is a tendency, then, to think of the adaptive process as fundamentally reductive, derivative or denigratory. This hinges around
In thinking about the value of adaptive texts, McFarlane argues that:

> The insistence on fidelity has led to a suppression of potentially more rewarding approaches to the phenomenon of adaptation. It tends to ignore

> the idea of adaptation as an example of convergence amongst the arts, perhaps a desirable—even inevitable—process in a rich culture; it fails to take into serious account what may be transferred from novel to film as distinct from what will require more complex processes of adaptation; and it marginalizes those production determinants which have nothing to do with the novel but may be powerfully influential upon the film. Awareness of such issues would be more useful than those many accounts of how films 'reduce great novels'. (10)

Instead McFarlane posits that '[t]here are many kinds of relations which may exist between film and literature, and fidelity is only one—and rarely the most exciting' (11). While Orr argues that 'the issue is not whether the adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice of a specific source and how the approach to that source serve the films ideology' (Orr, 1984, cited in McFarlane, 1996: 10), I am wary however of inverting this hierarchy to place the film's ideology above that of the novel. Instead my analysis is driven by understanding the conversation produced by these literary and filmic texts, their meanings and representations.

In the analysis that follows in this chapter and the next therefore, and in accordance with my methodology, I am less interested in how 'successful' these texts are at adapting *Story of O*, nor at which text is 'better' as both are problematic subjective positions which ultimately tell us little about the meaning of the text(s). Instead the analysis which follows aims to deconstruct the film's dominant ideology and meaning, as I have with *Story of O* in Chapter Four. If, as feminists have argued in the previous chapter, it is the patriarchal modes of literature and language which confine O, what affordances and limitations does the adaptive process into this new media offer the text? In this intertextuality how do the filmmakers deviate from the novel and what affordances or limitations does the medium of film and the adaptive process bring? How does it open up or close down *Story of O*'s narrative potentialities? In this way, the adaptations analysed in this chapter and the next should be viewed not as parasitic texts, but instead as texts in their own right.

Here, we must look to ‘the particular ways in which adaptations make their own meanings’ (Geraghty, 2008: 4); and consider adaptation’s central mode as working to destabilise the source text and ‘defamiliarise’ its story. This destabilisation must thus be considered a welcome part of the process wherein adaptive texts therefore are a complicated ‘nexus for, and mosaic of, context, writing/directing subjects, originating texts and intertexts, discursive practices, and viewers/readers’ (Slethaug, 2014: 5). This is, as I have argued in Chapter Two therefore, part of the text(s) ‘continuous productivity’ (Kristeva, 1980). Here I am most interested in exploring the affordances that these adaptive filmic texts offer both to the expansion of O’s storyworld, and the way in which their surrounding discourses shape our resultant understanding of the complexities of female sexuality under patriarchy.

Histoire d’O[1]

This section examines *Histoire d’O’s* narrative and mode of visual representation[2] as a point of distinction against its source text(s). Here, five central locales of difference are identified: in the supplemental characterisation of Pierre, the valet, and the addition of Ivan; the absence of both Nathalie and Marion, and the re-inscription of Jacqueline; as well as the narratologic dissonance of agency and consent and the dénouement which rewrites O a new ending.

Opening, 1

Just as in *Story of O*, *Histoire d’O* has two distinct beginnings. In the first, O and René are taking a stroll in one of Paris’ many parks, on the cusp of twilight. René waves ta grand car to a halt, and, once inside (again as per the novel) commands O to remove her underwear, in preparation for a destination unknown to her. The silent driver in his rear-view mirror watches on as René commands her to follow the instructions given to her at the chateau. Half in statement, half in question he adds, “You will obey.” O responds immediately, “Oh yes”, foregrounding O’s consent wherein in novel form she sat in silence.

Opening, 2

The second version returns us to the same shot and the narrator informs us in keeping with the novel that:

> *Another version of the same beginning had been simpler but more brutal. O had been driven somewhere by her lover and a friend of his, unknown to her. And it was his friend, the stranger, who had explained to the young woman they had been instructed to prepare her.*

Here 'The Stranger' is the dominant character as René is seen removing O's panties under his instruction in contrast to the former narrative. The narrator informs us however that "*O was very surprised at having her hands tied, since she had every intention of obeying her lover*." Again, this statement works to reinforce O's willing complicity and consent. Who is the lover to whom O surrenders herein is however therefore ambiguous as both René and The Stranger seem to occupy the role of protagonist, and of dominant to her submission.

Roissy and Pierre, the valet

After O's induction to Roissy, we cut to a collared O being walked down the chateau's halls while Pierre, the valet, watches on. O is introduced to the men of Roissy and one quizzes René, "Has she been chained?" He replies, shortly, "Not by me". This is a notable departure from the novel, in which René replies "No, never." (Réage, 1954: 18) The effect of such a statement thus implies a sadomasochistic history of O, pre-René. The man continues, "Or whipped her? …If you had it might have given her pleasure", whereas the novel states unequivocally "Pleasure? We've got to move beyond that stage." (ibid.,) In foregrounding O's pleasure, consent and implied a priori submissive experience, *Histoire d'O* deviates from Réage's novel, and its issues of ambiguous consent and complexity of desire. Again, Pierre watches on while O's face is pressed deeply into the billowing swathes of one of the men's shirt, engaged, we presume (but do not see) in fellatio.

The next day brings news that O is to be interned in Roissy, and that René is to leave. After a whipping – in which, similarly, the whip, its contacts and welts are conspicuously absent, but her reactions and exclamations very much present – O's consent is once again foregrounded. An unnamed man of Roissy asserts: "Once again I want to remind you that you came here willingly – you can still back out. No-one forced you and you are free to leave, if you wish to go. Now, for the last time – do you want to leave?" She shakes her head and her eyes turn downward, thus non-verbally reaffirming and reinforcing this consent Such an addition to the narrative – where no such lay in the book – attempts to ascribe O agentic consent through once again. Later, after a restless night chained and lovingly bundled in furs by Pierre, he returns to whip O. Again, this sadomasochistic act is markedly obscured, shrouded in the modesty of cut away editing. As viewers we are once more invited to 'fill in the blanks' are thus potentially complicit in the text's sadistic narrative drive. Before leaving Roissy René bids her say two words before undertaking her 'vow of silence' (here, like the novel evoking both monastic virtue and atheistic deviance), and she exalts, foreshadowingly, "Sir Stephen".

With little sense of time passing, and various narrative points Omitting various points of her experiences at Roissy including, notably, O's anal training (Réage, 1954: 61—63) *Histoire d'O*'s narrative foregrounds not sex but love amplifying the novel's themes. Professing her love for Pierre to fellow resident Andree, the narrator informs us that what Andree "*couldn't believe was that O loved everything that came from her lover – even Pierre. It was her lover that possessed her; through these strangers to whom he had surrendered her*." Thus, whilst O's love for another man is offered as contradistinction to monogonormativity I would argue that it also foregrounds René's power over O as her 'one true lover'. Pierre and the other men of Roissy thus are ascribed vessels for his love.

In accordance with the novel, Pierre blindfolds O, guiding her descent of a stairway into the boughs of the castle-like chateau, pauses to caress, kiss and penetrate her, thrusting only twice before his body jerks and we (dubiously) infer that they both have orgasmed. They descend a final stairway into a darkened

underground room. He removes her blindfold and then, again in contrast to the novel, Pierre demands O look at him. She shakes her head in defiance, her body tight and coiled, intent on following Roissy's rule of eyes being lowered before men. A curiously desperate Pierre implores promising (or threatening?), "I won't beat you again! I'll only pretend to!" Yet he does whip her, and her cries are no lessened than in the earlier scenes.

In text, it is important to note that Réage describes O's trials in this 'circular vaulted room' as unrelenting, and the immeasurable span of her (willing) captivity therein as a solitude and test of fortitude, in which:

> *Pierre, or some other valet, it didn't matter which*, replenished her supply of water, placed fruit and bread upon her tray were none left, and would take her to bathe in a nearby dungeon. She never saw the men who entered, because, whenever they came, they were preceded by a valet who blindfolded her and didn't remove that blindfold until they had gone. (Réage, 1954: 70, my emphasis)

Here in the darkness, O is at her most alone. In *Histoire d'O* however, it is Pierre who repeatedly whips her, Pierre who replaces a singular untouched meal with another, and it is Pierre who leaves her to be whipped by three unseen men, while memories of René are montaged, representing O's will as intertwined with her lover's, thus returning O to the monogornormative fold in which love martyrs her. Pierre bundles up the exhausted O in his arms, and tenderly carries her out into the daylight. O is given her emblematic ring to wear upon reintegration into Paris and she and René exit the chateau. Whilst in the novel Pierre was logically absent, here O pauses, looking back towards a mournful Pierre. She glances back twice more, though this time with no eye-line match provided we are left to wonder, is it Pierre that O will miss, or is it instead Roissy?

Sir Stephen (and Norah, the 'negress' maid)

Musing on her prints of the model, O is not lost in the novel's reverie of her queer desire for Jacqueline, but instead is pleasantly surprised by the unexpected early return home of René. Under his command she dresses and

they leave to meet with Sir. Stephen. Later, at Sir Stephen's grand home he tells her of their plan to share her. "I want to hear from your lips", Sir Stephen asserts, "that you consent to belong to me, as totally as you belong to René. You'll continue to have only one master, a most exacting one, as I have a penchant for rituals. Well?" In so doing, as in the novel, the central tenet of hetero and monogonormativity is maintained, exchanged from one lover or 'master', to another; and further, this narrative returns once more to the evocation of O's consent. It must be made overt at all costs, it would seem, to avoid any ambiguity or complexity of O's desire.

O asserts unequivocally that she accepts this new agreement. This statement differs once more from Réage's O, who mulled over the ramifications of such a weighty request, finally asserting '"I am yours […] I'll be what you want me to be"' (Réage, 1954: 101). Dialogue muted, the narrator informs us that: "*the two men discussed her body in the crudest and most obscene terms, and O felt immersed in shame. But beyond the shame she felt as one does in the night, in the grip of a recurrent dream one recognises as having begun again*." This inclusion adds not only a somnambulant dreamlike quality recalling *A Girl in Love*, but also adds to O's complicity in her own desire, ambivalent as it is, rooted in shame and its avowal. However, this narrative once again tactic obfuscates *Story of O*'s most sexualised content: abridged, faded out, and muted, here O is the passive dreamer, of a dream whose details fade and blur on waking. No mention is made of how the two men intend to share her; vaginally and anally. The result is an inescapably desexualised, normative narrative.

Sir Stephen demands her to masturbate, thus recalling her earlier queer desire for, and experience with Marion, a character (and modality) absent from this adaptation. As in the novel O refuses, and Sir Stephen instead penetrates her by force. The camera zooms first in upon her clenched jaw and bared gritted teeth, then resting, pointedly on her finger and the ring of Roissy – obscuring the sexual act taking place. O is awakened in the morning by Norah, Sir Stephen's maid, described in the novel as an "old negress". But the Norah of *Histoire d'O* is youthful. She brusquely announces that "The master has a

message for you" (the ambiguity of this noun hanging heavy in the air). As O listens to a tape-recording Norah picks up a delicate silver crop, gently wrapping it upon her own fingers. In this addition to the narrative, Norah thus becomes an extension of Sir Stephen, and of his and O's powerplay, which in turn becomes transmogrified by the uneasy intersection here of class and race. His words accord with Norah's action: "The whip [sic] is for your next visit", though who wield it is thus ambiguous.

Jacqueline

In O's photographic studio she ruminates on Sir Stephen and Renè's love and desire for her. Awakening her from her introspection, Renè greets her jubilantly, regarding her silver gifted cigarette holder from his brother with pride. Jacqueline interrupts the couple. Upon turning to leave Renè exclaims to her "No, don't go!" and the trio are next seen walking happily through the streets of Paris. The narration informs us that:

> *after that Jacqueline spent a lot of time with them – Renè enjoyed it. He found her beautiful and no doubt wanted her. A short time ago O would have been jealous, but she was too preoccupied by something else – the ever-increasing hold Sir Stephen had over her lover*.

It is important here to note once more the omission of O's desire, this time for Jacqueline (in the novel, ranging pp.133—136), and how this relates to O's desire as being queer, or heteronormative.

Pierre, (again)

Crossing a bridge over the river Seine, O meets Pierre in chance encounter. They exchange a brief inaudible conversation, framed in long shot. At the nearest telephone box (conveniently located at the foot of the bridge) O phones Sir Stephen, explaining that Pierre wishes to take her to a hotel. Sir Stephen instructs O, contrary to her wishes, to "Go home at once […] I want you to obey me, that is all." O walks away hurriedly, as mournful acoustic guitar resonates the frame. This scene, not found in *Story of O* [re]positions Pierre both as O's lover, and it would seem, object of her desire. Further in this narrative Sir

Stephen dominance functions here both as monognormative and patriarchal – it is his will, his desire and his control that here stands as protagonist.

Jacqueline (continued)

At home in her apartment O is greeted by Sir Stephen. He asks whether she has desired any other man than Pierre. O both shakes her head and subtly nods in response. “A girl maybe?” O brings him the prints of Jacqueline. He gently pushes O flat upon the large glass table, and moves his hand between her thighs, obscured by her dress. The camera focuses upon her head flipping from side to side, her teeth biting at her lips, as guttural noises escape her mouth. The prints of Jacqueline lie beside her face directly in her eye-line. That Sir Stephen here provides O with the orgasmic proof of her queer desire for Jacqueline is important: it and her subversive potentiality are constrained; its modality mediated by the recuperative power of his heteropatriarchal normativity.

Later, as O and Sir Stephen sit in a restaurant the narration ponders: “*Sir Stephen was making her talk about Jacqueline, but was he listening? She felt with delight that he was only aware of the sound of her voice, and the movement of her lips.*” The literal silencing of O’s queer desire is here deafening, and the delight with which she relishes Sir Stephen’s disinterest in the articulation of her desires is somewhat baffling.

Shame here, I would suggest functions as the overarching drive: O’s shame in articulating her queer desire, and the shame in taking pleasure in his objectification is that which outmodes her subjective expression. “You’re not listening”, Sir Stephen chides with no sense of irony whatsoever. O responds simply, reasserting her consent, “I’ll do anything you ask of me. I’m yours. Absolutely. And Renè’s.” He asks whether she will agree to be branded returning O’s consent as central to this adaptive narrative. He adds, “In any case, you have time to decide. The time needed for Jacqueline to surrender” Is Jacqueline and O’s relationship yet to come then nothing more than an

inconsequential narrative sub-thread, a marker of time passed before O can truly submit, to a man?

In the studio O forces her body roughly against Jacqueline, who attempts to wriggle out from O's grip, muttering "no" repeatedly. O disregards her lack of consent, grasping her face and kissing her. Finally, Jacqueline acquiesces. Later, in O's apartment both women enter a bright and airy bedroom, in which the model is to stay. That night, the pair discuss Renè's absence. O leans into kiss her face, yet she turns her head aside. O disrobes Jacqueline, and their bodies, entwined in queer desire (albeit mirroring the book's heteronormative paradigms of power – O the hunter, Jacqueline the prey for whom resistance is futile) are blurred as the camera pulls focus to the heavy-handed foregrounding of a toy car, recalling Roissy, Sir Stephen (and to a lesser extent Renè)'s will and desire which literally blurs O and Jacqueline into insignificance.

While Deigham (2010) astutely notes the similarity between *Histoire d'O* to the French novel *Belle De Jour* (1928) and its adaptation of the same name (1967), in that: '[b]oth films depict the secret and subversive sexual lives of otherwise normal, young, attractive, middle class women [. . . who] intentionally abandon their conventional lives in favor of sexual exploration and potential personal liberation (Deigham, 2010: 132)[3] their claim that 'Séverine and O are characters that cannot be satisfied within the bounds of normal romantic or sexual relationships' (ibid.,) is, as I have argued an oversimplification which erases the text's heteronormative and (if ambiguous) monogonormative drives. Thus, the assertion that '[u]ltimately [O] finds sexual bliss with a female partner, Jacqueline' (ibid.,) is clearly revisionary.

Anne-Marie

O, Anne-Marie, and Sir Stephen stroll together through the rural grounds of Samois, and they discuss her branding. O once more affirms her consent. In a large, airy atrium another interned girl, Colette, whips O under AnneMarie's instruction. As the music reaches its swelling cadence O's screams become chasmic, her mouth agape in agony. She sheds no tears. Fade to black.

Sometime later O is sat in the mansion's garden, her expression peaceful and serene. The narrative informs us that:

> *She had come to understand that her: feelings for Renè; her stay at the chateau; the ordeal she had gone through, were nothing but fate's way of leading her to the man she loved […] and she told herself if she was strong enough to bear it til the end everything would be given her. She would finally have conquered him*.

Again, clearly what this statement obfuscates is O's own desire and pleasure, and the potentiality therefore of these experiences as a complex and ambivalent exploration of her own sexual desire. Recall thus, in the novel that:

> O had never understood, but had finally come to recognize as an undeniable and very meaningful truth, the contradictory but constant entanglement of her feelings and attitudes: she liked the idea of torture, when she underwent it she would have seen the earth go up in fire and smoke to escape it, when it was over she was happy to have undergone it, and all the happier the crueller and more prolonged it had been. (Réage, 1954: 204)

"Today it is your turn" Anne-Marie announces some time later. "But we didn't draw lots yet!", exclaims O, her eyes searching Anne-Marie who, in the novel, "played the game with unimpeachable honesty" (Réage, 1954: 210) The girls pause, watching Anne-Marie's movement over to the record player. "It's about time you learned. Sir Stephen mentioned a certain Jacqueline. You'll have to whip her someday." O's beats who Collette screams repeatedly until at last Anne-Marie switches off the music. O drops the crop to the floor, imploring Collette's forgiveness. In the next scene, red hot coals are placed in an ornate container, at O's feet. Her eyes fixate upon them. "O, you may still refuse" states Anne-Marie, once again foregrounding O's consent. "No", O responds quickly. "Shall I tie her hands?" Collette proffers, comforting O with a hand upon her shoulder. "No", O responds simply once more. The process of O's branding is lost in a quick and varied edit: a disorientating pan to the onlooking Andree shows her flee the room in terror, whilst a brief close-up on O's face shows her eyes clenched shut, brow furrowed her mouth open wide screaming in pain. O's scream follows Andree as we cut to an exterior shot of her running away from

the house, the audio bridging this edit and making O's scream inescapable. *Histoire d'O* avoids the direct representation of what is perhaps the novel's most viscerally sadistic act, distancing the viewer from an identification with O and inviting us instead to be like Andree, terrified and repulsed.

Ivan

Deviating from the novel, in a restaurant O sits with Sir Stephen in polite conversation with two unknown men, and the narration informs us that "*then Ivan took O to a hotel room and kept her there until the evening*. […] *O's submissiveness, and the marks which he had seen on her body touched Ivan profoundly. But above all he had received from her freely and naturally all he had never yet dared to ask of any woman*". In montage O and Ivan's sex unfolds until finally, post-orgasm Ivan's eyes tightly shut in exhaustion. Later, at Sir Stephen's house he informs O that "Ivan has fallen madly in love with you. He came round this morning and begged me to set you free. He told me he wanted to marry you. He wants to save you." This sub-plot of Ivan as another potential partner after Pierre functions clearly to threaten O and Sir Stephen's relationship, ultimately reinforcing the strength of their heteronormative monogonormative bond. This is a moral conservativism that shuns the orgiastic non-monogamous scenes of Réage's novel.

