The Slave Soul of Russia
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From a psychoanalytic perspective, the slave soul of Russia is best understood as an example of something Freud called moral masochism. Unlike erotogenic masochistic practices (sometimes called perversion masochism) in which an individual may need to be bound, beaten, or otherwise mistreated in order to achieve sexual orgasm, and unlike severe self-destructive and self-mutilative behavior based on a pervasive disintegration of psychic structures, moral masochism is a relatively mild disturbance in which the otherwise healthy individual searches for opportunities to suffer, to be humiliated, or to be defeated.

It does not matter, according to Freud, who it is that satisfies the "need for punishment": "The suffering itself is what matters; whether it is decreed by someone who is loved or by someone who is indifferent is of no importance. It may even be caused by impersonal powers or by circumstances; the true masochist always turns his cheek whenever he has a chance of receiving a blow."\(^1\)

Karen Horney says that the masochist may be overwhelmed by a "feeling that good and evil come from outside, that one is entirely helpless toward fate, appearing negatively in a sense of impending doom, positively in an expectation of some miracle happening without one's moving a finger."\(^2\)

The ideas of "impersonal powers," "circumstances," or "fate" in these formulations sound remarkably like the Russian ideas of *sud'ba* and *rok*. Freud discusses human acceptance of "the dark power of Destiny" elsewhere in his essay on masochism, and in his *New Introduc-
tory Lectures on Psychoanalysis he dwells further on the predestined quality of some forms of moral masochism:

There are people in whose lives the same reactions are perpetually being repeated uncorrected, to their own detriment, or others who seem to be pursued by a relentless fate [Schicksal], though closer investigation teaches us that they are unwittingly bringing this fate on themselves. In such cases we attribute a 'daemonic' character to the compulsion to repeat.  

Ultimately, says Freud, the sense of unavoidable fate in such cases is determined by previous experience of the parents, which is to say that fate is not so impersonal after all: “The last figure in the series that began with the parents is the dark power of Destiny which only the fewest of us are able to look upon as impersonal”; “all who transfer the guidance of the world to Providence, to God, or to God and Nature, arouse a suspicion that they still look upon these ultimate and remotest powers as a parental couple.”

If the power which threatens the masochist ultimately emanates from the “parental couple,” then the ontogenetic origin of masochism must lie in childhood. As Loewenstein says, “masochism seems to be the weapon of the weak—i.e., of every child—faced with the danger of human aggression.”

Clinical Developments since Freud

Although Freud speaks of the “parental couple” as the ultimate source of any internal need for suffering and punishment, he more often than not specifies the father as the model for the psyche’s internal disciplinarian (superego, conscience), and in his article on Dostoevsky he declares outright that “Fate is, in the last resort, only a later projection of the Father.” Freud also tends to focus on the Oedipal dimension of internal needs for suffering (e.g., “through moral masochism morality becomes sexualized once more, the Oedipus complex is revived and the way is open for a regression from morality to the Oedipus complex”).

These two tendencies of Freud’s are, in my opinion and in the opinion of many other modern psychoanalysts and psychologists, mistaken. The mother has a crucial role to play in the origination of the child’s masochistic tendencies, and she plays her role specifically in the pre-Oedipal period. These considerations do not exclude, but complement the later role of the father and of Oedipal dynamics.
The importance of the mother in early development has been emphasized in many post-Freudian theories of human ontogeny. The child begins its existence in a sort of symbiosis with the mother. There follows what some psychoanalysts term a separation-individuation process, which takes place very roughly from about the fourth to the thirty-sixth month of age. The child acquires the fundamentals of its "mother tongue" specifically in the context of its early relationship with the mother. It is in this context that the child also learns the elementary moves of give and take required for all subsequent reciprocal interaction with persons. The child has its first erotic experiences in the pre-Oedipal situation. And so on. In many respects the mother-child dyad is the prototype of all significant social interaction the child will ever have. There is an enormous literature (not only psychoanalytic) on the fundamental importance of the mother in early child development.

How does this literature contribute to our understanding of masochistic practices? What role does the pre-Oedipal mother play in the child's acquisition of masochistic tendencies? The existing theories on pre-Oedipal mother-child relations are very heterogeneous, and they do not always deal with the problem of masochism. But from those which do, it is possible to tease out a thread of common concerns as regards the ontogenetic origin and adult manifestations of masochism.