He continues, "[…] you're always free to choose if you're mine. I explained this to Ivan, he's coming at three." "But you're mad!" O exclaims, "both of you! If Ivan weren't coming, what plans had you made for me?" Cut to O entering an unlocked room of Sir Stephen's home, an exact replica of the atrium "music room" of Anne-Marie's. "Poor boy" ruminates O. "But he must learn the realities, and this is the way." In the next scene we hear O groaning, and in Ivan's POV shot see the sweating, tousled hair of O, her body strung between two columns. Her body, notably for the first time, is adorned with fresh whip lashes. Her look is defiant, and Ivan rushes from the house, dashing off down the Parisian street. That this is the first time we see anyone marked is crucial, as it is circumscribed not only consensual, but agentic, orchestrated by O herself.

The party

In the next scene it is explained that O, Renè and Jacqueline have joined Sir Stephen in Brittany. Notably Jacqueline's sister Nathalie, the fawning adolescent is absent from this storyworld. Later, over lunch O briefly drifts off into a daydream in which it is Jacqueline being whipped by Norah. O looks up, catching Norah's eye. Whether in discomfort or jealous desire again is ambiguous.

In her room that night, O sits upon her bed, perusing a grand array of brightly coloured carnivalesque headpieces. An upset Jacqueline enters, jealous of O's attentions no longer being focused upon thus her recalling the infantile behaviours of the spectral Nathalie: "I'll do anything you want, I swear it O, I'll kill myself!" She insists on being taken to Roissy, once again embodying the spirit of Nathalie. The narrator interjects: "*Having accomplished her mission Sir Stephen assigned her, O chose a mask seeing herself as a bird that had been carefully trained to retrieve her victim and bring it faithfully to her master*".

Sir Stephen, O and Norah approach the location of the party not by car, as in the novel, but bizarrely by speedboat, an addition that jars against a narrative by and large purposefully timeless. Her body is bare but for a cape and collar, to which a lead held by Norah (and not of course, Nathalie) leads O through the party guests. The narration spans the next scene also, where O ultimately drives Jacqueline to Roissy. In this way Heathcote (2002) argues that *Histoire d'O* as filmic adaptation offers a narrative which is circular, yet in his desire to revise the film's narrative to fit a dogmatic reading in which 'the circles of Histoire d'O represent unending cycles of violence towards women' (ibid.,), this pointedly ignores the real ending of *Histoire d'O* as follows.

The ending: normative recuperation

Cosy in each other's arms before a roaring fire, Sir Stephen declares his love for O "You say that you love me. But just say I demanded that you bear as I did only a few of the same punishments, hmm? You would accept it, wouldn't you?"

“I believe so. “But one of the things I’ve learnt in life is—” he exhales sharply as O brands his hand with his cigarette. In his POV shot she smiles, revealing the mark she has left upon him, a perfect “O”, mirrored in her ring, upon which the camera zooms before fading to black.

Summary

Like the novel’s confines of industry and medium before it, from its first sex scene to its closing scene of heteronormative recuperation, *Histoire d’O* is for all its controversy much more modest in its representation than its source text. Indeed, as McKibbin argues, the film ‘moved closer and closer to an explicit realism to arrive at a curious absence’ (McKibbin, 2003: 93) thus on the one hand echoing what I have argued is the distinctive presence-absence paradigm of Réage’s text. Yet it is difficult to believe that such strategies here are anything more than a (somewhat failed) attempt to pacify the modest sensibility of audiences and censors alike, as can be observed throughout the narrative discussion herein.

Most pointedly this can be observed in the queer erasure of O’s lovers Marion and Nathalie, and the foregrounding instead of heteronormative romances with both Pierre and the would-be lover, Ivan. In so doing, rather than opening up the text’s cognitive dissonance and ambivalence and the meaning lying within its gaps, I argue that this adaptation instead averts its gaze away from O’s subjectivity. In removing from view *Story of O*’s most extreme scenes of sexuality and sadomasochistic violence, as well as any truly queer potentiality, *Histoire d’O* therefore ratifies the text(s) dominant ideology of gender and heteronormativity. In what follows however, the discursive frameworks of the film’s reception are examined, which destabilises the fixity of the reading I have offered herein.

Reception

Critical Reception

Having been refused certification by the BBFC in 1975, for critics in 2000 when it was finally passed, *Histoire d'O*'s reputation proceeded itself. *Empire*'s Clark Collis, writing in 1999 stated that the: 'notorious porn extravaganza' would have

> slipped into *well deserved obscurity* had it not been refused a certificate back in the mid 70s. As it is, the film has achieved near mythic status among porn cognoscenti, although it's difficult to imagine anyone except particularly bored SM freaks or Udo Kier fanatics getting much of a thrill? (Collis, 1999: 39, my emphasis)

This description is telling, both in its implication that the film adaptation is 'bad' – unsurprisingly reinforcing a hierarchy of taste (see Bourdieu, 1979) that of course typifies the discourse of critics (on film criticism cf. Klinger, 1994; Clayton and Klevan, 2011, and n.d.,; Buckland, 2012; Gray, 2010 and 2011) – but also in its use of humour to dismiss a film whose history has been ensconced in controversy for its portrayal of sadomasochism as sexual violence.

Similarly, scholar and critic Linda Ruth Williams for *Sight and Sound* in the same year describes *Histoire d'O* as follows:

> For the most part, this tale of self-annihilation looks like a cross between a Biba commercial and a progressive rock video, awash with knee-booted shaggy-haircut 'chicks' drifting across misty landscapes in pseudo-medieval frocks – a fantasy of women forever at their leisure and eternally available. Yet although there are nipples aplenty and a fair share of (female) pubic hair, there's hardly any male flesh, excited or otherwise in sight. The sole reason for the film's notoriety seems to be its focus on bondage and whipping. (Williams, 1999: online)

For Williams, then, *Histoire d'O* is a laughable male (patriarchal) fantasy, which focuses most upon the objectification of its female cast, offering we may infer, nothing for a female or queer gaze. '[T]ime has done it few favours', she asserts with perhaps a touch of sympathy for the text, or for its potentiality, adding that while: '[t]he film does have a certain kitsch charm, awash as it is with appalling synthesised elevator music sweeping across the embarrassing dialogue dubbed into music […] *Story of O* presents hardcore subject matter in an insanely softcore fashion (ibid.,). Collis echoes this appraisal, joking that O is:

> abused by some ludicrously coiffured goons, while wearing a series of frontless dresses that even Benny Hill may have considered in poor taste […] the thing is just so lame: poorly acted, cretinously written and with all the imagination of a prepubescent schoolboy. Love of a sort wins in the end, but not before a lot more soft focus squelchiness and toe-curling dialogue (Collis, 1999: 39).

Thus, while some 70s softcore films have been lauded as retro-chic cult classics – e.g., *Deep Throat* (1972), and *Behind The Green Door* (1972) – *Histoire d'O* is dismissed as being too gratuitous, too frivolous and altogether too 'soft' to the point of being dull. Implicit in these critics' arguments is the understanding that to appreciate or to even enjoy this adaptation of O's story belies an infantile cinematic taste palate, and indeed 'prepubescent' or perhaps perverse sexuality ('bored SM freaks'). It is not only the film's out-dated aesthetic and formalist elements that disappointed critics – in addition to Sébastien Japrisot's screenplay, Corrine Clery's performance of O also comes under scrutiny as Williams continues: '[i]n the voiceover, O wonders "why she found her terror so delicious", but since Clery's performance only moves from A for anodine to B for bland, we never get to T for terror' (Williams, 1999: online).

While Clery's performance will be analysed in further detail below, it is worth highlighting the main critical concern held by Williams and Collis – *Histoire d'O*'s gender politics, a theme most pertinent to our considerations herein. Willliams asserts that 'if Just Jaeckin's more or less faithful adaptation does anything, it reminds us what a small story of commonplace degradation *O* always was' (ibid.,). Both *Histoire d'O* and its source text *Story of O* are dismissed, as is its queer potentiality and the possible transgressive themes that I have argued for, rejected in favour of a reading more akin to those of radical feminists, as examined previously. Thus, a central contradiction of Williams' review presents that *Histoire d'O* is at once too soft, but also too extreme in its subject matter (which degrades – whom?). It is dismissed once again, a 'small' narrative of little importance. In *Empire*, a similar criticism is levelled at the film, '[t]o say that the film is misogynist doesn't cover it and the script's repeated attempts to convince us of O's voluntary involvement in the assorted violence only makes

matters more gruesome' (Collis, 1999: 39). Once again, then, *Story of O* becomes the oppressive text par excellence, and O its Stockholm syndrome suffering victim.

A later issue of *Empire* (six months later in 2000, and 25 years after the film's initial worldwide release) accompanying *Histoire d'O*'s eventual BBFC certification, saw critic Mark Dinning interview the film's director, Just Jaeckin, inviting him to respond to the recent criticism:

> "You know, I refuse to judge. And so when people start to judge me, I just don't care […] censorship only exists because the public are seen as babies, instead of the adults that they are". He was in no mood to hold back about those who have described his smutty epic as at once "cretinous", "misogynistic" and thespianally challenged" nonsense. "The film has been a huge success throughout the world and so it's of course frustrating to have such critics shit on your work". He sighs. "They don't understand that it's erotic, not pornographic, and a fantasy about what a woman can accept because of her love for a guy. So I ask you, how can that be sexist? Men cannot do for woman even ten percent what they can do for you…." (Jaeckin in Dinning, 2000: 32)

Jaeckin's response is problematic in a number of ways. While we shall return to this assertion of censorship as reductive and infantilising, his positioning of *Histoire d'O* as 'erotica' and decidedly not pornography, again carries with it a false hierarchy of taste. Additionally, his gender and heteronormative understanding of O (and the implication of *Story of O* as a monogamous heteronormative narrative) as non-misogynist through woman's strength and power emanating from her love for man, is highly problematic and not at all a convincing defence. While I have argued that Réage's text largely reinforces such a traditional problematic notion, Jaeckin leaves no room to mount a counter-reading and indeed counter defence of his text as potentially transgressive or subversive. In sum, while Jaeckin attempts to mount a defence of the text, he ultimately reinforces its problematic dimensions. Thus, just as Paulhan and Pauvert before him, Jaeckin here stands as a mediator for the text, speaking for it, for Réage and for O, yet excluding any reading that may run

contrary to his understanding of gender, and of sexuality, outside of a patriarchal, masculinist gender and heteronormative paradigm.

Curiously, while contemporary criticism saw *Histoire d'O* attacked, derided and dismissed, its critical reception upon release in 1975 was a mixed bag. American publication *Variety* heralded *Histoire d'O* as a 'big budget glossy sadomasochistic "softcore" [which] could bridge the gaps between regular and porno audiences' (Moskowitz, 1975: 18). While contemporary audiences may be less distinct, this statement demarcates the adaptation as having a potentially important and historic impact upon the cinematic world more broadly. The Paris correspondent, Gene Moskowitz added pointedly: '[t]here are frenzied but softcore lesbian love bouts and the ritual of submission that may get this pic added femme libber protests' (ibid.,). This telling inclusion not only perhaps draws upon the novel's infamy and controversy, but also places the film amongst the feminist debates discussed herein in chapters three and five. What is unclear however is whether the author sees such feminist attention as a negative, or as a further reason for a viewer to attend a screening – or both. Additionally, and interestingly, absent here are the critics concerns which would later surround the text's gender politics vis-à-vis the BBFC, as Moskowitz adds simply, 'Corinne Clery is pretty and subservient as the beset O.' (ibid.,)

The British periodical, *Films and Filming* also lauded *Histoire d'O* as 'an elegantly photographed […] study of sadomasochism' (Anon, 1976: 48) and its coverage was accompanied by a full four-page photo spread. Furthermore, in a later issue Derek Ellery lamented *Histoire d'O*'s refusal of certification both by the BBFC and the GLC, asserting that

> *[t]he obstacle, of course, to the film being screened lies in its content, for the production values of the work are beyond question*: Robert Fraisse's photography is quite simply breathtaking removing the goings-on to a level of poetry and dreamlike unreality to which the voice-over narration can only aspire. Fraisse, art director Poirot, and Jaeckin have between them created a true equivalent of Pauline Réage's dislocated prose. It is not just that the glassware, bonds and candles twinkle in the diffused light, nor that *the camera is discreet where the novel goes into detail*, the makers still

> have an eye for a powerful image where required, and certain shots of O discovered limp and sweating in Sir Stephen's house by a young admirer, or driven by night in a speedboat to meet the Commander are *unforgettable moments in cinema*. (Ellery, 1977: 33, my emphasis)

Again, this is in vast contrast to the earlier examined critics, as Ellery clearly asserts his enjoyment of the film. That two such glaringly oppositional 'truths' of *Histoire d'O* as both fundamentally 'good' and 'bad' co-exist is more of a complex issue than simply resulting from the passage of time, and the changing tastes of pornographic audiences.

Both *Variety* and *Films and Filming* assert that the film's power lies in its 'softcoreness' and thus palatability for a potential mass audience and opposed to an overwhelmingly male 'porno audience'. Accordingly, its soft-lit soft-focus 'vaselined lens' (Moskowitz, 1975: 18) aesthetic is both heralded for its restraint, and implicitly contributes to *Histoire d'O*'s appeal to a crucially potentially mixed gender audience within a (gendernormative) 1970s rationale. It is with irony, then perhaps, that the adaptation of this female authored, female centred tale of female submission was, we infer, seen to be more palatable to a female audience through the adaptive mediating process of 'softening'. To what extent this is born out in the text, how and why, is a subject to which we will return. For other critics however, such as Richard Eder for the *New York Times* in 1975, the adaptation's softness was a weakness, as he states:

> The film, for all its rich photography and amber-lit bodies, is [like the novel] similarly abstract. It is little more than an attempt to illustrate the book, with the bodies as coloured plates. […] It is filmed with considerable discretion. Both the beatings and the sex scenes are done with more emphasis on facial expressions than bodily. (Eder, 1975: 20)

Further, in *Films and Filming* Ellery's interpretation of Clery's performance is also in direct contrast to Williams', which he describes as 'eye opening, particularly in her physical transformation between scenes such as at Roissy (nubile innocent) and later in her job as a fashion photographer (assured and mature)' (Ellery, 1997: 36). Ellery foregrounds the physicality of Clery's performance, which contrasts strongly against Williams' derision of the actress'

O being marked by ‘insipidness’. It is therefore the viewers’ reading of O, and of *Histoire d’O*’s narrative which shapes their understanding of the film, and of Clery’s performance.

Returning to the film’s status as ‘banned’ i.e., refused certification, Ellery ruminates that

> [w]e thus have the curious situation in which the soundtrack of a film is available (on Decca SKLR 5235) the original freely available in paperback, but no film. […] It is laughable that *Story of O* lies getting dust in Wardour Street, its only screenings reserved for inquisitive councillors who promptly throw up their hands in horror. (ibid.)

While Ellery’s outrage at the BBFC (as censorial body), and the resultant inaccessibility to the text for a mainstream (as opposed privileged elite) audience may well typify a masculine liberal paradigm ignoring the UK’s specific legal framework for the publication and distribution of texts – as we shall go on to explore, that *Histoire d’O* was denied distribution while its novel counterpart was in full circulation is an important observation, especially given that we have seen critics either lamenting or praising its comparative softness. In order to understand this seeming contradiction, then, a consideration must be undertaken into examining how audiences have been conceptualised by censorial bodies, and how this has evolved in time to reflect evolving media, and distinctions of taste through ‘quality’.

British Censorship and The BBFC

Originally introduced to combat the proliferation of pornography production, sales and consumption in 1857, The Obscene Publications Act (OPA) has historically held a central role within the censorship, or indeed 'banning' of sexually deviant, 'obscene' texts within the British socio-political context. As the Lord Chief Justice explained, the legislation was ‘intended to apply exclusively to works written for the single purpose of corrupting the morals of youth and of a nature calculated to shock the common feelings of decency in any well-regulated mind’ (Campbell, 1857 in Roberts, 1985: 613), The act made no attempt to define obscenity but for a moral judgement of 'intent to deprave'. This

ambiguity was refined by Campbell's successor, who held in an appeal less than ten years later, that the test of obscenity was 'whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall' (Cockburn, 1868 in Roberts, 1985: 627). This in effect meant that obscenity relied not upon intent, but upon effect – a hard to prove yet less easy to defend supposition, reliant upon a problematically imagined reader.

The British government was forced to re-examine these definitions following increasing public pressure in 1959, spearheaded by the Society of Authors who presented parliament with a proposal to reform the existing law, following several high-profile prosecutions of publishers. The proposal called for reform on two main issues: that of intent to distribute harmful materials, arguing that the publishers may not be aware of the content of their texts, and the proposed importance of artistic merit. As a consequence, the 1959 amendment states two main changes: Section 2(5) states that '[a] person shall not be convicted of an offence against this section if he proves that he had not examined the article in respect of which he is charged and had no reasonable cause to suspect that it was such that his publication of it would make him liable to be convicted of an offence against this section' (Great Britain, 1959); and more importantly for our concerns that, as stated in Section 4 – (1) 'public good; A person shall not be convicted of an offence. . . if it is proved that publication of the article in question is justified as being for the public good on the ground that it is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern' (ibid.,).

The potential ramifications of this amendment for literary publishers, writers and consumers in post-war Britain was clear; allowing previously banned 'subversive' or sexually deviant texts to legally return to print, and circulation based upon their artistic merit. D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* published by Penguin books for instance, was the first noted prosecution under the new act. Sited as obscene for its portrayal of overt female sexuality, and uses of the words 'fuck' and 'cunt', the trial was held at the Old Bailey in which academics and literary critics testified as to the work's literary merit. Penguin and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were found innocent of obscenity crimes, legalising

its publication for the first time since it was written, in 1928 (see Craig, 1962 and Hunter, Saunders and Williamson, 1993). Indeed, the text became so acceptable and re-cooperated into British culture that it was on the national school's syllabus by the mid 1980s (Rozenburg, 1987) thus evidencing a shifting British cultural attitude to the concepts of obscenity and pornography.

Conversely however for pornographers at the time, the Act's definition of artistic merit being limited only to 'science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern' posed multitudinous effects. For, just as literary works of 'artistic merit' could be 'justified as being for the public good'; pornography could be ascribed opposite based upon the moral judgements of those who would view to criminalise them. As a result, an emergence in the 1960s of pornographic texts marketed under the guise of educational, and scientific 'nudist films' proliferated the market (one can also assume that many 'obscene' pornographic texts went further underground to avoid prosecution).

Furthermore, this reflects a broader international attitudinal shift evidenced by the distribution of pornographic adaptations of literary texts throughout the 1960s and 70s, including the emerging (and enduring) popularity of sadomasochistic narratives (such as Joseph Marzano's *Venus in Furs* (1967); Massimo Dallamano's *Venus in Furs* (1969); Jesus Franco's: *Marquis de Sade: Justine* (1969), *Marquis de Sade's 'Philosophy in the Boudoir' a.k.a Eugenie* (1970), *Eugenie De Sade* (1974); Claude Pierson's *Justine de Sade* (1972) and Chris Boger's *Cruel Passion* (1977) amongst others, some of which will be discussed in the following chapter) legitimised by their association with deviant texts of 'artistic merit' (cf. Krzywinska, 2006). Yet these were far from hard-core texts, and still had to adhere to the strict standards of the BBFC to avoid criminalisation under the OPA, infamously resulting in a softer 'English cut' to achieve certification and thus distribution in the UK or face rejection. However, this is by no means to suggest that the BBFC operated with a liberal attitude toward the representation of deviant sexuality, as *Histoire d'O*, our present case study, would evidence.