Many psychoanalysts hold that the adult masochist has suffered some form of deprivation or trauma at the hands of the pre-Oedipal mother. The mother may not have been sensitive enough to the child's need for milk, she may have been emotionally unresponsive (or responded inappropriately) in dyadic interaction with the child, or she may have physically abused the child. Such a mother has, in a sense, defeated her child, and the child, having had no adequate experience of what it means to be victorious, grows up to be someone who tends to engage in self-defeating behavior. The masochist repeats prior defeats. In effect: "I shall repeat the masochistic wish of being deprived by my mother, by creating or misusing situations in which some substitute of my pre-Oedipal mother-image shall refuse my wishes." Masochism should not be blamed entirely on mothers, however. Life is not easy even for the infant whose mother is doing everything humanly possible to care for it. Anxiety is unavoidable in infancy. Also, some infants may simply be constitutionally incapable of withstanding the treatment they receive from perfectly normal mothers. There are
defective infants as well as defective mothers. I want to avoid the kind of stigmatization of mothers that resulted from the once-popular term “schizophrenogenic mother.” Psychoanalysts do not always seem to be aware of how much they blame their patients’ mothers.

In any case, it is the psychoanalytic consensus that something went wrong in the masochist’s early interaction with his or her mother—regardless of who was “at fault.” As Kerry Kelly Novick and Jack Novick assert, “the first layer of masochism must be sought in early infancy, in the child’s adaptation to a situation where safety resides only in a painful relationship with the mother.”

Something may later go wrong in the relationship with the father as well, of course, or with other individuals. But usually masochistic problems originate in interaction with the mother, if only because the mother is usually the child’s primary caretaker—in Russia, as elsewhere—in the crucial early phases of development.

Indeed, by virtue of her uniquely powerful position in the young child’s life, the mother enormously influences all of the child’s subsequent thinking and fantasizing about dominance and submission. The pre-Oedipal mother is the prototypical “master,” the child is the prototypical “slave.” Psychologist Dorothy Dinnerstein has written on this topic:

In our first real contests of will, we find ourselves, more often than not, defeated: The defeat is always intimately carnal; and the victor is always female. Through woman’s jurisdiction over child’s passionate body, through her control over what goes into it and what comes out of it, through her right to restrict its movements and invade its orifices, to withhold pleasure or inflict pain until it obeys her wishes, each human being first discovers the peculiarly angry, bittersweet experience of conscious surrender to conscious, determined outside rule.

When the child—for whatever reason—has this “bittersweet experience” more often than it can bear, then it is in some sense permanently injured. Its sense of itself (as distinct from others), its evaluation of itself (narcissism) is affected. The masochist is, among other things, forever trying to repair old injury to the self.

Only the repair fails. What is more, this failure seems to be planned. The masochist seeks out failure, sometimes even seems to enjoy it. How can this be?

Paradox lies at the heart of masochism. The masochist achieves what Thoedore Reik calls “victory through defeat.” Arnold Cooper
speaks of “the paradox of pleasure-in-unpleasure.”

Anita Katz finds it paradoxical that “the masochistic person contradicts himself or herself, speaking and acting against self-strivings and self-fulfillment in a seemingly absurd manner.” A striking clinical example is offered by Katz:

After several years of our work, she [a self-deprecating, self-defeating patient] said: “I want you to be my mother.” When I asked her what that would be like, she startled both of us by beginning to hit herself on her face and head. She screamed, “Do you see what I did? I beat myself when I think of being mothered.”

On another occasion, when the patient was again beating herself, the analyst told her to sit up and stop it. The patient then asked, in complete innocence: “That’s not good for me, is it—beating myself?”

Masochists can be surprisingly ignorant of the harm they do to themselves.

Various attempts have been made to explain the paradox of masochism. Daniel Stern, in his discussion of the “paradoxical stimulation” offered to infants by relatively unresponsive and neglecting mothers, offers a behaviorist rather than a psychoanalytic model. According to Stern, there is a class of mothers who seem able to reinforce only the self-hurtful behavior of their infants:

All infants have a “repertoire” of common self-hurtful or discomforting mishaps, such as losing their balance in the chair and falling “slow motion” to one side; or missing their mouth with a spoonful and landing the stuff in the eye, ear, or chin; or misjudging a reach for something and falling forward on their face; or miscalculating the trajectory of an object they are bringing toward their face and bumping it against their forehead. Many of these misoccurrences are in fact funny in the way that slapstick is funny, and most caregivers may laugh (if there is no real injury) and also give some soothing “there-there” behaviors.

What is unusual about this group of mothers is that only when one of these mishaps befalls the infant do they come alive. Only when inspired by the “funny” circumstances of the infant’s discomfort does the mother perform lively infant-elicited social behaviors. At those moments she shifts from her deadpan uninvolved and becomes an effective social partner. At that point, the infant usually rapidly recovers from his mishap in response to his “transformed” mother, and they then share one of their rare moments of mutually pleasurable and exciting stimulation. The problem of course is that the infant’s main moments of interactive delight and liveliness with his mother are dependent upon and perhaps become associated with an immediately preceding unpleasurable feeling. A more ideal learning paradigm could hardly be devised for acquiring the basis of masochism: pain as the condition and prerequisite for pleasure. (The maternal behavior of these mothers is not without obvious sadism.)
Stern does not suggest that this is the only route to masochism, but clearly this particular route is in some sense the "fault" of the mother.