In 1970, four years prior to the release of *Histoire d'O*, the then Secretary of the Board of the British Board of Film Censors, John Trevelyan, wrote the following letter worth repeating at length, to Maurice Girodias of Grove Press, the American publisher of *Story of O* at their London offices:

> I am interested to hear of your intention to publish "THE STORY OF O" in England. I have read the American edition, and was impressed by its literary quality. There are, of course, people who will consider it obscene, but I feel that its literary quality justifies its publication, especially since what it describes is so clearly conscious desires of a great many women to be dominated by men, not only sexually but also in other ways. If I thought that this book would do harm I would not say this. I do not happen to be a sadist or a sado-masochist [sic] myself, but I am very well aware of the attractions of this kind of perversion to some unhappy people. Nevertheless I think that if this book should stimulate someone of this kind it would be more likely to have a cathartic affect than to cause an individual to do some physical or psychological harm to another person. […] For these reasons I would not personally object to the English text of this remarkable book being published. Of course, if the film rights were purchased, I might have a different reaction! *There is an enormous difference between a book which is read in private, and a film which is displayed to a mass audience*. *Even in this permissive age no-one would faithfully translate the book to screen, and the result of filming it might well be able to make something on one medium that we all would agree is obscene, which in its original medium we would accept.* […] I just hope that it will be on sale in the respectable bookshops, and not in the back-street pornographic market.(Trevelyan, 1970: n.p., my emphasis)[4]

The censor's comments offer a fascinating insight into the paternalism of the BBFC, and of the elitist hierarchy of taste employed in the UK's rubric of censorship. As in the Obscene Publications Act that the BBFC purports to protect filmmakers from falling afoul of, obscenity here is pitted in a false dichotomy of supposed 'literary quality', as well as objective rather than subjectively defined concepts.

Trevelyan's commentary on femininity and SM too is a curious inclusion, for not only does it echo the gender and heteronormative psychological narratives of biological determinism, it also pathologises SM practitioners as 'some unhappy people'. Both assertions thus clearly draw upon the discourses of BDSM examined in Chapter Three. Trevelyan, it must be noted, had no medical background, and as such therefore attention must be drawn here to the manner in which such discourses stretched far beyond the medical profession, and into the masculinist authoritative realms, which have shaped our culture writ large. That the censor sees such a vast disparity between literary and cinematic representations is too a clear key focus for the concerns of our enquiry, though it belies both a highly problematic hierarchy of taste, as well as being strikingly revisionary. For, as we know, less than twenty years previous Réage's pornographic literary text was seen to be just as dangerous and obscene (see Chapter Five, Réage and the *Brigaide Mondaine*) and its audience just as easily influenced through a classed hierarchy.

Such a theorisation of cinematic audiences being more easily influenced than readers of literature, is however inherently classed. Building on Tom Dewe Matthews' assertion that British censorship has been governed by the 'long-serving, silently spoken rubric: the larger the audience, the lower the moral mass resistance to suggestion' (Dewe Matthews, 1994: 2), Petley argues that 'lurking behind these fears about the 'corruption of innocent minds' one finds, time and again, implicit or explicit, a potent strain of class dislike and fear. The object is often the spectre of the working class in general' (Petley, 1997: 170) Indeed, one ought to here recall Chapter Three's criticism of Ellis' theorisation of sadomasochism as frequently observed in the 'brutish', 'uncivilised' working class as monolith. Here viewers are thus denied their interpretive repertoires, evoking again the hypodermic needle model of film audiences who will, 'as monkey see, monkey do', simply ape the content to which they are exposed.

Despite this clearly problematic theorisation of *Histoire d'O*'s potential audience, Trevelyan's prediction before the film's release indeed came to pass, with the film rejected by the board now governed by James Ferman upon its submission – though not before Trevleyan requested 'see it at the Board – and if possible to

bring my wife. This could, of course, be a cause 'celebre'.' (Trevelyan, 1975: n.p.)[4] Clearly, he had no concerns that it would deprave or corrupt them both.

The official communication on its rejection in November of 1975 declared the following rationale:

> Although the scenes of sex and sexual whipping are deliberately treated with immense, even "tasteful", visual discretion, being largely implied by head reaction shots and sound effects, we felt that the film had no merits to justify its apparent advocacy of a life of sado-masochism [sic] and sexual degradation. The film was viewed several times, including a viewing with the board's solicitor, who confirmed the view that, should the film be passed, it could become subject of a prosecution by the DPP on the grounds of its potential to "deprave and corrupt". There may be some press controversy over this decision, as the film is showing to large audiences in Paris and in other parts of the world. Certainly, the book has some claims to be a serious work of literature, since it does offer genuine insights into the darker area of sexual psychology. The film, on the other hand, tends to merely glamorise its subject, thus suggesting that the sexual maltreatment of women is both justifiable and harmless. In this respect it seems to depart radically from current British standards. (BBFC: 1975, n.p.)

Putting aside the curious distinction of British standards versus European, this statement squarely places the film's distribution as potentially 'depraving and corrupting' this specific notion of a British mass audience. Most curious, of course, is how this 'soft' rendering of Réage's novel somehow results, as Trevelyan predicted, in a more offensive, and potentially criminal rendition. Further, this unauthored statement from the BBFC which concludes with the assertion of 'the sexual maltreatment of women' echoes (though of course paternalistically) the anti-SM feminist rhetoric examined in Chapter Three. It was not possible to ascertain from the BBFC's archival records as to whether this influence was originating from within the board, but I think it unlikely given its all-male history of presidents and secretaries/directors. More likely, the increasing visibility of second wave feminism in the socio-political cultural discourse shaped the board's perception of gender and sexual politics at that

time. This film then according to the BBFC, unlike the novel not only has the potential to deprave and to corrupt a mass audience, but further, is both misogynist and has the potential to contribute to harm to women, despite as I have argued: the reduction of its source text's most extreme content; its foregrounding of consent; erasure of queer desire and its centralisation of hetero and monoganormative themes.

The BBFC were right to anticipate a 'media circus' surrounding the board's decision, and as the more recent critics noted, this may well have contributed to the *Histoire d'O*'s infamy. Tabloid press coverage of the film had begun before the board's decision – with the *Daily Express* in September of 1975 interviewing an outraged and disgusted member of the clergy, who protested its Paris run. It is noteworthy that here Christians shared the same concerns as radical feminists as to the perceived harm of sadomasochistic texts, demonstrating a broader overlap in attitudes to deviant sexual practice. Inviting the ever upbeat and somewhat obtuse Jaeckin to respond in defence of his text, the director asserted:

> Can 10 million people be wrong? That's how many have seen [my last film] Emmanuelle and already with 'O' we are getting 20,000 customers a day […] I know critics panned it. But they didn't do it in one line. Some of them took four pages over it. One guy said he'd seen so much flesh he was going vegetarian. […] My films are erotic not pornographic. I hate porn. It makes me sick. I'm not interested in making a lot of money. I'm interested in making movies. I'm going to do one about doctors next. The fashion before me was murder. Which came after detective stories and Westerns. I ask you, isn't it better to watch beautiful girls doing beautiful things than to see John Wayne shooting everyone or those interminable war movies? (Jaeckin in Brown, 1975: 5)

Here Jaeckin reiterates the false hierarchical dichotomy of pornography versus erotica, positioning himself as the auteur-artiste. That his understanding of his own text extends simply to a story of 'beautiful girls doing beautiful things' is bewildering, yet ultimately reinforces the criticisms of *Histoire d'O* as gratuitous, and glamorising. Accordingly, one cannot help but to wonder whether a more

informed and spirited defence of the text would have garnished a warmer response by censorial bodies.

Jaeckin remained hopeful as to the film's viability within the UK, adding that with the BBFC: 'I guess we'll have a little trouble. But it'll sell there as it will everywhere. I'm sure of that. The critics don't frighten me. The public who, lets [sic] face it, are not driven into the cinema at gunpoint make their own choice.' (ibid.,) Here, unlike the BBFC Jaeckin theorises audiences as active participants over passive receptacles for dominant meaning. This is a strong contrast to the censors' theorisation of media consumption. While lacking in paternalism, the director instead advocates a simplistic neoliberal paradigm of cinema as market, audience as (willing) consumer, thus obfuscating any responsibility for the text he has created. Either it is popular, or it is a commercial failure and here its gendered and sexual politics central to the text's meaning take a back seat to its money-making potential.

Whilst the international cinematic landscape of [neo] liberal markets may have afforded the viewer-consumer this scope of choice, in Britain, and specifically in London, the opportunity to watch *Histoire d'O* was severely curtailed by an additional 'banning' by the Greater London Council (GLC). As Leonard Vigars, for *The Evening News*, reported in June of 1976:

> The GLC has banned its first film since being criticised by a high court judge for allowing obscene films to be screened in London [… in] this case I understand four members of the board voted for the film to be banned and four were in favour of allowing it to be shown […] Their view of The Story of O – based on a book written by a Frenchwoman and dealing with bondage and sadism – was that it is "totally unacceptable". Six weeks ago Dennig ruled in the Appeal Court that County Hall had been applying the wrong tests in its film viewing. He criticised the GLC for allowing pornographic films to be shown in London "*to the shame of its decent citizens*". The council should apply the test of "indecency" and not just whether a film would deprave and corrupt, the judge said. The GLC has agreed to apply this new rule but has begun talks with the Home Secretary

> over the future of film censorship in London. (Vigars, 1976: n.p. my emphasis)

There is much to say about this reception by the GLC. Again, it has unfortunately not been possible to ascertain as to the gendered make-up of this board, however that the vote was split is certainly noteworthy. Interestingly too is the inclusion of the author as a 'Frenchwoman', perhaps conferring upon the text a sense of European cultural capital, or instead Francophobic and misogynist connotations. More importantly however the GLC's rationale of deciding for Londoners what constitutes acceptability echoes the BBFC's paternalistic role in protecting citizens from the 'shame' of being exposed to 'indecent' texts.

The following day, coverage in British tabloid *The Daily Mail* added that chairman of the viewing committee, Phill Basset opined, 'under our old standard we might have let *The Story of O* be shown, but not now. *It's rubbish and we felt it would be likely to outrage public decency*.' (Basset in Gilchrist, 1976: n.p. my emphasis). That a text can be simultaneously without quality (i.e., 'rubbish') and yet still able to 'outrage public decency' – rather than for instance, disinterest or bore – seems at first a contradiction, yet it recalls both the nineteenth century Penny Dreadful debates (see Barker, 1997; Murdock, 1997; and Petley, 1997), and foreshadows the Video Nasties 'crisis' of 1980s Britain (see Barker,1984; Petley, 2011; Egan, 2012) both of which displayed uniquely British cultural anxieties around the public consumption of mass media.

In May of 1978, the film was resubmitted to the BBFC in cut form. After much discussion at the BBFC as to whether the film's status as fictional fantasy contextualised its content, the film was once again rejected. Accordingly, the BBFC released the following official communication, titled 'FILMS REFUSED A CERTIFICATE, MAY BULLETIN, 1978 STORY OF O, THE (HISTOIRE D'O)' in which the same rhetoric is wielded:

> Refused a certificate in November 1975 [*Histoire d'O*] has been seen by us on a number of occasions during the last three years, and at every stage we have felt it presents insuperable difficulties given the current guidelines for BBFC censorship. This view was confirmed by the action of

> Parliament last year [1977] bringing cinema under the control of the Obscene Publications Act of 1959, since we have always felt that the "deprave and corrupt" test, prescribed in the act and derived from the old common-law charge of obscene libel, would be the one to apply to this film. […] In the past the Board has occasionally allowed details of sadistic practices where they reflect either a sickness to be pitied, as in THE NIGHT PORTER […] or where the behaviour is that of an unsympathetic psychopathic villain as in the BRUTE [sic]; or where the relationship in some ways reflects individual deviant psychology in THE CHOIR BOYS. We have been careful, however, never to grant a certificate to a film which appears to encourage such practices as a general rule, which THE STORY OF O most certainly does. (BBFC, 1978: n.p.)

Here *Histoire d'O* then, it is argued, offered a real and present danger to British (mass, working class) audiences precisely through its refusal to present sadomasochism as a deviant psychology, a pathology to be 'pitied', and to be 'cured', echoing radical feminist concerns that the novel constructed O as object-victim. Thus, the BBFC too deny O her own subjectivity and agency.

Further, audiences are again reinforced as lacking in interpretive repertoires or the apparent readerly intellect required for a nuanced understanding of the text as fantasy, over realist, moralist tract:

> It has been argued that the film is a fantasy, and yet there is little evidence that audiences will regard it as such, since everything is portrayed in naturalistic fashion. Most worrying of all however, is the fact that the film implies that sadism is in no way harmful, which is a major departure from the theme of the book. We have seen the film in many versions: first at somewhere more than an hour and three quarters; then at an hour 41 minutes, the length at which it was released in Paris; and with progressively more material cut. The current version was submitted at approximately one hour 16 minutes, and *there is no doubt that the cuts have softened the emphasis on flagellation and dominance. These still remain the subject of the film, however, since the continual, painful punishment inflicted on 'O' is discussed throughout. And she is shown thriving on her treatment. […] THE STORY OF O attempts to sell sadism*

without naming the price […] The price makes all the difference to the artistic and the moral truth, and it explains why the book, as opposed to the film, has never seemed vulnerable to the law.' (ibid., my emphasis)

For the British censor(s) then, there are three key foci of the film's deprivation. Firstly we are told that *Histoire d'O* is so naturalistic in form that uneducated viewers might not be able to distinguish it from reality, though recall critics' observations of its ultra 'softcoreness', its 'Vaseline lens' (Moskowitz, 1975: 18), of its being 'like a cross between a Biba commercial and a progressive rock video, awash with knee-booted shaggy-haircut 'chicks' drifting across misty landscapes in pseudo-medieval frocks' (Williams, 1999: online). Further, even the film's trailer declares it a work of fiction, clearly stating that it is 'Based on the famous novel by Pauline RÉAGE [sic] Jean-Jacques PAUVERT Published [;] The masterpiece of EROTIC LITERATURE', as well as starring the recognisable British actor Anthony Steele, who audiences would have recognised from a plethora of 1950 and 60s film roles and television appearances throughout the 1970s, as well as a high profile marriage to Swedish actress Anita Ekberg and a two-nation manhunt for him in 1960 after he suspiciously disappeared from West Germany (Anon, 1960a; and Anon, 1960b).

That audiences would believe *Histoire d'O* to be real then, is hard to believe. In addition, as earlier examined, Jaeckin and Japrisot's deliberately moralistic ending, in comparison to the novel's supposed retributive or tragic closure as I have argued in Chapter Four, is revisionary for there are two endings in which only one does O die. Thus, the BBFC's interpretation of the novel's narrative is revisionist, painting it as a moral tract on the harms of sadomasochism, a reading not borne out in the text. Lastly, the assertion of the narrative consisting of 'the continual, painful punishment inflicted on 'O'' (BBFC, 1978: n.p.) is, much like the feminist readings of the novel, also revisionist for it focuses on the trials at Roissy (and perhaps also to a lesser extent, Samois), wilfully ignoring the swathes of scenes that focus not upon SM but upon love. Again, it is hard then to think that the BBFC's decisions were not directly influenced by feminist readings of the time.

Nonetheless the BBFC continues:

> The office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has informed us that films apparently endorsing the practice of sadism are among those currently most likely to be convicted under the "deprave and corrupt" test and the principal argument for the prosecution with such a film would be that it incites crime. Criminal assault in this country is the infliction of serious bodily harm, with or without the victim's consent, since consent in such cases is no defence. The punishment inflicted on 'O' in this film would, in reality, lead to serious injury; yet there is no evidence of such consideration in the film. For that reason it seems to us both a dangerous and a potentially illegal work to license for public exhibition in this country. (BBFC, 1978: n.p.)

It is therefore the acts which are depicted which are of greatest concern to censorial bodies. That she heals quickly and with seemingly no lasting pain appears irrelevant to their assertion that such sexual practices constitute a form of harm both for O but more urgently for the film's potential viewers.

Whilst debate continued well into the 1980s on the film's supposed illegality, it finally received certification in 2000, twenty-five years after its initial worldwide release. The BBFC news release, in February of that year fascinatingly asserted that:

> The Story of O, a French language film dubbed into English, has been passed '18' uncut for cinema exhibition. The film was a 'cause celebre' when released in the 1970s and was refused certificate by the BBFC when it was first submitted in 1975. The version now classified by the BBFC has been pre-cut by approximately eight minutes and is five minutes shorter than the version rejected in 1975. The film, whose theme is sadomasochism is *very much a work of its time*. Much of the action is conveyed by the facial expressions of the characters. Explicit detail, in the present version, is avoided. The main female character, the O of its title, is throughout *free to withdraw her participation in the events portrayed*. The board is satisfied that the film falls within its published Guidelines for '18' rated films. (BBFC, 2000a: n.p., my emphasis)[5]

An additional, albeit brief announcement by the BBFC in its annual review further presents a strikingly opposite position to that of the board's rejection:

> The board's policy on works featuring sadomasochistic sexual activity has always been concerned with possible harm, to themselves or to others, caused by the actions of those who might be encouraged to copy such behaviour. *The Story of O*, a French *soft-core sex film of the seventies* in which a woman is schooled in sadomasochistic sex to please her lover, including *willingly submitting* to whippings, was resubmitted 25 years after it was rejected in 1975. *The lack of strong sadistic or sexual detail, the evident consent of the female character and the extremely dated style led to the judgement that it was no longer necessary to deny adults the right to see this film*. (BBFC, 2000b: 37, my emphasis)

Histoire d'O's approval by the board for an 18 certification thus hinges on two key factors: firstly, its age with now reads as more of a period piece thus reducing any perceived contemporary realism in the text, and secondly, its foregrounding of consent, which confers with my own reading offered earlier in this chapter. The latter of which of course has not changed in the interceding years and was always a heavily foregrounded element of the film's narrative, thus we can observe an attitidunal shift in the way in which the BBFC conceptualises sadomasochistic sexual practice, and the role consent plays within this discourse as examined further in what follows. Since the decision to pass *Histoire d'O* was, at time of writing, made less than twenty years ago, the rationale for its certification is not yet accessible, closed within its archive. Thus, we must examine their policy to ask: beyond this 70s text becoming dated then, what had changed during the 25-year interim from when *Histoire d'O* had first been refused certification?

Firstly, the technological advancements in home cinema vis-à-vis camcorders and VHS had led both to a proliferation of home-made hardcore pornography. Further and connectedly, the R v. Brown trial had seen a group of gay men arrested for photographed and videotaped SM play parties in an investigation headed by the Obscene Publications' Squad, claiming that they were engaging in a murder enquiry. Yet when it transpired in the ensuing enquiry that none of the men had been murdered, nor suffered injuries severe enough to require

medical attention, the case was in fact not dropped. Instead, in 1989, the submissive men who had participated were charged with abetting assaults upon themselves under the Offences Against the Person Act (1861). As White explains, Judge Rant, who presided over the trial, ruled ‘that the activities in question fell outside the exceptions to the law of assault and ruled that a defense of consent was ineligible. [… In addition] The Appeal Court (and subsequent courts) responded by asserting that it was not “in the public interest” to allow people to engage in such activities’ (White, 2006: 170).

The Spannermen's defence unsuccessfully further appealed to the House of Lords, where the convictions were upheld by a majority vote of three to two, in an ideological split of those who considered sadomasochism as sexual, and those who could not consider it anything other than violence. Lord Templeman explained further his siding as follows: ’In my opinion sado-masochism is not only concerned with sex. Sado-masochism is also concerned with violence. The evidence discloses that the practices of the appellants were unpredictably dangerous and degrading to body and mind and were developed with increasing barbarity […]’ (Templeman, R v Brown, 1993 quoted in White, 2006: 172). While the defendants would later appeal to the European Court of Human Rights the UK judge's verdict was ultimately unanimously upheld.

White asserts that the case, and resulting criminalisation, arose from the law 'seek[ing] to control […] the Theatre of Pleasure in which bodies, identities and pleasures are fluid, boundless and performative' (White, 2006: 187). This positioning of sadomasochism as fluid, performative and eroticised transgression echoes the pro-SM feminist discourse examined in Chapter 3, while the courts’ vilification of sadomasochistic practice as 'dangerous’, ‘degrading’, ‘barbarous’ and 'against the public good' reflects the anti-SM position, particularly when the issue of consent is denied (cf. Chaline, 2005 on R v. Brown, consent and UK Law).

Secondly, and in contrast, the BBFC (2000c) public consultation ‘Sense and Sensibilities: Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines’ was published, its findings indicating a shift in the British cultural consciousness away from

concerns over depictions of sex and sexuality (4; 23), Interestingly, respondents noted the chasm between sex that could be practiced, rather than watched; concluding than anything legal be permitted (24). Additionally, 2000 saw a relaxation of the R-18 certificate in reaction to the proliferation of, and access to, hardcore pornography online. The category thus expanded to 'a special and legally-restricted classification primarily for explicit works of consenting sex or strong fetish material involving adults' (BBFC, 2014: 24). Exempt from this R-18 banding however was:

> material […] in breach of the criminal law, including material judged to be obscene under the current interpretation of the Obscene Publications Act 1959; […] the portrayal of sexual activity which involves real or apparent lack of consent. Any form of physical restraint which prevents participants from indicating a withdrawal of consent; the infliction of pain or acts which may cause lasting physical harm, whether real or (in a sexual context) simulated. Some allowance may be made for moderate, non-abusive, consensual activity […] and sexual threats, humiliation or abuse which do not form part of a clearly consenting role-playing game. Strong physical or verbal abuse, even if consensual, is unlikely to be acceptable. (ibid.)

Thus, the evocation of consent is cornerstone to the acceptability of sadomasochistic pornographic texts, despite as we recall, the BBFC's 1978 assertion that it matters not whether such acts are consensual, for 'with or without the victim's consent, since consent in such cases is no defence' (BBFC, 1978: n.p). Such a shift thus echoes what Downing (2007) notes to be the advancement of acceptability politics of BDSM practitioners in the cultural mainstream, through the (problematic) rubric of 'Safe, Sane and Consensual' (cf. Williams et al., 2014). Yet curiously, for an 18 certificate the following exemptions from certification apply:

> where material or treatment appears to us to risk harm to individuals or, through their behaviour, to society. For example, the detailed portrayal of violent or dangerous acts, or of illegal drug use, which may cause harm to public health or morals. This may include portrayals of sadistic or sexual violence which make this violence look appealing; reinforce the suggestion that victims enjoy sexual violence; or which invite viewer complicity in sexual violence or other harmful violent activities (BBFC, 2014: 24)

Why then would a text in which SM is glamourised, and in which both O and (arguably) the viewer take pleasure therein, be permissible at an 18 certificate? In addition to the BBFC's public consultation, the early 2000s also saw an increase in non-normative (and often unsimulated) sex in mainstream films more hardcore in content, often exploring themes of sexual violence though not as sex films, that is, to borrow once more the over simplistic and moralistic language of the BBFC: 'works whose primary purpose is sexual arousal or stimulation' (2014: 23); i.e., such films as: Catherine Briellat's *Romance* (1999) and Dogme 95's *The Idiots* (1999); and followed by texts such as *Baise Moi* (2001) and *Irreversible* (2002)[6]. *Histoire d'O*, as a result, had become comparatively soft-core and tame, and, added to its dated 1970s aesthetic became decidedly *harmless*.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for a consideration of *Histoire d'O* as part of *Story of O*'s expanded storyworld. However, close textual analysis has evidenced that rather than opening up the novel's narrative potentialities outside of the constraints of literature and language, the film compounds the problematic dominant ideology of its source text(s) which privileges hetero and monogornormative love at its core. Further, the adaptation's centralisation of consent, and decentralisation of sex excludes a counter-reading of O's desire and thus agency. Despite this, discourse analysis of both film criticism and censorship uncovers contradictory and shifting discursive truths about the film, wich may both destabilise the fixity of its dominant ideology and meaning thus providing a unique case study for changing British attitudes to female masochism and submission.

In the following chapter we therefore turn to an examination of a far more hardcore adaptation, Kink.com's *Training of O: The Training of Madison Young* (2007) to suggested that the medium may be less problematic than in soft-core as discussed herein. While in this adaptive pornographic text Réage's narrative fades into the background and there exists little narrative fidelity, what is instead

foregrounded, unlike in *Histoire d'O* is the performative embodiment of O which blurs performativity and authenticity, fantasy and reality, in its status like *Story of O* as a (performed) love letter.

Notes

1. I have endeavoured throughout the course of this thesis to obtain a truly 'uncut' version of *Story of O*, a status many DVD releases make claim to, yet have omitted scenes often squirreled into their bonus material, and/or a runtime of between 90 to 100 minutes. I suspect therefore, that there existed no fully uncut theatrical version. If we return to the BBFC's runtimes we are told:

   > We have seen the film in many versions: first at somewhere more than an hour and three quarters; then at an hour 41 minutes, the length at which it was released in Paris; and with progressively more material cut. The current version was submitted at approximately one hour 16 minutes (BBFC, 1978: n.p.);

   and later, 'The version now classified by the BBFC has been pre-cut by approximately eight minutes and is five minutes shorter than the version rejected in 1975' (BBFC, 2000a: n.p). I estimate the full run time therefore to be in the region of 1 hour 45, with the BBFC classified edit at 1 hour 40. For the purposes of the analysis that follows I have primarily used the Arrow DVD version which runs at a total of 1 hour 41 minutes. In addition, the fullest runtime, which I have used to supplement this analysis is a Russian dubbed bootleg, with a runtime of 1 hour and 49 minutes. The time difference between the two can be attributed to two key differences: firstly, the overall playback speed which has been slightly slowed, I infer to allow more on-screen time for the dubbing, or perhaps as a NTSC versus PAL slippage. Secondly, this longer version incorporates one of the deleted scenes to be found on the Arrow DVD bonus materials, of Renè and O in her apartment anticipating her visit to Sir Stephen; a relatively inconsequential omission. As a result, therefore, I am reasonably confident that the versions I have used are akin to those seen by cinematic audiences.

2. While outside of the concerns of this chapter which is primarily concerned with narrative and characterisation, it should however be noted that *Histoire d'O* has a prominent soundtrack in which meaning is of course both conveyed and underpinned. See Butkus (2010), and Pääkkölä (2016) for discussions of the role of music in sadomasochistic erotic film including *Histoire d'O*.
3. That Deigham (2010) goes as far as to describe the narrative as one of 'anarchistic, antibourgeois subtext' (143) is also however revisionary, and clearly ignores the highly problematic roles both race and class play herein, not least O's 'knapsack of white privilege' (McIntosh, 1989).
4. I leave it to the reader to decide as to why Trevelyan thought *Histoire d'O* would be of particular interest to himself and his wife. Further, the letter was found along with some torn pages of a photo special from French periodical *L'Express* from September of 1975 ('the enclosed paper'). Its cover features Corinne Clery nude with whip marks across her chest, bare breasted and hair sweaty and mangled. One page has been torn out but remains within the issue, this is page 71 and 72. Page 71 shows Clery again bare breasted and bound with hands cuffed, high above her head and 72 displays an orgasmic Clery, with two lovers – seemingly Renè and Pierre, though they are obscured. The image displays no nudity, but it is clear that her left wrist is bound in a leather cuff. Since the entire issue is in French, one wonders whether Ferman would have been able to read the articles contained within, or whether it was to share the imagery, for the titillation that the BBFC worried *Histoire d'O* would provide audiences.
5. I would suggest that the term 'cause celebre' is here used can only curiously be a reference to Trevelyan's 1975 letter (see n. 4).
6. While outside of the time period examined in this chapter, see Attwood and Smith, 2010 for a discussion on the implications of section 5 of the recent Criminal Justice and Immigration Act (2008) on pornography in the UK.

Chapter Seven – *The Training of Madison Young*[1]

Introduction

If *Histoire d'O*, as examined in the previous chapter ,was particularly problematic in its aversion of its gaze and refusal to directly represent O's sexual desire and submission, these qualities can be found in abundance in the locale of online hard-core BDSM pornography. This chapter therefore examines the multi-million-dollar internet pornography studio Kink.com's hardcore adaptation, *The Training of O*: *The Training of Madison Young* as adaptation. Principally analysis is here concerned with analysis of the series' plot and ideology, and the discourses that are produced by and around Kink.com and Madison Young's training. I am less interested in the sexual acts that Young performs, than I am in the 'truths' that construct their meaning. However, I am also interested in the affordances that Young's performance offers, and how the hard-core mode offers us new ways to think of O's labour, agency and embodiment.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the contested term of 'authenticity' and its relation to hard-core pornography both in genre and performance. An examination of Kink.com's marketing strategy as 'authentic' 'consensual' 'community', and Madison Young's narrative around her *Training of O* episodes reveals the mobilisation of authenticity and consent as discourses which legitimise and construct a truth of female submission and masochism in this locale. This is evidenced by a close textual analysis of *The Training of Madison Young*, comprised of four episodes or 'days' which total a runtime of over three and half hours.

Further, I argue that whilst *The Training of O* bearing little fidelity to the narrative of its source text, *Story of O* (despite Kink.com drawing heavily upon it in its marketing of the channel) *The Training of Madison Young* is a rich text for analysis, in not only its blurring of fantasy and reality, authenticity and performance, but further like the novel before it, in its status as a BDSM love letter couched in heteronormativity yet lacking the novel's queer desire and

pluralities. This chapter closes with a re-consideration of Sontag's assertion of O's 'radical passivity' through a comparative discussion of *The Training of Madison Young* and *Sleeping Beauty* (2011).

Hard-core Pornography and Authenticity

Before beginning to analyse the hard-core adaptation *The Training of Madison Young*, it is important to consider how this mode of adaptation differs from soft-core, namely in its representation of authenticity. In what follows I want to draw focus to two specific facets of authenticity in hard-core: firstly, in relation to Sadomasochistic pornography as a genre; and secondly to the complexities of authenticity in performance and sexual practice moreover.

Linda Williams, in her highly influential monograph *Hardcore: Power, pleasure and the 'frenzy of the visible'* (1989) writes of two main ontological modes in sadomasochistic pornography. Firstly, in what she terms 'aesthetic sadomasochism', in keeping with *Histoire d'O* as examined in the previous chapter, violence 'is not real, nor does it aim at the effect of reality. Here the *effect* of violence—the slap, the whip lash [sic], the flinch—is created through editing, acting, and sound effects; the "frenzy of the visible" is not offered as hard core [sic]' (Williams, 1989: 201). Secondly, in amateur sadomasochism and 'isolated sadie-max' (impact play focused scenes)

> both attempt to create in the mind of the viewer an impression of reality, a violence that is […] "hard core" [sic] […] The violence in these films is thus quite opposite in its effect to the special-effects violence of the slasher horror film, where we know that the actor has not been slashed but the narrative asks us to believe it anyway. Here knowledge and belief converge. Ultimately we do not *know* that the violence is real, but we *think* it is. (ibid., emphasis in original)

It is this mode, while neither conforming to the genres of amateur porn or sadie-max (should such a term still be in usage) that typifies Kink.com's content, which is marketed as both 'authentic' and 'real', and performed by models who we are told legitimately enjoy and engage in BDSM practice in their personal lives, as explored in the following sub-sections.

In *Carnal Resonances, Affect and Online Pornography* (2011) Susanna Paasonen observes the blurring of amateur vs. commercial porn as follows:

> The divisions between amateur and professional pornography involve complex yet dualistic notions—such as authenticity versus artifice and the homespun versus the commercial. These divisions also involve differences in motivation: amateurs assumedly do what they do for the love of it (as the Latin root of that word, *amare,* "to love" suggests) and professionals are motivated by money. The boundaries become blurred in amateur porn, however, because some sites offer (modest) fees for videos and images that the users upload, and many others require (less modest) membership fees for accessing them. All this renders "labours of love" a form of commercial sex (Paasonen, 2011: 85).

Kink.com's content, as discussed in further detail below, despite being a market leader of commercial BDSM and operating on a significantly priced subscription fee basis (at time of writing around thirty US dollars per month) it aims to create an amateur style 'community' where models perform for their love of BDSM and its authentic pleasure.

Indeed, BDSM performer (and filmmaker) Madison Young writes in *Porn Studies*, 'Authenticity and its Role Within Feminist Pornography', that 'authentic pleasure' is both 'revolutionary' (Young, 2014b: 186—187) and fundamentally feminist (187). Further, she argues

> We are not a series of buttons and formulas, we are not a face and a body of airbrushed sameness; we are a celebration of difference. Our authenticity is manifest in different moans, screams, yelps of pleasure, of ecstasy. […] Choice empowers us all [… and t]his results in the expression of authentic desire, authentic sexual pleasure, in a way that is honest and true to the individual. […] In giving space for the authentic expression of self, we are creating space for performers to be valued and recognized as individuals as well as creating space and permission for the viewer to explore their own authentic sense of self. (187—188)

For Young both here and as we will see in the analysis that follows, authenticity is an expression of authentic desire, pleasure and self. Contrastingly however,

Berg (2017) argues that this mode of authenticity can itself be considered a performance ‘of being oneself and wanting to be there—and, emphatically, being there not just for the money’ (Berg, 2017: 671) Here once more we can observe a problematic binary modality, of authenticity vs performativity as not distinct concepts but instead blurred and overlapping.

In response to Young, porn producer and performer Vex Ashley 2016’s forum piece *Porn – artifice – performance – and the problem of authenticit*y argues against the notion that ‘‘real’ sex is not and cannot be performative’ (187). Ashley continues further asking ‘is real art ever truly ‘authentic’; that is, made without any consideration for its audience?’ (188) Instead she argues that ‘[u]nreality in porn exists in a spectrum’ (189), and bitingly proffers that

> Authentic pleasure every time is only truly possible for those with the luxury of only taking jobs and working with partners that excite them, an attractive but essentially unrealistic ideal for most workers. (188)

This echoes ex-performer Kitty Stryker’s 2015 blog post *Seems Legit: Authenticity, Performativity and Sex* in which she asserts that feminists should be less concerned with the performativity of sex and sex work, than with the damage caused by working under capitalism, a point also made by performer Siouxsie Q: ‘I would like to see more emphasis placed on fair labor practices than on whether or not I have a "real" orgasm.’ (Q, 2014: online) Further, Stryker asks:

> who decides, then, what is authentic and what is performative? Are these actually opposite sides of the spectrum? […] Honestly, most of my sex is performative, […a]nd honestly, what’s wrong with it if I want to moan a little louder because it gets my partner off? Is having sex that is more choreographed than the sort you’d have “naturally” inherently bad? (Stryker, 2015: online)

Thus, the notions of ‘authenticity’ and ‘performativity’ as ‘good’ and bad ‘respectively’ are problematised, as is the notion of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ sex (recall Downing, 2012 in Chapter Two), further blurring the lines of demarcation. Despite this, as will be examined in the following section, such contested concepts are integral to Kink.com and *The Training of O*’s brand identity.

Kink.com, *The Training of O* and Madison Young

Derided as ‘torture porn’ (Whisnant, 2012) and the ‘Abu Ghraib’ of pornography (Dines, 2013), Kink.com was founded, managed and owned by CEO Peter Acworth in 1997 as 'Cybernet Entertainment’, and glamourised in the 2013 documentary KINK (dir. Christina A. Voros; see Davin, 2017), The site is heavily marketed as both authentic and consensual BDSM pornography:

> Peter [Acworth]'s dream all along was to create this 24/7 world that modeled the principles of *consensual power exchange* and *personal development*, and to create the kind of explicitly erotic power structure that was usually viewed strictly as a fantasy (Kink.com n.d.a: online, my emphasis).

Kink.com’s USP is thus '*genuine* fetish material, *real* bondage, the *real* fetish experience' (Acworth in Adult DVD Talk, 2008: n.p., my emphasis). Yet while Kink.com markets itself heavily as ethical, consensual porn (as follows), this has been called into question during the publicised wage debates of ‘camgirl’[2] employee performers at the (historical) Kink.com ran sub-site, KinkLive (cf. Holloway, 2012; Hall, 2012; Ackworth, 2012; Conger, 2013; and Gall, 2016 on unionisation)[3]. This is an important consideration given that as Nencel (2012) notes, many performers began as camgirls before progressing onto main site content.

Further, Kink.com has also been critiqued for its lack of performer diversity (cf. Ingraham, 2016; and Liberman 2017) which Nencel terms a ‘homogenous demographic’ (Nencel, 2012: 34). Additional controversies surrounding Kink.com include, Ball’s (2016) critique of the studio’s Pride prison themed party, Young’s (2014a) discussion of cocaine use and firearms at Kink.com, as well as the dropping of the studio’s star performer, James Deen after numerous rape allegations (see Potter, 2016; cf. Smith and Taylor-Harman, 2017). Yet the site still occupies a prominent market position in catering for a wide range of BDSM related interests.

For the purposes of clarity, it is worth therefore briefly examining how the specific site – or text – examined in this chapter, *The Training of O,* is not wholly representative of the range of pornographic material Kink.com offers across its numerous sub-sites or 'channels'. At time of writing (October 2017), Kink.com comprises of a total of 57 channels. Predominantly these fall into the admittedly broad and problematic categories of: Gay (12); Lesbian (6); 'Transsexual' (see Stryker, 2008) (2); and most predominantly, heterosexual pornographies (27). Of this latter (23) are femsub[4], and (14) femdom[5]. Despite this variance, *The Training of O* nonetheless thus occupies a central position within Kink.com's repertoire, as heterosexual BDSM femsub content which remains their predominant focus.

While some scholars have argued that narrative is, at best, secondary in pornography (Lehman, 1995, cf. Williams, 1989), this sense of authenticity is also achieved through *The Training of O*'s alignment with the novel and its narrative:

> Based on The Story of O, the erotic novel by Pauline Reage [sic] TheTrainingOfO.com is 4 days of reality porn – real slave training, not staged. It is the real journey of truly submissive women who wish to become trained sexual slaves for men. (Kink.com, n.d. a: online)

Further, this constructed sense of authenticity with Réage's source text stretches beyond simple promotional wording. Both *The Training Of O* and its connected site *The Upper Floor* use the imposing architecture of the San Francisco Armory's two thousand square feet space – Kink.com's headquarters, controversially purchased after over thirty years of neglect, for a reputed cost of 14.5 million dollars (Mooallem, 2007: online) – to communicate interior design (and classed hierarchy) à la Roissy (cf. Kein, 2012; Harman, 2013). The masters and slaves-in-residence quarters in the Armory are thus lavishly decorated in Edwardian style finery for *The Upper Floor,* while the slaves-in-training and their dehumanised, environmental, and indeed implied sexual squalor, are housed in the dank, dark 'dungeony' (Acworth in Adult DVD Talk, 2008: online) basement for the *Training of O*.

‘Slaves’ who undergo and complete their full *Training of O* are then allowed to progress to the literal upper floor of the title, in order to serve and entertain a hierarchical 'party', or grouping of their 'community':

> At The Upper Floor, however, the complex, *negotiated social structure is real*, rather than the ad-hoc entertainments offered by more casual SM or D/s play [...] It is hoped that through broadcasting the full-time environs of The Upper Floor, Kink.com may encourage other players to create their own 24/7 households *practicing negotiated hierarchy* [...] (Kink.com n.d. b: online)

Thus, the continuing mobilisation of Kink.com's rhetoric of the 'real', 'consensual power exchange' within a 'negotiated social structure' contrasts strongly against the radical feminist readings, who attacked *The Story of O*'s absence of consent and agency. With consent and authenticity nonetheless placed squarely within the conception, production and promotion of their texts, what instead is the O of Kink.com's *The Training of O*?