Another—more psychoanalytic—idea is that masochistic practices derive from the child's defiant, sadistic feelings initially directed toward an external object such as a parent, but which have then been redirected inward as a result of identification with the object.\textsuperscript{17} In this view, masochism is sadism turned inwards. An example would be the little boy who becomes enraged and bites himself instead of the parent when the parent imposes some restriction.\textsuperscript{18}

Another approach focuses on the individual's need to control the people who administer pain. Irving Bieber describes a three-and-a-half-year-old girl who attempted to control her mother's punishing behavior by punishing herself:

During the preceding year, whenever one parent, especially the mother, punished the girl physically, the child would inflict or threaten to inflict self-injury. She would strike her hands or head on solid objects with sufficient force to produce hematomata; or she would burn her hand on a radiator, or over an open gas flame if she could get to it. By these maneuvers she was largely successful in preventing physical punishment.\textsuperscript{19}

To be more precise: she was successful in preventing punishment by the parent, for she did nonetheless punish herself. She gained a measure of control over the situation by taking that control away from the parent. Her masochistic actions constituted a narcissistic assertion, in effect: "I did it." Control requires a self who controls.

Related to control is the notion of mastery. Otto Fenichel, for example, discusses "repetitions of traumatic events for the purpose of achieving a belated mastery."\textsuperscript{20} In Beyond the Pleasure Principle Freud describes a little boy who was trying to overcome the anxiety of being separated from his mother. The boy developed a game in which he threw objects away and then, with great pleasure, "found" them again. The game was repeated again and again. The apparently compulsive nature of the play led Freud to his concept of the repetition compulsion ("Wiederholungszwang").\textsuperscript{21} Not all such repetition is necessarily masochistic, although most analysts agree that masochistic practices do tend to be repetitive in nature.

According to Edmund Bergler, the future masochist initially masters the painful aspects of the pre-Oedipal situation by "sugarcoating" them, that is, by reversing their real significance: "No one frustrated me
against my wishes; I frustrated myself because I like it." 22 Again, the shift of control is away from an outside agent to the asserting self. This shift is based on an illusion, of course, for it would never have had to take place if the self were really in control. But it does give the developing child a means to reduce anxiety, as well as a potential source of pleasure. The child actively tries to obtain pleasure, even if the conditions are inappropiate and success is unlikely. 23 As Cooper puts it: "the infant claims as its own, and endows with as much pleasure as possible, whatever is familiar, whether painful experiences or unempathic mothers." 24

Masochistic behavior in adults is not always obvious to the outside observer. It may even appear as a normal striving for goals. But a little free association on the couch reveals what is going on, at least to the attentive analyst. Here is one of the numerous clinical examples offered by Bergler:

A young man had developed an amorous attachment for a girl outside his financial and social sphere, and was very conscious of the obstacles. He constantly reiterated the hopelessness of the situation and stated that the inevitable day must come when the family would convince the girl to give him up. One evening the girl told him that an old friend of hers was going to be in town shortly and asked him whether he would object to her seeing him. This trial balloon, testing his "notorious" jealousy, was immediately used by the young man for a violent scene, with which he unconsciously hastened the inevitable end. 25

The young man, in effect, planned the unhappy ending of an affair that might actually have turned out well (or might have turned out well if a different girl had been chosen). Other psychoanalysts have observed other kinds of pathological infatuation and masochistic patterns of falling in love. Otto Kernberg, for example, describes patients who receive "narcissistic gratification and fulfillment in the enslavement to an unavailable object." 26 The gratification is narcissistic in the sense that the patient is rewarded with an implicit feeling of grandiosity or moral superiority over the rejecting object. In effect: "I am the greatest sufferer of the world." 27

This is also a somewhat exhibitionistic (Reik would say "demonstrative") idea. The masochist is always posturing. Psychoanalysts have noted the theatricality of masochism, the masochist's need for a "public" of some sort. It is unusual for a masochistic act to take place without a
witness, at least an imaginary witness. In the deepest layers of the masochist's psyche this witness is always the pre-Oedipal mother.