Madison Young’s 2014 autobiography, *Daddy*, gives invaluable insight into her participation in *Training of O*, and of the site’s inception, by her partner James Mogul. Its foreword, by porn performer and artist Annie Sprinkle sets the scene for that which will follow, both acting as a framing device validating the memoir as truth – ‘I can vouch for its *authenticity*. I was there’ (Sprinkle, 2014: xii, my emphasis) – and in its proclamation of the narrative as contemporaneous fairytale, in which Madison and her partner James Mogul are its heroes, its star-crossed lovers – ‘She’s a fierce BDSM gladiator, boldly going where few women dare. James is a master alchemist of sexual ecstasy. Don’t compare yourself. Few of us are at their level. […] They are mythical creatures but relatively accessible – if you are worthy.’ (xi) She continues, monumentally saccharine in her address:

> Can Madison Young win the heart of *Sir* James? How does *Sir* James get so many women to kneel at his feet, and submit to his titillating tortures? How does James’ magic camera spin digital images into gold? Can Madison maintain her feminist identity and woman of power status whilst bottoming to a man? (xi—xii, my emphasis)

The parallels between Young and Réage's narrative, or, indeed between Young and O's, are rife. The memoir is no less grandiose than its foreword, as Young states that '[a]s a couple, we are rarely sighted, celebrated icons of dominance and submission' (Young, 2014a: 30), who, in public appearances were 'allowing ourselves […] to bask in the gratitude and fandom that we earned through years of trying to bring *authentic* moments to the once void adult industry' (31). This discursively constructed sense of authenticity, as blurred in Young's *Training of O* scenes discussed below, is central to her narrative as she asserts that she and James 'were […] *artists and educators* before we became performers and directors. In our porn work we had tried to bring the *authenticity* of the BDSM community forth for the masses' (26, my emphasis) and that '[m]y focus on *genuine pleasure, empowered performance* and positive relationships made me *an advocate for authenticity*, in a world made of plastic' (27, my emphasis).

Young discusses her entrance into Kink.com, and debut as a porn performer after having responded to Ackworth's Craigslist ad, in 2003. Arriving at their office to be interviewed, she recalls the experience:

> The foreign environment overwhelmed me. It was a bustling hub of bondage, a Grand Central Station of intense pornographic experiences […] I stuffed my hands into my pockets and gazed up at framed photographs on the walls depicting women in different states of vulnerability; tied and collared their faces set permanently in orgasmic pleasure, perseverance, and strength while mascara dripped down their cheeks. It seemed *genuine and uncontrived*, like a documentary photography exhibit on sex and emotional vulnerability (Young, 2014a: 96, my emphasis)

Kink.com, which had then been operating for six years was about to fill the extreme BDSM online pornography market void caused by the closure of inspiration and competitor Insex (1997-2005)[6]. It offered not only Young a route to finance her San Francisco art space, 'Femina Potens', but further she suggests, an outlet in which 'I was an activist, *revolutionizing porn* by being a woman enjoying herself in bondage' (109, my emphasis), in which '[t]he camera had become a safe container for me, a place for my fantasies to exist without interfering with the domestic home life I had built' (110). Here pornography is

thus situated as a distinctly unproblematic fantasy 'safespace' locale for her 'revolutionary' female sexual desire, completely dislocated from the patriarchal (if not misogynistic) context of industry and audience. Young would go on to work for Kink.com for a decade, amassing at her estimation over 150 scenes (173)[7].

For James Mogul, a Seattle bondage photographer, Kink.com offered not only an opportunity to be geographically close to Madison Young as their relationship burgeoned, but also the opportunity to develop his own sub-site, what would become *The Training of* O in 2007. Young writes,

> He was hesitant, at first, to direct for KINK, since his work is much *more artistic than pornographic*, and he expressed mixed feelings around the *pornification and appropriation* of the BDSM community *for mass consumption and commercial gain*. But his trips to San Francisco to visit me became so frequent that he needed a way to pay for all the travel involved. KINK became the solution. James' eye *for visual beauty and strong narratives* won him an offer of full time employment and to be able to live a life with a financial cushion, a savings [sic], a retirement, seemed like the responsible thing for Daddy to do. Just like that, our lives were swept away by KINK, but I was holding Daddy's hand in mine. (124—5, my emphasis)

Here too James Mogul is positioned as revolutionary, an authentic 'artist' contra capitalism and consumption, despite working for a multi-million-dollar, hardcore giant.

However, Young writes, what Madison and James had hoped would bring them closer together, instead pushed them further apart as more and more of his time went into creating the site and its content, at the San Francisco armory (125; 151—2; 215; 225—226). Further, Young recounts that just days before *Training of O* was to go live, James admitted that he was not only its director, but also performed in its scenes (152). For Young this was a betrayal, as he had assured her that sex scenes were performed by 'stunt cocks' (ibid.,). She expands as follows:

> There was suddenly a price tag on him. Girls he hired would have the experience of being his submissive for an entire week: including bondage, sex, and emotional intimacy. It was more than simply an exchange of bodily fluids and physical closeness. It was a built-in one week on-camera relationship with my Daddy and it was eating me alive. […] The experiences lingered on well past their on-screen training, and these girls yearned for something more with James. They called him while we were at dinner and clung onto him at company dinner parties, greedily drawing his attention away from me. […] We discussed what we were comfortable with each other doing with strangers and what was to be reserved for our home life. The weekly site updates taunted me with images of James breaking our agreements. […] The site was an entity of its own, I felt like I could trust Daddy, but not the site. (151—152)

The division between James as (virtuous) artist and authentic practitioner, and Kink.com's hardcore as (villainous) commercial autonomous industrial machine is here compounded (see Kein, 2012 for a questionable argument that the two are not necessarily incongruous). This rejects, and yet ultimately reinforces the dialectic of desire, pleasure and commodity consumption in Kink.com's product central to its success as explored by Miller (2012). Further, Young positions Mogul as victim of its machinations, evading his position as a cog within it.

Later that year (2007), in an attempt to salvage their relationship and regain his attention and affections, Young decided to undergo her own *Training of O, The Training of Madison Young*. She elucidates her experience as follows:

> This was a complicated moment; our relationship – life, love, and drama, was playing out in front of the camera, and was also the source of a paycheck. (179);
>
> This training wasn't a competition between my will and Mr. Mogul's, it was a test: our relationship and our love versus the armory. […] We were trying to rebuild trust in the very rooms in which our vows had been broken. (172)

Again, Young and Mogul are once more situated as resistive, rather than contributing agents, against the machinations of Kink.com. Here the boundaries of pornography as both performative and authentic, both fantasy and the real

are blurred, and thus *Training of O*, like *Story of O* before it, is positioned as a love story.

The Training of Madison Young **(2007)**

The Training of Madison Young is comprised of four episodes or 'days' which total a runtime of over three and half hours (213 minutes total). In what follows, I overview the narrative of the four days, which comprise multiple scenes. Here I want to draw attention to the way in which the narrative bears little fidelity to the plot of the novel, and yet retains great similarity in blurring fantasy with reality, and in its centralisation of Young's journey as a labour of love, or love letter. Further, I am interested in the affordances and limitations that the hard-core medium brings both in representing Young's desire and sexual agency, and in blurring performance and authenticity.

Day 1 (1hr 12m)

Scene 1: James ('Mr') Mogul addresses the camera (and audience) directly, explaining that his girlfriend has been 'petitioning' to train on the site, and also to enter into a service contract with him in their relationship. He announce that this training will combine the two invites the audience to "*come with me, and help me train Madison Young"*.

Scene 2: Madison is suspended in a cage in the armory's 'dungeon' which he hits repeatedly with a 2 by 4 plank of wood. Madison emits high pitched utterings. He announces that they must undertake an interview which "*establishes consent and makes everyone realise that you are here of your own free will*". She confirms that she is there of her own volition. He laughs and asks "Are you aware that you're gonna be tied up, gagged, beaten, fucked, bruised, used, abused and whored out over the course of the next week *all for our members enjoyment*?" he asks, recalling Dworkin's (1974) passive past participles (see Chapter Five). She affirms, adding her enthusiastic consent and stating that she wishes to become a better submissive become more service orientated, and less focused on her own pleasure. They discuss her seeking his

permission to sit down, to not use furniture for the duration of the week, and to adhere to a nightly curfew. This extends beyond the filmed scene, blurring the lines of the performance, and Young's lived experience. In addition, she will be required to undertake 'homework' under each day's training, and to complete a video diary. She affirms throughout with the refrain "Yes Sir".

Scene 3: Mogul affixes a training collar around Young's neck. He commands her to stand on tip-toe, attaching a spreader bar to her ankles. The camera alternates between long shots of her bound and spread body, open, and to close ups of Young's face in anticipatory pleasure. He commands her to penetrate herself with a mounted dildo attached wand. He denies her and orgasm, explaining that "[…] *If you want to submit you have to give up something of yourself.*"

Scene 4: Mogul places on the tips of her toes, and her fingertips bracing the dungeon wall. He asks her how long she can maintain the endurance pose, refusing her initial answer of as long as he commands. The camera cuts to James directly addressing the camera that he is looking both for her endurance and an honest answer. He tells Madison: "When you say something like 'As long as you would like Sir', *that makes me feel like I'm reading a fantasy novel or something like that*." Thus, he rejects *Training of O*'s alignment with *Story of O* as its source text, reiterating the authenticity of *this* pornography. (This both contrasts against, and chimes with Young's recounting of a fan's reaction: '[…] "your *Training of O* series with Mr. Mogul… wow! It was like a romance novel come to life."' (Young, 2014a: 34) She pleads to be released from her position to fellate him, to which he eventually agrees.

Scene 5: She fellates him until he announces, irritated, "*You suck cock like a porn star*! Keep the fucking drool in your mouth, hmm?!" (see Hester, 2014a and 2014b, on hardcore pornography and abject fluids; including 'gagging porn' as displacement for capturing female pleasure; cf. Williams, 1989). "Yes Sir" she refrains, and returns to fellating him, following his instructions. "Do you like sucking cock while *they* watch?" he turns her head towards the camera. She replies affirmatively to Mogul, who makes her address this to the camera. He

pushes her to the ground, thrusting into her violently whilst pulling at her hair. She begs to be permitted to orgasm, and he concedes, “Show *everyone* how you cum, slut. Do it.” He finally ejaculates into his hand, wiping his fingers into her mouth before instructing her clean the fluids from the concrete floor.

Scene 6: Mogul throws the soapy contents of several buckets of water Madison’s body, and hoses her down in a tiled bathroom. He alternates between digitally penetrating her vagina, and slapping her labia, she cries out repeatedly. He reminds her of the video journal she is to keep, “I want to hear what you’re thinking about, I want to hear your internal thought process. She asks him how she can improve tomorrow, and he tells her that he will consider her question.

Scene 7: At the motel James leads a clothed Madison into her room. He gives her one key while keeping the other. They wish each other goodnight. A title card appears’: ‘*To Be Continued*’.

Day 2 (1hr 06m)

Scene 1: Madison’s ‘journal cam’ diary entry, interspersed with footage of the previous day’s training, delivers a monologue from her hotel room:

> […] It feels like the ultimate in, in submission and giving yourself to someone else. *And somehow, in giving up complete freedom, you gain complete freedom.* [...] I can’t wait for tomorrow. I’m completely honoured to be here with the person that I love, and getting to explore all these things with them, and go deeper, with him.

Madison masturbates for the camera, bringing herself to orgasm, then looks at the camera and sighs breathily.

Scene 2: He tells her that to become a better submissive she must think before answering questions. He asks her to explain her understanding of her training collar’s purpose. She looks briefly back and forth to camera, and replies that it is a constant symbol and reminder of her submission. He informs her that her next task is to receive a whipping, without flinching or dropping her gaze. The

whipping begins however Young starts to cry. James stops the scene and the camera loses focus and drops to the ground. When it refocuses, James is speaking reassuringly and soothingly to her. “It’s just a normal BDSM reaction you’re having,” he asserts, “it’s what we all strive for in BDSM right here. *Catharsis*.” She reasserts her consent to continue and the camera operator covers the lens with his hand.

Scene 3: James commands her to thank the audience for watching her masturbate in her video journal. He penetrates her vaginally with a large dildo attached to a long rod until he permits her to orgasm. She thanks him, kissing him. “Say thank you to *them*” he commands, pushing her face towards the camera. “Oh, thank you” she sighs, to camera.

Scene 4: Madison is bound to a table with leather straps. Again, blurring the boundaries of text and audience he informs her that members comments’ have requested to see her spanked, which he undertakes then penetrates her vaginally, then anally. The scene thus recalls Sir Stephen’s anal training of O, a dimension distinctly absent from *Histoire d’O*.

Scene 5: Madison is naked with her arms crossed behind her back. She asks how she can go about learning a routine with him, to which he replies “observation”, and she is set homework of identifying twenty-five points in his home routine.

Scene 6: Mogul visits Madison unannounced at her motel room waking her by pressing his boot onto her shoulders. He commands her to fellate him and reiterates that he is training her to be a service orientated submissive. He ejaculates into her mouth, bids her to “Stay” and tells her not to be late tomorrow, before exiting the room. She remakes her bed on the floor.

Day 3 (1hr 04m)

Scene 1: Madison delivers her video journal monologue to camera from her motel room, interspersed with footage from day two reasserting her enthusiastic consent:

> […]*I could just feel these layers of stuff just, just peeling away.* […] It [sic] felt *this amazing release*. […] I feel like I'm finally paying attention to him. Because I do want to be able to learn his routine, and *that's what this week is really about for me*, is, um, being a good service submissive for him, and I need to be able to learn how to do that. On day three it's going to be my first shoot in front of Mr. Mogul in which another man will be involved. I know that that's, that's part of *giving myself to him*, and that I am his property [inaudible] and *I am very excited by that prospect*.

Scene 2: Mogul and TJ Cummings discuss their plan for Madison. Mogul instructs him to "fetch her, and, um, use and abuse her a little bit […] You should take your time and um, make good use of her […] More than anything I just want her to feel used, whored out." TJ relishes the prospect.

Scene 3: TJ announces himself to Madison, who is chained to a mattress on the floor, working on her 'homework'. "Miss Young, I'm your *valet* for the day" he explains, recalling Roissy's valet Pierre. He begins to flog her genitals and body with increasing sadistic severity. He demands that she fellate him then turns his attention back to flogging and spanking her body, then licking her vulva in exaggerated strokes, biting at her labia. Feeling that he has successfully primed Madison as wanton, he stops, unlocks her chain and commands her to stand.

Scene 4 [segue]: In a corridor TJ instructs Madison to carry heavy pails of water, warning her not to spill a drop.

Scene 5: On the exterior of the armory roof in daytime, Madison, nude places the buckets on the ground. She admits to having spilled some of the contents and TJ tells her that she will be punished, running her through a series of military boot-camp drills with and without the buckets, in her heels. The exercises are interspersed with fellatio. After some time, Mogul then joins them on the roof. He derides her for not working harder. "*The members are going to*

love to see you exercising, Madison Young" TJ asserts, and commands her to thank them for their suggestion, once again collapsing the boundaries of the text and breaking down the fourth wall. She is visibly exhausted. They command her to return "downstairs" with the remaining buckets, and once again to not spill a drop.

Scene 6: Back in the dungeon interior Madison stands on the concrete plinth, naked with her hands crossed behind her back. As in Roissy, she is instructed to stop "eyeballing" Mogul, and to avert her gaze. They discuss her willingness to have sex with, and to serve other men under his instruction and will. "*Are you willing to let go of me as a lover to be my servant*?" he asks. She begins to cry, explaining that she is crying at the thought of losing him as a lover. He pauses, and asks, "You know you can't be my servant every day, in reality…? Right?" Here the authenticity of the text is concurrently foregrounded, and called into question, the boundaries of the text and reality once again problematised. He continues, tenderly, "You're not going to lose me as a lover, do you understand that?" He asks her if she would like to continue and she agrees, thanking him. They go through her homework list, discussing her twenty-five observations, and he informs her that she will be rewarded by being allowed to worship his boot as a symbol of his power, first orally, then by grinding her vulva against it. "You know," he tells her, "*you're making members very happy by fulfilling these simple requests*".

"You're a masochist, aren't you?" asks Mogul. Madison replies affirmatively. "So, punishment would be ignoring you. […] *That would be the worst possible thing, wouldn't it*?" "Yes Sir", she affirms, as the narrative attempts to recentralise her consent and agentic desire. They discuss TJ the 'valet', and that she will be expected to serve him just as she would Mogul, and that she is to take sexual pleasure in this service. Mogul dismisses Madison, and she exits with TJ.

Scene 7: Mogul addresses the camera, and the audience directly. "I love to whore her out to other men, it's really fucking hot to me" he asserts recalling Rene's attitude in the novel, yet his prosody and body language indicate

discomfort. "*Let's go watch*" – he invites the viewer into a room in which is flogged by TJ while Mogul watches. Finally, TJ ejaculates into her mouth, and makes her show both Mogul and the audience, before commanding her to swallow. Madison exits and Mogul and TJ chat a 'post-game analysis', in which TJ communicates astonishment at her level of masochistic endurance whilst maintaining a smile and asking for more. Mogul thanks TJ for the scene, and they exchange an awkward joke about not wanting to shake fluid covered hands (thus staunchly reinforcing their heterosexuality).

Day 4 (1hr 15m James Mogul, Madison Young and Derrick Pierce)

Scene 1: Madison delivers her video journal monologue to camera, interspersed with footage from day three.

> This week, and what I'm really learning for the future, is how to serve, and…. derive pleasure from serving Mr. Mogul. *That's what it's all about*. […]I was to prove my submission to Mr. Mogul by giving myself to another man […] It was so hot. […] So, I have another night; one more night on the floor here. And, um, at least here at the hotel, and, um, we'll see what tomorrow brings.

She thus reiterates her enthusiastic consent

Scene 2: Madison takes very small stilettoed steps across a dusty floor. She stumbles slightly. Both her arms and her thighs are bound. Mogul whips her with a crop as she walks and encourages her to take longer strides. "There will be no falling down", he asserts. Mogul asks Madison to impart her 'homework', which she explains was to explore the difference between a "lover and a submissive" however he chides her, informing her that the task was instead a "lover and a servant". He asks her what she thinks should be her punishment for this error, and she quietens. She offers to rewrite the paper, which he accepts but however insists is not sufficient 'consequence'. Their wills jostle unexpectedly. "I appreciate your effort in the paper, and *we will post it to the site forum so that everybody can read it*. […] But you will write another with the word 'servant' […] Does that seem reasonable to you?" She asks how long it takes to become a well-trained submissive to his liking. He chuckles, telling her

that she is already to his liking, but admits he doesn't not know the answer and asks her opinion. She pauses and suggests, "a year?" He concurs that a year seems sensible but adds, "Don't you think preferences change over time?" She agrees, and they concur therefore that further re-training should be expected as the relationship grows. The boundaries of the text therefore expand once more. "So maybe there is no such thing as a perfect submissive?" he ruminates, "Is there such thing as a perfect dominant?" he asks, "a perfect person?" He has one last task for her – to go upstairs and use everything she has learned to seduce Derrick Pierce. To camera, Mogul asserts that "my little slut's turning into a service slut. It's very erotic. I'm very turned on. I'm gonna have her go upstairs and fuck Derrick Pierce like crazy. I think she's learning something, *do you*?"

Scene 3: After a pep talk from Mogul, Madison enters a day-lit bedroom, and approaches Derrick who is sat cross-legged on a chair. Madison attempts to impress him with her correct execution of her learnt postures, to which he scoffs, barking criticism. He flogs her, chiding her for any movements of recoil. He asks whether he is being too nice to her, and she admits that he should hit her harder, explaining "I derive pleasure from the cane because I'm serving you". She fellates him then he penetrates her. She finally begs him to be permitted to orgasm, screaming operatically. When he is ready to ejaculate, he commands her to fetch a bowl, and she kneels before him with the vessel outstretched as he masturbates. He instructs her to lap the contents up, sparing no drop. She happily complies.

Scene 4: Mogul enters the bedroom and quickly chats to Derrick to ensure that he has been sufficiently happy with Madison's performance. He leaves, and Mogul picks up a large wooden 2 by 4, instructing her to stand over the bed, stimulating herself with a black Hitachi wand. He informs her that he will beat her with a 2 by 4 plank as her reward until she orgasms. Mogul asks Madison to outline the process of establishing a 'service agreement', for the benefit of the member audience, adding "*Maybe they'll get some inspiration for their own agreements, hmm*?" They discuss its importance as a collaborative negotiated document. He permits her to orgasm, and she cries out, but the wand cuts out

and she cries out in desperation. She starts again and finally orgasms. Breathily she thanks him repeatedly.