In the immediate clinical situation, however, the witness is the therapist. Masochists love to perform self-destructive acts in the presence of the person who is trying to prevent them from performing such acts. One of Bergler's patients, a depressed, unemployed woman of means who regarded working women as "silly slaves," consistently showed up late for her psychoanalytic sessions. Yet she was always disappointed that the analyst could not devote more time to her. Sometimes she was so late that only five minutes of the session remained, yet she insisted on having a full session of treatment. She could not understand that the doctor had to send her away, even though she knew another patient was waiting. She perceived the doctor as an unjust tyrant, when in fact she was punishing herself. She was also incapable of making any connection between her feelings about the analyst and her hatred of her mother, whom she regarded as some kind of monster.28

Masochistic behavior is often accompanied by feelings of self-righteousness or self-pity. "Poor me," the patient seems to say, "I am always getting mistreated." Yet the patient somehow always manages to end up in a situation that results in suffering. The patient wallows in suffering, even while complaining constantly about it.

Such patients become what Bergler calls "injustice collectors." They go about the world searching for ever-new ways to be "kicked in the jaw." On the surface they appear to be aggressive, they seem to have a "chip on the shoulder," but they are only trying to provoke aggression from others by their behavior—and they often succeed.

Many masochists are desperately in need of love. They use suffering to obtain sympathy and love from others. This is evident, for example, in one subtype of what Otto Kernberg calls "depressive-masochistic personality disorder" in which there are "traits reflecting overdependency on support, love, and acceptance from others." These traits reveal "a tendency to excessive guilt feelings toward others because of unconscious ambivalence toward loved and needed objects, and an excessive reaction of frustration when their expectations are not met." For these patients the "sense of being rejected and mistreated as a reaction to relatively minor slights may lead them to unconscious behaviors geared to making the objects of their love feel guilty."29

As Bernhard Berliner puts it, such patients try to "extort love" from
others. Otto Fenichel speaks of the "accusing, blackmailing tone" of the masochist. Or, to use an American slang expression, masochists like to "lay guilt trips" on the people around them, and often suffer (or rather, try to enjoy) rejection as a result.

The love which the masochist ultimately seeks is a mother's love—often metonymically represented as the pre-Oedipal mother's breast. One self-pitying, self-deprecating masochist wrote the following in a note to her analyst:

I was about to say that I think I over-love my mother, and am afraid of this, also afraid of her love because there is something disgusting about it. I don't know why it should be disgusting, but it is . . . I would say large, flopping breasts come into the picture, over-earthiness.

To "over-love" the floppy-breasted mother is to need her love too much, and the feeling of disgust in this case is clearly a compensatory reaction (the technical term is reaction formation). Bernhard Berliner says that "the masochist hangs on, so to speak, to a breast which is not there and which he has to repudiate when it could be there, symbolically." Esther Menaker also emphasizes the background of felt oral deprivation by the mother in masochistic behavior:

The normal development of the ego is as directly dependent on getting love from the mother at the earliest infantile level, as is the physical development on getting milk. If mother love on the oral level is absent or insufficient, the individual suffers a psychic trauma which must eventuate in a malformation and malfunction of the ego. The masochistic reaction is one form of an attempt on the part of the ego to deal with this trauma. It sacrifices itself, that is, its own independent development and the sense of its own worth, to sustain the illusion of mother love—an idealized mother image—without which life itself is impossible.

This idea is illustrated by the case of a masochistic woman patient who was literally deprived of her mother and cared for by a busy uncle for the first four or five months of her life. This masochist certainly had inadequate mothering during the crucial pre-Oedipal period.

An even more graphic example is the dream Dmitrii Karamazov has shortly before his masochistic declaration of guilt (see above, 84). Recall that the mother in the dream is unable to feed her child. Her breasts are dried out, and the child is crying pitifully. Dmitrii is very moved by this. He wants to cry himself. He identifies with the child, he understands how the child must feel, since he himself had been abandoned by his mother when he was three years old. He must feel the child's own
rage against the mother for not providing nourishment. But hostility against the beloved mother is bound to produce guilt, which is to say that the hostility is redirected back against the self. Guilt feeling is, by psychoanalytic definition, an imagined experience of aggression directed against the self: "... the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego." 35

Not for nothing, then, does Dmitri guiltily beat his own breast after the dream, for his unhappy dream child (i.e., he himself as a child) had raged against the mother's dried-out breasts. The masochistic declaration of guilt ("of all I am the lowest reptile," "I need a blow, a blow of sud'ba," etc.) is this rage, redirected away from the inadequate mother and toward the self.

When later Dmitri repeatedly says "It's for that babe I am going to Siberia now," 36 he is rationalizing his guilt feelings, explaining to himself and to those around him why he welcomes the punishment of Siberia. If there weren't any children deprived of the mother's breast, there wouldn't have to be any sought-for Siberia. If mothers were (perceived as) adequate, there wouldn't be any masochism. Here Dostoevsky achieves an essentially psychoanalytic insight by means of literary images.