He instructs her to kneel, and informs her, “it’s time for you to graduate”. He unlocks her heavy chain collar, and commands her to kiss the light, leather collar held in his hand. He tells her to go and compose herself, and then to return for her ‘exit interview’. They both leave, her in the nook of his arm as he wipes a tear from his eye.

Scene 5: Madison kneels before a seated Mogul, on an ornate rug. Rifling through his notes, he begins: “[…] I haven’t scared you off.” “No”, she smiles. “We still have our relationship”. “Yes”, she replies. They discuss her experiences across the days, and the pair discuss her crying and timeout on the second day, with Mogul adding that he did not think ‘they’ would let them ‘publish’ it, owing that her tears could be construed as resulting from the painful whipping. She begins to cry, and he asks, “Would you do it again?” “Yes” she replies. “What are you doing later?” he asks, and they both laugh. “Having dinner and sex with you” she replies. Mogul asks if she remembers a statement made in her video journal, that in ‘giving up freedom you gain complete freedom’. She affirms, and states that she still feels it to be true. She adds, lastly, that she is “very excited to have this, this relationship, D/s relationship in conjunction with our romantic relationship, and in developing both”, and serving him the best that she can. He adds, “this is *just* the beginning” and she repeats the statement, smiling and chuckling. He affixes the leather collar around her neck, which he describes as “a tradition handed down by our elders”, adding “I earned my leather and now I feel like I’m handing it on to you.” They chuckle. “Now let’s get out of here!” he exclaims, slamming shut her file.

Reconsidering Passivity

Meredith Jones' *Sleep, Radical Hospitality, and Makeover's Anti-matter* (2015) amongst other texts considers the Australian feature film *Sleeping Beauty*, released in 2011. The plot, which echoes perhaps *Story of O,* explores the life of unhappy university student Lucy who answering a job advertisement which

transpires to be for 'silver service' in lingerie at an opulent country home. Whilst headstrong she emits an aura of vulnerable youthful purity, clearly demarcated with her pale skin and flaming auburn hair (like Madison Young) which is complemented in white lingerie, against the harsh black outfits and kohled eyes of the other, more seasoned girls. Surrounded by the ageing Australian elite, Lucy's ability to submit herself – in this instance to the demands of a highly sexualised yet domesticated labour environment – is made clear in a scene in which one of the party's guests purposefully trips her up. Lucy, falling to her knees in front of her taunter, simply recoils, takes a deep breath and apologises, picking up a dropped glass and continuing on with her duties. This response foreshadows that which will follow, and establishes Lucy's clear place within, and acceptance of, not only the gendered economical hierarchy, but additionally her role as submissive female to be trained, and indeed perhaps corrupted by her dominant superiors. Soon enough she then progresses to an altogether more bizarre role within this hierarchy as her female boss informs her that her new métier will simply require her to drink some tea and fall into a deep sleep.

She is assured however, that she will not be penetrated, creating a troubling de/sexualised incongruity that we especially as viewers understand, as we are witness to the nocturnal activities that evade Lucy's waking knowledge. One client for instance, in an enfeebled display of his masculine strength attempts to lift and carry her lifeless body, dropping it to the ground, while another who assures Clara that he is impotent and thus offers no threat to the sleeping girl's body instead croaks a barrage of highly sexualised insults and burns her body with the butt of his cigar. Finally, intrigued to witness her mysterious eventide exploits, Lucy sneaks a covert camera into the mansion bedroom, yet upon waking finds not revelatory footage, but instead the figure of Clara looming above her, and beside her, the dead body of another elderly client who presumably wished to die beside her. The film ends with Lucy's scream. Directed and written by the female novelist Julia Leigh, *Sleeping Beauty* thus offers us an alternate yet not dissimilar world to that of O's.

Jones suggests that through *Sleeping Beauty* the inactivity of sleep can be re-read as in fact resistant to the neo-liberal 24/7 hyper-productivity paradigm and moreover a bio-political and moral concern. Further, she argues that these portrayals of the sleeping body are highly gendered, as man 'is mastered in these texts by being re-cast as a site of action whilst around sleeping princesses, we learn that attractiveness and goodness come through extreme passivity: through being seen and not heard' (Jones, 2015: 336). Here I want to re-contextualise Jones' research away from the specificities of slumber and somnambulant [in]activity to a broadening in conjunction with Sontag's (1969) assertion of O's 'radical passivity'.

Firstly, can we think of O's training as labour? Certainly her body labours under the lash, but in the first novel there is no sense of monetary exchange nor a labour that could, within a capitalist system be justifiably valuable or indeed 'valid'. If we move away from such a socio-economic mode however, we can rethink O's labour in differing terms. Firstly, the cliché a 'labour of love' seems utterly apt for the tale at hand. Everything that O endures she does out of her love firstly for René and then later for Sir Stephen (who she accepts unreservedly as her new lover under René's request). Similarly, for Madison Young as O her body very much labours: both as performer (cf. Smith, 2012; Hester, 2015; Scott, 2016; and Berg, 2016); and BDSM practitioner (Young 2014a); both sexually and psychosexually, for her lover and the far from incidental audience.

Additionally, as it pertains specifically to *Sleeping Beauty*, Jones suggests that '[t]he contradiction of a body that is simultaneously at the heart of (narrative) radical transformation and utterly passive is central to these stories' (Jones, 2015: 336). The parallels here to O are clear. Jones describes Lucy's in/action as:

> a form of *radical hospitality*. This is a hospitality that requires deliberate and conscious passivity. The labouring body here is valuable for what it can contain and hold rather than what it can do. When we think of passivity as undesirable, even as toxic, it is worth remembering that capacity can be about the ability to hold (containment) as well as about

> action, and that ‘mere’ vessels have power. […] In Leigh’s *Sleeping Beauty* the sleeping body becomes a libidinal space of hospitality. The unconscious body becomes a host body, a hospitable space for fantasy, for intimacy, for violence, for narrative [..]. (339)

Further, she argues that the main character – if not protagonist – of Lucy 'plays no active role in these transformations yet without her inert body there would be no story' (ibid). Again, this offers a clear parallel to O's story. While upon first glance such a statement might seem to chime with Dworkin's (1974) assertion that O, and specifically *O’s body*, is the object and not subject of the narrative, we see in *The Training Of Madison Young* that there is no clean disjuncture between the body and the mind, as the embodied self; both simultaneously object and subject of her own will and desire, both internally and externally located. Yet throughout, it is constantly positioned as the product and producer of discourse, in which Young’s subjectivity is constructed.

It is this question of subjectivity that is central to our understanding. In *Sleeping Beauty*, Jones argues:

> This is extraordinary acting on Browning’s part, and yet she literally does nothing. It is a sort of ‘anti-acting’ that mirrors how the character Lucy continually gives away or simply refuses to possess any agency. Lucy’s drugged and unconscious body is one that is silently, passively, subversive [..] by being open to anything, by becoming a body that exists only for the purposes of others. This inert, floppy, agency-less figure is powerful because of its difference, because of the point it makes about freedom and a letting-go of will. (2015: 339)

Thus through Jones we recall Young’s words that “somehow, in giving up complete freedom, you gain complete freedom” (*The Training of Madison Young*, 2007); and we may see in O this oxymoronic state of being and not being, this being and not being subject.

Further, Jones quotes Cressida Heyes’ (2014) argument that in 'withdrawing one’s consent, withdrawing from the labour of being a docile body, rejecting the terms of one’s own exploitation by refusing to be a subject at all – these are alternative ways of saying no' (Heyes, 2014: 273), and certainly this chimes with

O's story – but to what extent can we see this reflected in *The Training of Madison Young*? For Young it is a constant, active struggle not simply to remain submissive, but to be submissively so in accordance to her lover's desire and to accept her own training which in turn offers her pleasure, though not necessarily masochistically. This is not simply passivity, and we might argue that neither is Young like O, 'profoundly active in her own passivity' (Sontag 1969: 218), for her being active is so clearly embodied and discursively constructed. While she occupies a sexually submissive role, unlike O Young's journey is one of consensual 'authentic' desire and agency expressed through the discursive framework of contemporary BDSM community rubrics of safewords and limits.

Conclusion

At first glance, *The Training of O* bears little fidelity to the narrative of its source text, *Story of O*, despite Kink.com drawing heavily upon it in its marketing of the channel. Kink.com's evasion of its status as commercial, constructed, audience aware pornography, through its sale of an ethical, consensual, 'real' community thus places O's experience in the discursive framework of contemporary BDSM community rubrics of safewords and limits. While these are asserted as being in place to protect the performer/practitioner, they are constantly present, creating a discursive frame in which subjectivity is clearly constructed and linguistically compounded through performative repetitions. This is furthered in both Young's account and performance, in which authenticity and consent are foregrounded.

Further, *The Training of Madison Young* blurs the authentic and the performative, truth and fiction, fantasy and the real, as well as the boundaries of text and audience. Thus, while *The Training of Madison Young* is a pornographic adaptation that moves beyond the narrative confines of Réage's original text into the realm of embodiment, they are ultimately intimately linked in a intertextual discourse. Both *Story of O*, *The Training of Madison Young* are indeed also *Histoire d'O* are all ultimately heteronormative patriarchal love stories in which the heroine through her submission must fight for the affections of, and prove herself worthy of, the love of a man. Consequently, she and her experiences are ultimately constrained and yet still we can find ways in which

the co-existence of multiple possibilities and pluralities of O destabilise and deconstruct these discursive truths.

Notes

1. Elements of this chapter have been published previously as 'Returning to Roissy: Kink.com's The Upper Floor and The Training of O as adaptations of the Story of O' (2013) see appendix.
2. ‘Camgirl’ is a term for sex workers who perform on webcam.
3. Kinklive was sold to flirt4free in 2015, see Webcam Startup (2015) ‘Kinklive is now a Flirt4free white Label’ November 4 [Online] Available at: http://webcamstartup.com/kinklive-is-now-a-flirt4free-whitelabel/ Accessed 28 October 2017.
4. ‘Femsub’ is an abbreviated term for BDSM pornography which focuses on female submission.
5. ‘Femdom’ is an abbreviated term for BDSM pornography which focuses on female domination.
6. See *Graphic Sexual Horror* (2009, dirs. Barbara Bell and Anna Lorentzon) for more information on Insex, including interviews with Ackworth.
7. For additional autobiographical and autoethnographic narratives at Kink.com see Nencel (2012); Gira Grant (2014); and Witt (2017).

Chapter Eight – Conclusion

Preamble

Before beginning to conclude this research, I want to return to the statements made within the methodology chapter, which delineate the parameters of enquiry and thus the scope for findings. I have asserted that a post-structuralist framework makes no claim to an exegesis of 'truth' of a text, but instead deconstructs and explicates texts as unfixed, fluid, and changeable. I asserted that the project was not to conclude as to whether *Story of O* and its representations of gender and sexuality are either 'good' or 'bad'. Instead I advocated for a nuanced, complex approach. Further, I have argued that in this way, a failure to 'master' such texts and to eschew finitude are objectives fundamental to the queer feminist mode of enquiry this thesis employs. In so doing, I have warned that the findings of such an enquiry may frustrate readers who seek closure and an authoritative claim to meaning having been mastered upon the text. That being said, I have argued that this is not to say that everything (or anything) means nothing. In what follows therefore I overview this thesis' argument chronologically and return to answer the earlier delineated research questions. Next, I conclude the findings of this research (in this frame) and reiterate this thesis' ultimate original contribution. I then close the thesis by identifying a multitude of avenues for further enquiry which potentially expand what I have argued for throughout: the texts' continual productivity.

Argument Overview

This thesis set out to answer the following questions: how has sexually submissive and masochistic female desire been historically and culturally constructed and how does this shape our understanding?; does the novel *Story of O* challenge or reinforce these notions?; and how does this differ when we broaden the storyworld to include its paratexts? Furthermore, in turning to the pornographic adaptations, I asked: what do the soft and hardcore adaptations offer to this understanding?; how do they deviate from the novel, and what affordances or limitations does the medium of film and the adaptive process

bring?; how do they open up or close down *Story of O*'s narrative potentialities?; to what extent are these adaptive texts normative or subversive?; how can they be seen to be negotiating femininity under changing contemporary contexts and paradigms?; and lastly, I return to ask, how do these further texts complicate our understanding of female sexual desire under patriarchy? In what follows I will reiterate how these questions have been answered, in an overview of this thesis' argument.

Chapter Two delineated the thesis' theoretical framework, methods and rationale for text selection which as such does not need to be concluded, however I return to evaluate this stance, its affordances and limitations to an extent in my discussion of avenues for further research. In the third chapter, the literature review of this thesis, I argued that the figure of the submissive masochist was a product of two continuing and overlapping discursive (yet not parallel) frames that have shaped our cultural understanding. That is: the masculine discourse of psychology and psychoanalysis, and the feminine discourse of feminist thought and rhetoric. I stated that both discourses are marked by the mobilisation and thus reification of flawed binary oppositions: natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, right/wrong, procreative/perverse, normative/subversive, male/female, masculine/feminine, sadist/masochist, aggressor/victim, active/passive, and liberatory/oppressive. Further, these polarising discourses that each make claim to a 'truth' of the submissive masochist subject were destabilised in the figure of the sadomasochist who problematises a biologically determined genderism, and through these multiple competing truths as pluralism.

In Chapter Four the analysis of this thesis' case study on *Story of O* began. I posited that readings of *Story of O* have been lacking in their refusal to undertake a close reading of the text as a whole, focusing instead on a selective reading of certain sections of the narrative. Thus, a close reading of the whole novel was undertaken, arguing for its status as a rich text and not 'simple pornography' as asserted by Dworkin in Chapter Five. As a result, this chapter asserted that the principle themes of the novel were not simply its representation of sadomasochistic sex, but instead posited that a full

engagement with the text must focus on its constructions of agency, consent, love, and (queer) desire, each of which provide the foundation and context for its SM content.

Further, I argued that there are two main modes in which the text can be read: principally, as a dominant ideology of patriarchal gender and heteronormativity, and additionally, as a queer reading that looks for both moments of queer desire, and of gaps, ambivalences, and cognitive dissonances within the text. That these exist concurrently I argued both destabilises the dominant ideology and adds in a pluralistic understanding of O's story. Furthermore, I argued for a reading of this story in conjunction with its paratexts: the accompanying essay to the novel by Jean Paulhan, *Happiness In Slavery*, and of Réage's sequel *Story of O Part 2* and her preface *A Girl in Love*. Through these I argued for an expansion of O's storyworld which destabilises the fixity and univocity of *Story of O* (as novel), and explored a metanarrative in which *Story of O* exists as a love letter, blurring reality and fantasy. I contrasted Paulhan and Réage's understanding of the texts once again pointing towards the destabilising fluidity of multiple meanings. Ultimately, I argued through my analysis that *Story of O* is an inherently pluralized, complex and contradictory text.

In the fifth chapter, I turned to examine the novel's reception principally amongst radical feminists. This formed a secondary literature review which helps to position my own reading, as found in the previous chapter. Expanding on Dworkin's critique of pornography as inherently masculine and sadistic, as discussed in Chapter Three, I analysed feminists' assertions that *Story of O* is the oppressive text par excellence, and perpetrator of cultural harm. I argued that it is their own rhetoric that positions O as object and victim, and closes down the potentialities of the text, based on the same binary mode of thinking explored in Chapter Three. In addition, a counter-reading was offered to form a debate in feminist thought, drawing upon the author's reading of her own text, and supplemented by Sontag's assertion that O is 'profoundly active in her own passivity' (1969: 54). My analysis sided with neither camp but once again created a concurrent discursive multiplicity which destabilises these 'truths'.

Silverman's assertion in 1984 that O's oppression was the result of the confines of the patriarchal medium of literature was then explored through a discussion of the feminist mode of writing, écriture féminine. In this discussion I argued that the mode as practice is undefined, yet in so doing opens up to the potential to be found in numerous locales: in female authored works; in the exploration of female subjectivity; in texts published within, and despite of publishing as a patriarchal strong-hold; in the pregnable spaces of pauses, silences and blank pages; and in the inscription of performative embodied speech.

Further, I argued that Cixious' (1976) exclusion of *Story of O* was deeply problematic given that she had included a queer male writer in her canon, Jean Genet. I suggested that this omission was particularly pointed given *Histoire d'O*'s release in 1975, when it would have received resurgent interest. In so doing I drew attention to the problems of écriture féminine as an established canon, and thus further opened up space for *Story of O* to be positioned within this practice. This was furthered by a discussion of the novel's production and publication. Here I posited that Paulhan as editor, d'Estree as translator, and Pauvert as publisher were a patriarchal triad who mediated the text. I also examined Réage's reluctance to take authorial ownership of her novel, however I argued that ultimately despite these facts she is the author, and thus we can situate *Story of O* as belonging to a practice of women's writing, which is nonetheless so despite the patriarchal frame in which it is produced. Here I drew attention to the possibility of O's subjectivity being found *between* the discursive frameworks that construct her.

In Chapter Six I turned from the patriarchal confines of literature to the cinematic adaptation of *Histoire d'O* from 1974, beginning with a consideration of the mode of authenticity as a complex nexus and site of intertextuality. A close reading of the soft-core film was then undertaken to analyse both how it adapts its source text and the affordances and limitations this brings, as well as to explore how it differs from the claims made about it by contradictory discourses. This analysis highlighted areas of difference, both in the characters and narrative. This narratologic dissonance hinged upon a foregrounding of consent and agency, particularly in the film's dénouement which rewrites a new

ending in which O brands Sir Stephen with his cigar. I posited that these changes close down a plurality of the text. In addition, I argued that despite the film's controversy it is, perhaps surprisingly, both desexualised and 'dequeered'. In this mode *Histoire d'O* was accused of reinforcing the text's dominant ideology, and of averting its gaze to circumnavigate any complexities of the text, and its sadomasochistic content. To this end I therefore suggested that the limitations of this adaptation may thus be less problematic in a hardcore pornographic adaptation.

In addition, an examination of the film's reception when it received certification in 2000, this was then contrasted against critics' reviews following its theatrical release in 1975. Both posit a 'truth' of the text and thus here, I argued once more for the temporal fluidity of texts. Further an analysis of original archival research at the BBFC revealed the way in which discourses of censorship are highly influenced by the discursive frameworks previously explored (psychoanalysis and feminism), which viewed the text as having the potential for harm, despite *Story of O* never falling foul of the Obscene Publications Act. I argued that this paternalistic approach was further classed, underscored by a theorisation of mass media viewers as lacking in interpretive repertoires in comparison to readers of literature. This in turn was contrasted against the BBFC's decision to award certification in 2000, on the premise that the film was dated, fundamentally consensual and unable to cause harm. I argued that this shift exposes a changing cultural attitude to BDSM and pornography, and in so doing once more creates a fluid non-fixity and multiplicity of the text as well as the discourses that produce, and are produced by, the text(s).

In Chapter Seven, the analysis of *Story of O*'s adaptations as a continuous productivity of the text thus turned to Kink.com's *The Training of Madison Young* (2007), a four-part hardcore pornographic text totalling in excess of four hours. While holding little narrative fidelity to *Story of O* in turns of plot and characterisation, it is a rich text for analysis in that it blurs authenticity and performance, fiction and reality. In it, agency and consent like *Histoire d'O* are foregrounded leaving no room for the ambiguity and ambivalence of its source text. This argument was furthered by a discussion of *The Training of Madison*

Young positioned through the performer's autobiography, *Daddy: A Memoir* (2014a). Here, the relationship between Young as performer and James Mogul as director and co-star was complicated through their romantic relationship, and her performance as a love letter in which she hoped to save their relationship. I argued that it is this parallel between this text and *Story of O* which therefore make it a more successful adaptation. However, ultimately like *Histoire d'O* before it, Kink.com's *The Training of Madison Young* reinforces the dominant ideology of Réage's text while closing down the plurality and narrative potentialities. However, collectively their extension of O's story into multiple stories, I argue, creates a further multiplicity where simultaneous truths co-exist, jostle and destabilise.