Is Masochism Gendered?

As is evident from the variety of clinical examples I have given, both males and females may engage in masochistic practices. It is not clear a priori, then, whether the slave soul of Russia might or might not be a gendered object. There is reason to believe, however, that certain of these practices under certain conditions are more prevalent in one sex than in the other.

Fighting wars, for example, is an arguably masochistic activity practiced almost exclusively by males in all cultures. One may debate what constitutes a reasonable cause for taking the extreme risk of charging an enemy position—the motherland and Stalin, freedom and justice, oil in the Persian Gulf, or whatever—but one cannot doubt that men do these things more often than women do, and that they often die as a result. Perhaps this masochistic aspect of warfare has been neglected because the sadistic aspect is so obvious. The feuding princes of ancient Rus'
understood it quite well, however, for they interpreted death in battle as a deserved punishment. In effect: "I believe I am right; if I am wrong God will punish me." 37

Sexual masochism is also more common among males than females. Morton Hunt found, for example, that nearly twice as many males as females in his sample obtained sexual pleasure from receiving pain. 38 Males, incidentally, are also more likely than females to be sexual sadists. 39

Curiously, it is almost always male sexual masochists who don the clothes of the opposite sex. This makes sense in light of the fact that women generally have a lower social status than men do. 40 If one (whether male or female) needs to be spanked, or bound, or otherwise humiliated in order to achieve orgasm, one may as well choose gender signs that “go” with the occasion (e.g., an apron rather than a jock strap). 41

In some nonsexual contexts women appear to be more masochistic than men. Psychotherapists are familiar with a pattern of victimization that many women seem to gravitate toward. As Lynn Chancer observes, if such a pattern did not really exist, it would be difficult to explain the popularity of such self-help titles as Women Who Love Too Much or Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them. 42

The notion that women are inherently masochistic, however, has been controversial, to say the least, and Freud did not help matters with his unclear ideas about “female masochism.” 43 Within the psychoanalytic community there have been conflicting views on the extent to which women are masochistic. 44 Some feminist psychologists have vigorously attacked “the myth of women’s masochism.” 45

There are some empirical data to go on. For example, Frederic Kass, in a study of what is nowadays called “self-defeating personality disorder” by many in the American psychiatric community, found that the following “masochistic personality criteria” were significantly more frequent in female patients than in male patients:

Remains in relationships in which others exploit, abuse, or take advantage of him or her, despite opportunities to alter the situation.
Believes that he or she almost always sacrifices own interests for those of others.
Rejects help, gifts, or favors so as not to be a burden on others.
Responds to success or positive events by feeling undeserving or worrying excessively about not being able to measure up to new responsibilities.

Thinks only about his or her worst features and ignores positive features.\(^{46}\)

It is possible, however, that many of the women in Kass’s sample were living in abusive home situations. After all, when spouse abuse occurs, it is women, not men, who are usually the victims. The higher figures for self-defeating attitudes in women could reflect, in part, a natural reaction to being traumatized or to having been traumatized: “There is no justification for labeling as a core part of someone’s personality pattern the reactive behavior which victims develop,” says feminist therapist Lynne Rosewater.\(^{47}\)

When Rosewater assessed a group of battered women using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), she found remarkably high scores for anger directed inward. This anger, moreover, was “often experienced as guilt—a feeling of being personally responsible for the bad things that happen.”\(^{48}\) Such findings are in keeping with the general tendency for women to direct feelings inward and to blame themselves (whereas men tend to direct feelings outward and blame others).\(^{49}\)

Battered women who direct anger inwards clearly exhibit masochism (in Freud’s sense of sadism directed inwards). But feminist psychologists prefer to avoid both the term “masochism” and the expression “self-defeating personality disorder” in making a diagnosis: “To label victims as self-defeating personality disorders is simply to revictimize them.”\(^{50}\) “To perpetuate victimization in the name of nosology is unconscionable.”\(^{51}\)

I doubt that most masochists read diagnostic manuals or are given access to their diagnosis by their therapists, and therefore they are not likely to be harmed by the diagnosis itself. It is possible, however, that some therapists are so insensitive as to allow the diagnosis of “masochism” or “self-defeating personality disorder” to adversely influence the way they treat their women patients. That is, some therapists may be tempted to blame the patient rather than help the patient get out of a traumatic situation. For such therapists—and there are many of them, if
the feminists are to be believed—it is probably better to speak of battered woman syndrome, learned helplessness, or some other term that does not in any way lead the therapist to make a negative evaluation of the victim. Such an approach should also be taken to judges and juries, for they are in a position to do legal harm to women.

For purposes of this book, however, it is possible to call a spade a spade. Battered women do tend to stay in their abusive relationships, that is, they behave in accordance with the definition of masochism given at the beginning of this book (p. 7). But no therapy is being proposed here, nor is any expert opinion being offered to a court. I am doing applied psychoanalysis, not therapeutic or forensic psychoanalysis.

In any case, I am quite aware that victims are not necessarily responsible for their victimization. Iosif Stalin, for example, is at least partially responsible for the terrible things that befell the Soviet people (including his second wife), as I have argued elsewhere. One may legitimately study how some victims (abused women, slavish Russians, etc.) allow themselves to be victimized without denying that (1) sadists and other victimizers do exist, and (2) some victims play no welcoming role whatsoever in their victimization, that is, some victims are not masochists at all. Also, having an inferior social status (e.g., female or serf) does not necessarily mean that one is a masochist. Masochism may help one endure low status, but tolerating low social status does not necessarily mean one is masochistic, or masochistic all of the time.

Even when victims are behaving masochistically they are not necessarily suffering from a “personality disorder” (this is why I prefer the simple term “masochism” to the gratuitously evaluative “self-defeating personality disorder”). Masochistic behaviors can be adaptive, both in the clinical and Darwinian senses of the word. For example, initiation of dangerous physical combat may lead to self-destruction, yet it may be the only reasonable thing to do in certain situations. It may both enhance the probability of survival and eliminate the unbearable emotional tension of waiting for the enemy to attack. Similarly, a battered woman may in effect welcome further injury by staying with her abusive mate, but she may also be gaining the advantage of some fathering for her children, and the abusive situation may satisfy emotional needs of her own that other situations cannot.
The Masochist’s Questionable Self and Unquestionable Other

Masochists can be extremely resistant to psychotherapy. In this connection Freud spoke of a “negative therapeutic reaction.” Stuart Asch describes what he (after Bergler) calls the “malignant” masochist: “These masochistic characters are extremely resistant to analyzing behavior and attitudes that they maintain in order to perpetuate a primitive attachment to an internal object, a preoedipal conflict. The attachment is a residual of incomplete separation-individuation from the early mothering object.” According to Asch, these patients are still so influenced by the internal representation of a “devouring, sadistic mother” that they try to appease that image by sabotaging the therapy:

The gratification in failure, with its associated aim to make the therapist or parent or surrogate helpless to stop the patient, is often tied to a specific fantasy. The primary love object, usually the preoedipal mother, is somehow aware of this jousting and is watching and approving of the defeat of the analyst. The patient experiences it as reuniting him with his preoedipal object. The negative therapeutic reaction in these instances is intended to defeat the analyst’s aim of disengaging the masochist from his death embrace with the internalized preoedipal, engulfing mother figure.

Sometimes these patients do succeed in bringing the therapy to a complete halt. The analyst simply has to give up, and the patient may walk out, never to return.

Helen Meyers takes a somewhat more optimistic attitude toward malignant masochists. She, like many other analysts, recognizes the importance of the pre-Oedipal mother: “Unconsciously, the masochist continues to ‘seduce’ his internalized, critical, maternal object and repetitively reenacts, in current relationships and in the transference, the old scenario learned at his mother’s knee.” But Meyers also pays particular attention to the important role that masochism can play in the child’s attainment of self-definition and separateness from the mother, and this leads her to be tolerant of the masochist’s need to be negativistic:

The “no” of the two-year-old toddler helps him define himself, even when it involves getting into trouble. Unpleasure is experienced as a necessary accompaniment or condition for the pleasure in and drive for separateness and individuation. The adult masochist’s “I will, too, be self-destructive and you can’t stop me” asserts his control, but also defines him as an independent agent, separate,
autonomous, and individuated. "I am the sufferer" defines his identity, though a negative one.59

"As difficult as this may be for the therapist," says Meyers, "it may be necessary for the patient to fail on his own, before he can give up this masochistic stance without fear of merger." 60

This "fear of merger," which derives from an insufficient sense of separateness and individuality, is important in certain forms of masochism. It is as if the masochist does not have a separate identity unless he or she is suffering: Doleo ergo sum, I suffer, therefore I am—to quote a Cartesian neologism that has appeared more than once in the psychological literature on masochism.61

An insufficient sense of individual identity is as much the masochist’s narcissistic problem as is low self-esteem. When the masochistic act is designed to show that “I am in control, not someone else” (see above, 98), then there is an implicit danger that the “I” might be confused with the “someone else.” Similarly, when the masochistic act is aimed at mastery of a previous trauma (above, 98), the implication is that the trauma has threatened the very being of the masochist. The boundaries of the self who masters are clearer than those of the self who is traumatized.