Queer Readings

In what follows I make clear the queer reading in each of the analysis chapters (three to seven).

In Chapter 3 I troubled the binary modes of thinking in two key discourses and destabilised their constructions of gender. Firstly, in psychoanalysis I critiqued the construction of submission and masochism as gendered biological imperatives, and of sexuality as being a procreative drive. Further, in my examination of feminist discourses I again critiqued normative binary modes of femininity and sexual practice.

The queer method in Chapter Four was to first construct the text(s) dominant heteronormative and monogonormative ideology and in so doing, troubled its meaning. Further, multiple counter-readings were mounted including O's queer desire for Marion and Jacqueline, and of René and Sir Stephen's queer desire or kinship, which are largely absent from existing scholarship. Further, I actively argued for a plurality of the text, for ambivalences and ambiguities which queer its dominant ideology.

In Chapter Five, I further troubled dominant readings of the text drawing attention to the contradiction between multiple positions of interpretation. In this way the modes of language and literature were troubled and queered.

While *Histoire d'O* offers little potential for a queer reading, Chapter Six examined the way in which the adaptive process dequeers *Story of O.* Further, my analysis deconstructed the film's dominant ideology of hetero and monogonormativity. In addition, the chapter troubled the gender and sexual normativity of censorship's regulatory framework.

Lastly in Chapter Seven, while there are no queer textual properties of *The Training of Madison Young*, analysis focused upon queering the text and site's constructions of pornographic performance and sexual practice as constructs. Again, I deconstructed both the text and Young's narratives as hetero and monognormative.

Conclusion and Ultimate Original Contribution

I have identified numerous findings herein all of which are original contributions as identified in the introductory chapter. In what follows therefore, I clarify the ultimate conclusion and original contribution of this work. I have argued that *Story of O*, its paratexts and adaptations are rich texts that tell us not only how *they* make sense of the world, but much more how *we* make sense of the world *through them*. Their meaning, this thesis posits, is marked by a plurality and multiplicity of readings which shift in accordance to who is speaking, when, and why. They are thus the products of, and producers of, multiple competing discourses each asserting a 'truth' of meaning and representation, of gender and sexuality. All of these discourses come to be located in the figure of the female submissive masochist. Thus, in answer to the central enquiry of this research, how female sexual desire is constructed under patriarchy, the answer through this analysis of *Story of O* as case study is: in and through a complex web of contemporary competing subjective discourses that in their collective univocity of one fixed 'truth', destabilise each other.

Avenues For Further Enquiry

There are a multitude of avenues for further enquiry. While I have given my rationale for this thesis' text selection in Chapter Two, in what follows I will discuss additional modes of analysis that could be applied to *Story of O* and its paratexts, as well as identifying additional texts and topics for further study. Principally, there are three key themes which still require unpacking: class; race; and masculinity. While I have pointed to all three in my discussion, dedicated analysis will help to further unpack the complexities of the text, its representations and meaning. In terms of race and class, as I have indicated in my analysis, Sir Stephen's maid, Norah deserves further discussion as she is the only character of colour, and the only obviously working-class figure. As for masculinity, I have argued that Roissy is a patriarchal locale, and this is undoubtedly furthered in *Story of O Part Two*. A more sustained analysis attentive to the male characters, not just Sir Stephen and Renè, that populate O's storyworld would thus expand our understanding of the text(s) construction of gender and sexuality under patriarchy.

Additionally, there is one important limitation of this research which could be taken up by other scholars: I do not speak French. As I have indicated in my analysis, there are issues with d'Estree's translations and in part I have had to rely upon these to make sense of the text(s). This includes *O m'a dit*, the book in which Réage is interviewed about her work. In so doing, I have had to pay little attention to the specifities of language used therein and given instead my attention to the themes. For this reason, I have not employed a content analysis of wording, though I believe this could be illuminating. A Francophone scholar may also be able to identify further scholarship on the texts that I have been unable to access. The same is true of any language, both in scholarship and of translations; and how this effects the text(s) meanings. A new French to English translation which undertakes a comparison with d'Estree's would also be welcomed. That being said, I am not positing that a Francophone study would unveil the 'truth' of the text(s). However, again if we can situate multiple concurrent readings, it becomes further opened up as pluralistic, and this fixity even more destabilised.

An additional mode of research would be a qualitative study of the text(s) reception(s). One area in which this could be easily conducted is through members' open access comments on Kink.com's scenes – which also provides a potential opportunity to observe an online bdsm community (see Cross and Matheson on online BDSM communities; and Rambukkana, 2004 for a discussion of Internet-mediated BDSM communities and public sphere discourse). However, while I have undertaken qualitative analysis to some extent in my discourse analysis herein, in accordance with my methodology I have been wary of constructing such discourses as offering a fixed truth of the text(s) meaning(s). That being said, a qualitative study that situates reception as a fluid and changeable, historically and temporally located socio-political, cultural site would be an interesting lens through which to see how some are currently interpreting the text. This in turn would aid my argument that such texts and their meanings are fluid, and thus offer a welcome further pluralisation to the readings offered here. In fan studies, this could extend to cosplaying *Story of O* of which I have seen some evidence online. Additionally, many companies produce replica jewellery inspired by the novel, thus a discussion of *Story of O*'s place in material consumption and creation, and promotional cultures could be of interest. In this mode an examination of how *Story of O* has been marketed through items such as posters and DVD ephemera would also be insightful.

There are additional affordances that different treatments of the adaptive texts could bring. Namely, a formalist analysis of elements such as cinematography and editing, and mise-en-scène, as well as for instance, a star study of casting would tell us more about the decisions made in the adaptive process and how this contributes to *Histoire d'O* and *The Training of Madison Young* as adaptations. However, again, in keeping with my methodology I am wary of such a constructivist approach to reading texts; that is to say, such formalist methods make claim to a flawed univocal truth of meaning and in this way I believe closes down, rather than opens up texts. I would, thus, again advocate

for a pluralistic approach which keeps in mind the deconstructionist drive of a post-structuralist framework. Here, any and all additional readings are welcomed in that I believe they create this plurality collectively.

While in Chapter Two I supplied the rationale for studying *Histoire d'O* and *The Training of Madison Young* given the finite scope of this project, there are a number of additional adaptive texts excluded from this enquiry. However, they do potentially offer fertile ground for further research. Firstly, simply owing to their media, the following texts fall outside of the thesis' concern of novel to film adaptations: Guido Crepax's graphic novel *Story of O* (1975); Doris Kloster's illustrated photographic *Story of O* (2001) which includes a foreword by Pauvert; and the televisual episodic text *The Story of O: The Series* (1992, ES).

Further, there are two novels of which I am aware that adapt Réage's text. *The New Story of O* (1999) – credited to Bill Adler and Pauline Réage, though this postdates her death – sees O as a dominatrix resituated in America. Similarly, Ernest Greene's *Master of O* (2014) sets the narrative in modern day Los Angeles in which O is gifted to Steven Diamond – 'an ace L.A. criminal lawyer with a roster of A-List clients' – by his 'half-brother Ray, publisher of a slick kink-sex magazine' (n.p.1). While such descriptions indicate that the novels may belong to a literary exploitation cycle, unlike many of the films listed below they clearly have some commonality with the source text and should not be dismissed on the basis of their, frankly clichéd sounding plotlines. Both have the potential to expand the text and O's storyworld. Further, the discourses produced in these male authored texts (as in *Histoire d'O* and *The Training of Madison Young* as male mediated) offer insight into the way men have interpreted *Story of O*.

In addition, there are a number of cinematic texts excluded from this investigation, that bear little commonality to *Story of O* yet are marketed conversely. These I suggest belong to a vast, and continuing international exploitation cycle of O. At time of writing, in chronological order I have identified these as the following, though I have little doubt more will emerge, and have been submerged in the annals of cinematic history: *The Story of Joanna* (1975,

US); the short *Menthe – la beinheureuse/ Menthe – the Blissful* (Lars von Trier, 1979, DMK); *Fruits of Passion/Les Fruits de la Passion (dir. Shûji Terayama, 1981, FR, JAP); The Story of O Chapter 2* (dir. Eric Rochat, 1984, CAN)*The Sexual Story of O/Historia sexual de O* (dir. Jess Franco, 1984, ES); *Maladona* – presently marketed as *The Untold Story of Lady O* in China for foreign export (dir. Bruno Gaburro,1984, IT); and *The Story of O: Untold Pleasures* (2002, dir. Phil Leirness, US). Of these, I am aware that both *The Story of Joanna* and *The Story of O Chapter 2* have files at the BBFC which would warrant further investigation into the framework of censorship, but were outside of the scope of this thesis. In addition, there are innumerable hardcore texts that have been excluded from this analysis. Principally I identify these as the other *Training of O* scenes beyond the *Training Of Madison Young*, though in addition I have no doubt that there are a plethora of *Story of O* inspired hardcore texts outside of Kink.com, yet to be identified.

I am also interested in how *Story of O* has been taken up in popular culture. For example, in series five, episode three of the popular American sitcom *Frasier* (1993—2004), the titular character throws a fancy-dress Halloween party. His radio show assistant, Roz Doyle, arrives declaring that she is dressed as O. Her outfit, comprised of studded leather corset and miniskirt, is far from the costuming described in the novel – billowing draped fabrics which expose the breasts and genitals. What does this tell us about the way in which *Story of O* has been located in the iconography of BDSM? Further, as discussed previously, what would an exploration of costuming bring to our understanding of the texts and their adaptations? In addition, the American rock band Nine Inch Nails' (1992) song 'Happiness In Slavery'[2] clearly speaks to Paulhan's essay. How do its lyrics and music video, which stars the 'supermasochist'[3] performance artist Bob Flanagan help us to (un)make sense of *Story of O*? And what does Bob Flanagan's self-reflective poem 'Why?' (1993) which includes the line 'Because of O and how desperately I wanted to be her', tell us about how both BDSM practitioners have understood the novel, and how such texts create a further intertextuality?

Outside of *Story of O*, there are also a number of female authored BDSM texts which could be examined. These include, but are no means limited to: Catherin Robe-Grillet's (pseudonymously published as Jean De Berg) 1956 novel *L'Image* which features a foreword attributed to Pauline Réage (though I suspect it to have been penned by Paulhan, for it holds more in common with *Happiness In Slavery*)[4]; Anne Rice's *Exit To Eden* (1985); Jenny Diski's 1986 novel *Nothing Natural*; Vanessa Duriès' autobiographical *Le Lien* (1993) translated in 1998 as *The Ties That Bind,* and the as yet untranslated *L'Étudiante* (published posthumously in 2007 but written in 1993); and of course, E. L. James' *Fifty Shades* series (2012a, 2012b, 2012c). It is also important to note that many historical texts penned under pseudonym may yet emerge as female authored; and many more are yet to be written. Also, I am reluctant to locate Califia's 1988 collection of short stories *Macho Sluts* in this list given that Califia is a transman. However, given that much of Califia's writing pre-transition was concerned with lesbian feminism, it does occupy that historically located political position.

In addition, and relatedly, if the enquiry is expanded to include male authors, the scope for further research increases exponentially. While my thesis has been principally concerned with how woman writes herself, it may be illuminating to examine how men have written women. That being said, there already exists a wealth of literature too innumerable to mention on Sade (and, to a lesser extent Masoch) which has also already been examined by feminist scholars. In this way, this thesis has intended to redress this balance. Outside of this canon however, little attention has been paid to later male authors, and an examination of how contemporary works navigate gender and sexuality in today's culture would further expand this thesis' central concern with the construction of female sexuality under patriarchy.

Notes

1. Taken from the Daedalus Publishing edition jacket.

2. ‘Happiness In Slavery’ was released on the band’s album ‘Broken’ and as a single, both in 1992.
3. ‘Supermasochist’ is a term used throughout Flanagan’s works, and notably features in the title of the 1997 documentary by Kirby Dick. It also features in his sung piece ‘Supermasochistic Bob Has Cystic Fibrosis’, which features in Dick’s film.
4. To establish the work’s author a sustained comparative analysis would be required, which as I have noted herein would be helped by a Francophone content analysis. I have excluded it from my enquiry based on its lack of proximity to Réage’s source text, i.e., it has never to my knowledge been published alongside *Story of O* and thus only avid readers would have sought out the text to read in conjunction. I acknowledge however its potential to expand the text and our understanding thereof, and thus I identify it as a key avenue for further exploration.

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Returning to Roissy: Kink.com's *The Upper Floor* and *The Training of O* as adaptations of the *Story of O*

ABSTRACT

The controversial 1954 novel Histoire d'O/Story of O *(Réage 1976) and its feminist reception encapsulates the socio-political debates which surround BDSM texts. Questions of objectification, agency and subjectivity are here played out over the female sexually submissive body. Beginning with an overview of the key feminist critiques of the* Story of O, *this article examines what's at stake in Réage's 'phantasm' ([1969] 1971: 12) of sexually submissive femininity. Second, Kink.com's hardcore pornographic* Story of O *adaptations –* The Training of O *and to a lesser extent* The Upper Floor *– are analysed not only through their relation to the novel, but also through the contradictory negotiations of objectification, agency and subjectivity. This is anchored through Kink.com's self-construction as 'real', 'ethical' and 'consensual'. Finally, a case study cites one porn performer, Cherry Torn, as one amongst many O's in Kink.com's current content, offering in turn a plurality to Réage's source text. In so doing, this article seeks to ask what Torn's performance adds to our understanding of what it might mean to* be O *beyond the pages of a fictional novel, whether fleetingly, serialized digitally or indeed privately.*

KEYWORDS

Story of O
Pauline Réage
BDSM
feminism
performance
pornography

INTRODUCING O

The opening pages of *Histoire d'O* (Réage [1954] 1976) – known to English-speaking audiences as *Story of O* and written by Anne Desclos under the pen name of Pauline – tell the tale of 'O', a photographer brought to the Château de Roissy by her lover, Renè after a stroll around the city of Paris:

> 'Listen', he says. 'You're ready. Here is where I leave you. You're going to get out and go to the door and ring the bell. Someone will open the door, whoever it is you'll do as he says. You'll do it right away and willingly of your own accord, else they'll make you, if you don't obey at once, they'll make you obey'.
>
> (Réage [1954] 1976: 12)

Yet this is not the only start to O's journey, as the unknown narrator offers another version, in which O is taken by Renè and an unnamed second man, who explains that her lover will strip and blindfold her, before arriving at the chateau where she will 'receive instructions in due course, as required' (Réage [1954] 1976: 12). Blindfolded, chained, whipped, branded and pierced, O is made constantly available for oral, vaginal and anal intercourse for a group of elite French men. Two alternate endings are also proffered, creating once again a narrative plurality. In the first, O she accepts her sexual submission, embraced by Roissy's community who

> taking her for an example, or a sample, or for the object of demonstration not once did anyone address a word to her. Was she then a thing of stone or wax, or a creature of some other world, and was it that they thought it pointless to speak to her, or was it that they didn't dare? It was not until daybreak and after [...] that Sir Stephen and the Commander [...] led her to the centre of the courtyard, detached her chain and took off her mask: and, laying her down upon the table, possessed her, now the one, now the other.
>
> (Réage [1954] 1976: 262)

In the second denouement however, '[t]here existed another ending to the story of O. Seeing herself about to be left by Sir Stephen, she preferred to die. To which he gave his consent' (Réage [1954] 1976: 263). Although the core story itself is linear, these multiple framing narratives offer the reader the possibility to view, and experience, multiple stories of O. Nonetheless, as will be examined, Réage's narrative portrays her heroine journeying towards a position of arguable non-subjectivity via her sexual submission, to finally become the literal O, zero, nothing.[1]

Beginning with an overview of the key feminist critiques, responses and debates over the *Story of O*, this article examines what's at stake in Réage's 'phantasm' (Réage [1969] 1971: 12) of sexually submissive femininity. Such an approach does not simply locate *Story of O* within the context of its reception, but also opens up the text to examination through the key themes of female objectification, agency and subjectivity. Second, hardcore pornography studio website Kink.com's *Story of O* adaptations, *The Training of O* and to a lesser extent *The Upper Floor* (both 1997–) will be analysed through Kink.com's self-representation as 'real', 'ethical' and 'consensual'.

By opening out and analysing this transformation of our contemporary understanding of pornography, this research joins the burgeoning

1. John de St. Jorre, the British journalist who supposedly uncovered Réage's identity (see Kaufmann 1998: 803, for a brief, albeit differing account) while researching his monograph *The Good Ship Venus: The Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press* (1996) claims that O was simply a shortening of the name Réage had wished to use, which she felt bore too much resemblance to the friend from whom she had taken it (St. Jorre 1996: 228). In any event, whatever the author's intent, I would argue that this concept of 'O' as being aligned with 'o' holds weight, both as regards the textual content itself, as well as born out in the feminist readings.

interdisciplinary field of online pornography studies (Attwood 2009a, 2009b; Härmä and Stolpe 2009; Jones 2009; Juffer 1998; Lindgren 2009; Moorman 2009; Mowlabocus 2009; O'Toole 1998; Paasonen 2009; Patterson 2004; Slayden 2009), which, this article contends, will help to inform and expand film, performance and adaptation studies alike. Lastly, a case study cites one porn performer, Cherry Torn, as the one of many Os in Kink.com's current content. In so doing, this article seeks to position Torn within the aforementioned discourses and debates, asking what her performance in these digital adaptations adds to our understanding of the *Story of O* as well as female masochism and submission.