Daniel Kriegman and Malcolm Slavin (1989) suggest that repetitively self-defeating behavior in the clinical situation is aimed at the completion of a previously interrupted construction of the self. In this Darwinian view the self is an “organ” which has been produced by natural selection, and which reflects the inclusive genetic interests of the individual.

Robert Stolorow believes that “masochistic activities, as one of their multiple functions, may serve as abortive efforts to restore, repair, buttress and sustain a self-representation that had been damaged and rendered precarious by injurious experiences during the early pre-oedipal era, when the self-representation is developmentally most vulnerable.”62

To illustrate this thesis, Stolorow points out that some masochists are relieved of anxiety when they experience skin contact with a beloved person, or when their skin is stimulated in some unusual way: “the structurally deficient masochist . . . seeks erotic stimulation and warming of the skin surface, because it highlights the outlines of his precarious body image and restores his sense of self-cohesion.”63 Stolorow argues that the well-known exhibitionistic tendencies of masochists (e.g., con-
cern with martyrdom) also serve to shore up a failing self-image. Some masochists feel they do not even exist unless they are observed.

Roy Baumeister has offered a theory of (erotogenic) masochism that seems to be the opposite of Stolorow’s. According to Baumeister, masochistic practices do not facilitate cohesion of the self, but provide an avenue of escape from it:

Masochism may appeal to psychologically normal people as a way of escaping from the self. That is, masochism divests the person of awareness of self in high-level, symbolic, meaningful terms, extending into the past and future. In its place, masochism focuses awareness on the self at extremely low levels; as a physical entity existing in the immediate present, passively experiencing sensations and simple movements. Masochism deconstructs the self, providing escape from identity into body.64

If one needs to escape from the self, however, there must be a problem with that self. It does not naturally cohere, it would fall apart without periodic relief of some kind (Baumeister focuses on powerful politicians and responsible corporate executives who periodically come to a dominator or a dominatrix for a beating). I suspect, moreover, that the “elaborate self-concept” which needs to be “deconstructed” in the scene of humiliation is originally formed in early interaction with the mother, although Baumeister himself says almost nothing about ontogeny. At least something went wrong in the formation of the masochist’s self.65

Before Baumeister, some psychoanalysts had also viewed masochism as an attempt to escape from the self. Karen Horney is an example. She made it clear that the self to be escaped from is highly problematical: “The obtaining of satisfaction by submersion in misery is an expression of the general principle of finding satisfaction by losing the self in something greater, by dissolving the individuality, by getting rid of the self with its doubts, conflicts, pains, limitations and isolation.”66

Another example is Erich Fromm. In his important treatise Escape from Freedom (1965 [1941]), written in response to the rise of mass fascism in Germany, Fromm expresses the idea that individual responsibility and freedom are frightening. The self is insignificant and alone in the world. Consequently there is an inclination to “escape” from or “forget” the self, to fall into submissive dependence on some larger, controlling social entity such as a mass religious or ideological movement (e.g., Calvin-
ism, Nazism). One component of this process is masochistic in nature. “Escape” from the self is very likely to be self-destructive.67

It should be clear by now that, within the psychoanalytic field, there are diverse and sometimes contradictory views on the relationship of masochism to the self. The major contradiction has to do with the direction the masochist seems to be moving with respect to the pre-Oedipal mother. Some analysts (e.g., Meyers, Stolorow) see masochistic behavior as an attempt to achieve a separate identity or self-definition with respect to an external, maternally significant reality. Others (e.g., Asch) view masochism as a way not to be separated from the engulfing, pre-Oedipal mother, as even a means of achieving merger with her. The “escape” theories seem to fit the latter category, as they involve submersion in a larger other that is implicitly maternal (e.g., the highly idealized and ideologized group).

Perhaps these two apparently conflicting views can be resolved by positing two different grades of masochism, or two different extremes of the masochistic spectrum (much as manic-depressive illness is now regarded as a unitary phenomenon in the psychiatric community). At one extreme the self revives the old delusion of independence from the pre-Oedipal mother, at the other extreme it entertains the even older delusion of fusion with her.

The closest thing to a synthesis of these extremes that I have been able to find in the psychoanalytic literature is made by Lane, Hull, and Foehrenbach. Speaking of behavioral negativity generally (which includes masochism), these authors say: “One of the most important functions of negativity in later life is to simultaneously express and defend against unconscious symbiotic longings, wishes to return to the earliest relationship with the mother, a relationship that bore the stamp of negativity.”68 Adducing specific examples such as self-mutilation and headbanging, Lane et al. state: “These actions . . . may represent unconscious enactments of a primitive fantasy of merging with the destructive mother. The ensuing physical sensations restabilize the patient’s uncertain body image and provide assurance against the underlying fantasy.”69 In other words, the masochist simultaneously expresses longing for symbiotic merger with the mother and defends himself or herself against such longing. The fantasy of fusion is there, but so also is the self-defining defense against the fantasy—both wrapped up in the
one masochistic act. In some acts the fantasy may appear more obvious, while in others the defense against the fantasy seems to take center stage. 