REVISITING FEMINIST DEBATES OF THE *STORY OF O*

Story of O, writes Andrea Dworkin in her first monograph, *Woman Hating*,

> is more than simple pornography. It claims to define epistemologically what a woman is, what she needs, her processes of thinking and feeling, her proper place. It links men and women in an erotic dance of some magnitude: the sado-masochistic complexion of O is not trivial – it is formulated as a cosmic principle which articulates, absolutely, the feminine.
>
> (1974: 55)

For Dworkin, this articulation of the feminine is a reading of O as 'woman as victim' – a perspective that in fact characterized her work at large – in which she not only collapses sexual submission with masochism, but further constructs O as simultaneously occupying the roles of: a possessed body (Dworkin 1974: 58–60); a mythological figure (Dworkin 1974: 57); a prostitute (Dworkin 1974: 61); a surrogate 'that the two men love each other and fuck each other through' (Dworkin 1974: 62–63); and above all an object (Dworkin 1974: 58):

> This is, then, the story of O: O is *taken* by her lover Rene to Roissy and *cloistered* there; she is *fucked, sucked, raped, whipped, humiliated,* and *tortured* on a regular and continuing basis – she is *programmed* to be an erotic slave, [...] *branded* with Sir Stephen's mark and to have rings with his insignia *inserted* in her cunt; she serves as an erotic model for Jacqueline's younger sister Natalie who is infatuated with her; she is *taken* to a party masked as an owl, *led* on a leash by Natalie, and there *plundered, despoiled, raped, gangbanged.*
>
> (Dworkin 1974: 56–57, emphasis added)

Dworkin's rhetoric, based as it is upon a linguistic order which makes O the subject of passive past participles whereby actions are *done to* her, thus constructs O as the object. Through denying the *Story of O* as a potential journey of perversity and transcendence, dismissing it as a reading of 'infantile abandon' (Dworkin 1974: 55) aligned with 'children's fairy tales' (Dworkin 1974: 55), Dworkin implores her reader to accept that O can be nothing more than the victim with patriarchy. She asserts,

> [a]ny clear headed appraisal will show the situation, O's condition, her behavior, and most importantly her attitude toward her oppressor as a logical scenario incorporating Judeo-Christian values of service and

> self-sacrifice and universal notions of womanhood, a logical scenario incorporating the psychology of submission and self-hatred found in all oppressed peoples.
>
> (Dworkin 1974: 56)

Thus the *Story of O* comes to stand as the oppressive text par excellence, and O the Stockholm syndrome survivor of patriarchy. This is a notion that would be later picked up by Susan Griffin's 'Sadomasochism and the erosion of self: A critical reading of the *Story of O*' (1981),

> Even if we have not read *The Story of O*, our minds have been shaped by the same culture which shaped this tale. [...] Like O, as we impersonate the pornographic idea of women, we betray ourselves, and someone within us, who is condemned to silence, begins to die.
>
> (Griffin 1981: 199)

For Griffin, the novel epitomizes and indeed is emblematic of the quandary of the feminine in patriarchy. Whether one has even read the story or not, one nonetheless lives it, along with O. The *Story of O* is therefore pornography, asserts Griffin, and pornography serves only to reflect and reinforce cultural imperatives of female oppression which work to obliterate the feminine. For Kaja Silverman (1984) '*Histoire d'O* is more than O's story. It is the history of the female subject', an inherent quality of the text itself resulting from the limitations of its medium (Silverman 1984: 346). She argues that '"O" knows herself to be constituted in and through a discourse that exceeds her – one that speaks for her, in her "place"' (Silverman 1984: 320) and further, that 'history will never read otherwise until the female subject alters her relation to discourse – until she succeeds not only in exercising discursive power, but in exercising it differently' (Silverman 1984: 346). Silverman denies the reader the possibility of mounting a counter-reading of the text and indeed of O's subjectivity. Similarly, as Michelle A. Masse writes in 1992,

> Each [reader] must decide whether to identify with the beater, or beaten, and each must be aware, if the act of reading continues, of assenting to the voyeur's role just as O consents to every stage of her progress. To continue reading, a woman must agree to be the beaten in her own identification with O, or must be a spectator to another woman's being beaten, a position the third person narration encourages. (It is also possible, although less likely, for her to identify with the men who are beaters. Later in the novel, the option of identification with women who beat is also offered).
>
> (1992: 108)

While Masse notes the multiple positions of identification – and thus possibility for multiple reader interpretations – she limits this to a simple either/or option. Either the beaten (assumed passive) or the spectator (assumed passive) and unlikely the beater (active), but certainly no combination of the three.

These readings, however, crucially reject Susan Sontag's assertions in 'The pornographic imagination' (1969) that the 'passive [...] O is represented as active too; literally active in her seduction of Jacqueline, and most important, profoundly active in her own passivity' (Sontag 1909: 218). This appears to concur with Réage's authorial intent,

> I think that submissiveness can [be] and is a formidable weapon, which women will use as long as it isn't taken from them. Think about it: is O used by Rene and Sir Stephen, or does she in fact use them, and all that weighty, solemn organization of the castle keep, all those irons and chains and obligatory debauchery, to fulfil her own dream – that is, her own destruction and death? And in some surreptitious way, isn't she in charge of them? Doesn't she bend them to her will? And the fact is, she does get what she wants in the end: they kill her off, in three lines.
>
> (Réage in Desforges 1979: 140)

In this sense, both Réage and Sontag offer not only a radical alternative of the text itself, but also a contemporarily relevant reading of O. By returning to Roissy outside of the confines of the medium of literature and into the realm of pornographic performance, the remainder of this article seeks to relocate O in the contemporary domain. Furthermore, by taking forward the proposition of 'profoundly active in her own passivity' into an examination of Cherry Torn's pornographic performance, crucial light may be shed upon O's story or indeed stories.

SITUATING KINK.COM'S PORNOGRAPHIC CONTENT

Before discussing Kink.com and Cherry Torn, it is pertinent in light of the previously examined feminist rhetoric, to acknowledge that the discussion of hardcore pornography itself will no doubt be controversial to some. However, I side with Linda Williams in *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and 'The Frenzy of the Visible'* ([1989] 1999) when she states that individual pornographic texts have been overlooked in the discussion of pornography, arguing that we cannot 'adequately discuss the pornographic without making some stab at a specific description of pornography' (Williams [1989] 1999: 29, original emphasis). With pornography increasingly visible and economically powerful within contemporary (capitalist/neo-liberal and patriarchal) culture, cultural studies must redress its own exclusion of pornography from the field of cultural production, if we are to fully grasp its role in present society. Unlike Williams however, I have the luxury of discussing the pornographic in an age in which our present texts have not been 'lost, burned, or allowed to disintegrate from neglect, whose authors and dates are unknown, and whose visual content is perceived by many publishers as too controversial to be reproduced by analysis' (Williams [1989] 1999: 29) (though perhaps the jury remains out on this latter statement). While Williams analysed the origins of modern pornography vis-à-vis the Stag Film up until the 'revolution' of home cinema via VHS, today's pornography finds not only a home online, but crucially an archive.

Additionally, for the purposes of clarity, it is worth examining how the two specific sites – or texts – examined in the remainder of this article, *The Training of O* and to a lesser extent *The Upper Floor*, are not wholly representative of the range of pornographic material that the multi-million dollar Internet pornography studio Kink.com (founded by CEO owner Peter Acworth in 1997 as 'Cybernet Entertainment') offers across its numerous sub-sites. Offering a range of 'genuine fetish material, real bondage, the real fetish experience' (Acworth in Adult DVD Talk 2008), these cater to and portray a range of sexualities (straight, gay, lesbian) as well as fetishes (spanking, urolagnia, 'fucking machines', gang bangs, electricity amongst others). Each sub-site operates on a subscription basis, with pay monthly prices ranging from $24.95 (USD) to

2. It is beyond the scope of this article to debate the validity of these reports, or to comment on whether these might be isolated incidents or instead indicative of an endemic culture within Kink.com's working practices. However, they do seem to echo debates around the ethics of consent around the extreme BDSM studio site Insex which ran from 1997 to 2005. For further information the reader is directed to Barbara Bell and Anna Lorentzon's *Graphic Sexual Horror* (Bell and Lorentzon, 2009), a feature length documentary that features interviews with the creator and production team as well as performers. It is worth noting too, that many performers from Insex can now be found at Kink.com such as Princess Donna, director of Kink.com's *Public Disgrace, Bound Gang Bangs* and *Ultimate Surrender*.

$34.95, though some discounts are offered on access to multiple sites, and longer access lengths, i.e. three or six month subscriptions. In keeping with Kink.com's other sites, *The Training of O* and *The Upper Floor* are updated weekly with new 'shoots' including monthly live streaming, and additional material including on-set photographs as well as access to member forums. Further, both *The Training of O* and *The Upper Floor* occupy a central position within Kink.com's repertoire, as heterosexual BDSM female submission content remains their predominant focus.

Constructed as ethical porn, each shoot is appended with a specific ID number which can be traced online, enabling the viewer to view the dates, production details and performer names. However, Kink.com's status as 'ethical porn' has recently been called into question during the publicized wage and working conditions debates, as well as allegations of performer mistreatment (cf. Holloway 2012; Hall 2012; Acworth in SF Weekly 2013 and Conger 2013).[2] Nonetheless, Kink.com continues to publicize itself in this vein as visitors to the Kink.com main landing site are greeted with the banner, 'We demistify [*sic*] and celebrate alternative sexualities by providing *the most ethical* and authentic kinky adult entertainment' (Kink.com n.d. a: emphasis added).

KINK.COM'S HARDCORE ONLINE CONTENT AS ADAPTATION

Both *The Training of O* and *The Upper Floor* clearly align themselves with the novel for a sense of authenticity. The former claims to be 'Inspired by the legendary French BDSM erotic novel The Story of O, The Upper Floor illustrates real lifestyle BDSM as it is lived by 24/7 slaves and Masters, complete with extreme BDSM, explicit sex in bondage, punishment, erotic humiliation, and more' (Kink.com n.d. b), while the latter asserts that 'Based on The Story of O, the erotic novel by Pauline Reage [*sic*], TheTrainingOfO.com is 4 days of reality porn – real slave training, not staged. It is the real journey of truly submissive women who wish to become trained sexual slaves for men' (Kink.com n.d. c). Yet this constructed sense of authenticity vis-à-vis a relationship with Réage's source text stretches beyond simple promotional wording. Both *The Training Of O* and *The Upper Floor* use the imposing architecture of San Francisco's Armory's 2000 square feet space – Kink.com's headquarters, controversially purchased after over 30 years of neglect, for a reputed cost of 14.5 million dollars (Mooallem 2007) – to communicate interior design à la Roissy. The masters and slaves-in-residence quarters in the Armory are thus lavishly decorated in Edwardian style finery for *The Upper Floor*, while the slaves-in-training and their dehumanized environmental and implied sexual squalor are housed in the dank, dark 'dungeony' (Acworth in Adult DVD Talk 2008) basement for the *Training of O*. Slaves who undergo and complete their full *Training of O* are then allowed to progress to the literal upper floor of the title, in order to serve and entertain a hierarchical 'party'; or grouping of their 'community',

> At The Upper Floor, however, the complex, *negotiated social structure is real*, rather than the ad-hoc entertainments offered by more casual SM or D/s play [...] It is hoped that through broadcasting the full-time environs of The Upper Floor, *Kink.com* may encourage other players to create their own 24/7 households *practicing negotiated hierarchy* [...] Peter [Acworth]'s dream all along was to create this 24/7 world that

> modeled the principles of *consensual power exchange* and *personal development*, and to create the kind of explicitly erotic power structure that was usually viewed strictly as a fantasy.
>
> (Kink.com n.d. b, emphasis added)[3]

This continuing mobilization of Kink.com's rhetoric of the 'real', 'consensual power exchange' within a 'negotiated social structure' contrasts strongly with the radical feminist readings that heralded the *Story of O*'s absence of consent, lack of agency and overall passivity. With consent placed squarely within the conception, production and promotion of their texts, what instead is the O of Kink.com's supposed consensual, egalitarian yet hierarchical narratives?

CHERRY TORN AND THE PERFORMING 'O'

Before proceeding with an analysis of Cherry Torn's *Training of O* it should be noted that Torn is, in the history of the site, one of many O's. In addition, while she presently stars in other Kink.com productions – which I take to indicate that she is not unhappy in her continued employment – Torn is, however, no longer a 'slave in residence' at *The Upper Floor*. Nonetheless while examining Torn's training as one particular case study, the intention of what follows, however, is not to over-radicalize Cherry Torn as the porn submissive or porn star par excellence, but to place her within a larger discourse in which performance is held as central in building our contemporary understanding of O as pluralistic.

As noted above, the *Training of O* usually spans four days, yet *The Training of Cherry Torn* lasts a total of eight 'days' in eight parts or 'shoots' (filmed and uploaded between November 2008 and July 2009), at a total runtime of 589 streamable minutes. This extension of Torn's training garnered mixed response from viewers on her sixth day: with Ivory123 rating it as 'below average', explaining that it 'reminds me of the people that stayed in college for five to seven years. They just do not know when to leave. Next!' (Ivory123 in Kink.com n.d. d); pingomatic shares the same view, amusingly stating 'while cherry [*sic*] has gown [*sic*] on me, there is a satuation [*sic*] point, kinda like rocky 47' (pingomatic in Kink.com n.d. d); while britt22 rates it 'great![n]o complaint here about letting Cherry be the first girl to do days 5&6' (britt22 in Kink.com n.d. d).[4] Undoubtedly this concurs with Clarissa Smith's recent study of the pornographic performance of Allie Sin and Eva Angelina, for whom, she asserts, sex is very much an 'endurance sport' (2012: 205) and that porn 'actresses are differentiated by more than the colour of their hair, size of their breasts or positions of their tattoos' (Smith 2012: 200).

Nonetheless, in order to vary the content for viewers across the full eight days, Torn's training was informally structured into two sections: the former describing her personal journey into becoming a better submissive; the latter on her specific training to gain entrance into service in *The Upper Floor*. Beginning the first day, Torn is asked why she applied to undertake the *Training of O* – a marked contrast with O's delivery to Roissy – which, she explains, was to learn 'how to let go of control easier'. Torn is also encouraged to by her 'trainer', James Mogul (aka Maestro) to 'take advantage of the opportunity to steer the course', and she therefore states both the areas she would like to improve upon (including her posture, pain tolerance, and ability to walk in heels) and her desired rewards. These are stated as 'breath play, choking', the wearing of hoods and orgasming that she describes as 'the obvious choice'. While this

3. Indeed, it is worth noting here that in Dworkin's *O* chapter she asserts a rather flippant statement that 'Q. E. D. pornography is never big on plot' (1974: 57), yet the 'strict hierarchy' of these texts' 'complex, negotiated social order' clearly display Kink.com's intent towards *clandestine authenticity*, somewhat at odds, perhaps with the notion of a pornography website which functions *to be seen*. Yet, I would argue, this is an elevation and construction of its subscription membership model as an *elite club*, rather than viewership or fandom per se.

4. While as Gray notes in his analysis of one open-access forum, remaining an 'academic "lurker" [...] rightfully poses many questions of ethics' (Gray 2005: 847), I agree with his assertion that

> [p]osters are fully aware of the public, open nature of the forum; most use pseudonyms meaning they are both aware of speaking potentially to thousands and reasonably anonymous; and the performative nature of much [...] commentary itself belies an awareness of (or even a desire for) a considerable audience.
>
> (Gray 2005: 847)

Further I believe that the presence of performers in these Kink.com open access forum discussions presents a possibility to read such adjunctive resources as paratext moreover, and that thus the inclusion of such posts are ethically justified herein.

may be the obvious choice for Torn, no such option was given to the original O, for whom pleasure was simply something to be given. She is asked, 'Do you feel empowered to use your universal safeword, which is "red"?', and she answers in the affirmative. Torn is also questioned about her sexual limits which she states to be anal sex and the use of electricity. Again this is a sharp detour from the novel in which consent was never discussed, and certainly no safe words were offered or employed. Anal sex too plays a recurrent and pivotal role in the novel, relinquishing O's ownership of her own body to Sir Stephen and those of his choosing, with her own desires and limits absent from her 'training'. Torn and Maestro, however, are presented contrastingly as equal agents within the narrative, both shaping the course her training will take, with Torn's desires structured as central. This then is a contemporary story of O absolutely framed within the BDSM community's context of 'safe, sane and consensual' self-discovery and personal growth.

Reflections on her own sexuality and relationship thus dominate Torn's narrative. As she explains during her first day, whilst bound to a chair, spread-eagled, and penetrated while having her breasts 'tortured', she is utilizing taught techniques: 'feeling pain visually, sending it out into the room or back to the person who is giving it to me'. While her eyes appear fixed upon a point in the distance, this is not a disassociation from her body and the pain under which it labours, but instead is structured as her taking control over her own body and her own desire. Further, she explains, the training is enabling her to 'talk about what's going on with me more, being able to communicate without it being a big deal or anything ... it's always been a big problem for me ... I've always been "take what's given" ... all about my partner's enjoyment'. Such statements draw further upon Torn's personal sexual practice, and it is repeatedly noted throughout the scenes that she was at the time involved in a BDSM relationship with another pornographic performer, Mister Torn. In so doing, the 'real' and the 'performed' overlap and blur, as the longevity of Torn's role as O ceases to end along in time with the scene. This is also highlighted by her being given 'homework' including the task of researching BDSM activist Gayle Rubin, which she discusses in both intercut videoblogs as well as tested during training scenes (Figure 1). Such tasks are constructed to ensure the heightening of this sense of a 'real', 'consensual' 'personal journey' of submission.

In the second section of the training, viewers are informed that a substantial time has elapsed, referred to by Mogul as the beginning of '*The Training of O* with Cherry Torn v. 2.0'. A clear change to the format is apparent: the audience is addressed directly, and Torn's training becomes geared towards preparation for live broadcast 'community' events on *The Upper Floor*. Her relationship with Maestro also changes (she begins to address him instead as Mr Mogul), and her appearance has undergone a remarkable change: from platinum blonde, Cherry Torn is now brunette (Figure 2). Despite these changes, however, the constant issues of endurance, consent, desire and pain tolerance continue over the latter part of her training. In one such demonstrative scene from Day Seven, Mogul asks why Torn is crying during training for table service at an upcoming *Upper Floor* event. She explains, 'Mr Mogul, because I'm trying to hold this tray, Sir'. She laughs. 'And it hurts your arms?' he asks. 'Mr Mogul, yes, sir', she replies. They continue,

> Mogul: '"It's heavy?" Would you like to um, stop? Would you like to move on to something else? Or would you like to continue? Tell me what you want to do.'

Figure 1: Cherry Torn being tested on her knowledge of BDSM history in the Training of O. *Image © Kink.com.*

> Torn: 'Mr Mogul, I'd like to continue, Sir.'
>
> Mogul: 'Speak freely, please'
>
> Torn: 'Yes, I want to continue'.
>
> Mogul: 'Even though you're crying, why would you want to continue if you're crying?'
>
> Torn: [groans] 'Because I like it,' [half sobbing, half laughing].

Indeed she has further explained on the Kink.com forum to assure a concerned viewer that she would 'usually prefer to cry at some point!' (Torn in Kink.com 2007). It would be easy to accord her crying a coping mechanism status, but this would deny the possibility that for Torn crying is part of her pleasure,

> Mogul: 'Say "I like when you hurt me"'.
>
> Torn: [laughs] 'I like it when you hurt me' [cries out].
>
> Mogul: 'Say "I like it when I suffer, because", why? Why do you want to suffer?'

Torn turns her eyes down and considers her response. She raises her head and softly laughs 'because I like it'. She groans and exhales. 'Why?', he prompts her, 'because it ...?' 'Turns me on', Torn responds.

Figure 2: 'The Training of Cherry Torn 2.0' sees the performer having undergone a radical change from platinum blonde to brunette, as well as a narrative and format shift. Image © Kink.com.

For Torn it is a constant, active struggle to remain submissive and to accept her own pain training, which in turn offers her pleasure, though not necessarily masochistically. This is instead a mastery over her own will and not a desire for pain. This is therefore not simply passivity, but neither is Torn like O, 'profoundly active in her own passivity' (Sontag 1969: 218). While Torn occupies a sexually submissive role, her journey, unlike Réage's O's, is instead one of consensual desire and equal agency expressed through the contemporary BDSM community rubrics of safe words and limits. While these are no doubt in place to protect the performer/practitioner, the resultant shoots remain reliant upon verbal discourse in which subjectivity is clearly constructed and articulated through linear narrative.

CONCLUDING KINK.COM'S RETURN TO ROISSY

Although Réage's *Story of O* offers a narrative plurality, feminist critiques have dismissed the book as a monolithic eroticization of the feminine under patriarchy. Whilst Sontag and Réage's arguments that O offers a potentially radical 'passive activity' is seemingly borne out in the hardcore adaptation, *The Training of Cherry Torn*, these narratives too are ultimately constrained. Kink.com's evasion of its status as commercial, constructed, and audience aware pornography couches O's experience in the contemporary BDSM community rubrics of ethical, consensual and 'real' community despite contemporary controversy.

Nonetheless, as has been examined, the body in hardcore pornographic performance and the issues of desire, pleasure, pain, and consent are all demonstrably much less ephemeral and more real than on the fleeting pages of a fictional novel. Just as pornographic performance undeniably blurs the line between fantasy and reality, the real and the performed, the very fact that there exists many Os on Kink.com as well as the many more possible Os amongst its viewership weaken feminist claims on O as a monolithic feminine archetype, a fictionalized construct epitomizing patriarchal desire. In this sense, Torn, and her Kink.com co-stars offer the possibility of adding an oft-ignored voice into our understanding of not only what it might be to *perform* O in a digital age, but also perhaps what it might be to *be* O contemporarily, whether fleetingly, repeatedly, digitally serialized or indeed privately.

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