In any case, it is clear that the self—whether aiming for further individuation and coherence, or headed back toward the old symbiotic union with the mother—is what is at issue in masochism. The masochist has a questionable sense of self, no matter what form the attempt to resolve that question takes.

Also, whatever the ultimate theoretical solution turns out to be, Russian masochism can turn up at either end of the spectrum. The exhibitionistic holy fool, for example, seems to utilize suffering primarily to achieve self-definition, while the submissive member of the tsarist peasant commune apparently loses his or her self in that commune, which has many maternal features as we will see below.

With the masochist’s very identity or sense of self a major issue, it should not be surprising that masochistic habits are not easily extirpated. To stop being masochistic is to be a different person, a different self. If Russians were to emerge from their past shorn of their masochism, they would not be Russians anymore. They would be someone else. As Virginia Warren says, “masochists could change their identity, so that in the future they could cast off their self-inflicted pain and still have a (different) sense of self.”

But traditionalist Russians, at least, have not wanted to become someone else. Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov wrote: “Russians should be Russians, should take the Russian path, the path of faith, meekness, and the inner life.” For Aksakov, to take the path of “meekness” is to be Russian. Or, since the self is confused with Mother Russia anyway, to take this path is to be Russia: “Yes, Russia’s only danger is that she will cease to be Russia, and this is where the present Petrine system is leading us.”

Similarly, the right-wing, anti-Semitic nationalist Igor’ Shafarevich (1923—) fears that Russia’s essential identity will change if Russians accept what he calls “russophobic” attitudes, such as the idea (among others) that Russia is “a nation of slaves [narod rabov] always bowing down before cruelty and grovelling before strong power.” Shafarevich declares: “a people [narod] that evaluates its history this way can no longer exist.” This is perfectly correct, although Shafarevich would no doubt be perturbed to realize that he has achieved a psychoanalytic
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insight: for Russians to evaluate themselves as masochistic is, indeed, to stop being Russians. The self-aware masochist is already a different self from the unconscious masochist (including the masochist who denies masochism).

If the self of the masochist is problematical and fragile, the masochist's other is often unquestionable, solid, and grand—for example, the incomparable, eternal Mother Russia. According to psychoanalysis, this other is the parent (usually the mother) returned, but impossibly idealized, transformed into what Heinz Kohut would call an "idealized parent imago." She may in fact have been abusive, but in the mind of the masochist she is now an angel. Stolorow, summarizing the work of several other psychoanalytic scholars, says, "The masochistic character stunts his own independent ego development, sacrifices his competence, and creates a debased and depreciated perception of his own self in order to sustain the image of an idealized, all-good, all-powerful maternal object on whom he can depend for nurture and protection." Many masochistic patients periodically treat their analysts this way, for example. Highly religious individuals behave in a similar manner. The famous Ad maiorem Dei gloriam of the Jesuits is an essentially masochistic proposition. The great Russian masochist Avvakum was constantly seeking to displace glory from himself onto divine figures: "Speak, seeking glory not for yourself but for Christ and the Mother of God."

Here it is important to remember that the aggrandizement of the other toward whom one takes a masochistic stance is entirely projective in nature, that is, not based on the real status of that other. Nydes describes one patient who sought to assuage his guilt for having divorced a devoted but dominating wife by constantly berating himself for his ingratitude. His tearful self-flagellation reached its height just a few weeks before his marriage to what seemed to him to be a much more desirable woman. One day in the midst of the painful experience of his self-inflicted suffering, it suddenly occurred to him that his sadness was really quite useless since his former wife could not possibly know anything about it. That simple reality fact served to remind him that it was his infantile superego and not his former wife whom he was really attempting to appease.

Today's Russia, like this self-flagellating patient, is a country going through a sort of divorce and remarriage. Much of the masochistic posturing seen in the recent Soviet and post-Soviet media reflects not the
realiry of the situation, but personally archaic attitudes toward a previously idealized, domineering mother.

Normalcy and Cultural Variation

Ordinary, “normal” individuals may sometimes behave in masochistic ways. Almost all the recent psychoanalytic scholars of masochism assert, at one point or another, that masochism is ubiquitous in human fantasy and behavior. Patients who come in for treatment of their masochistic practices or who end up in hospital emergency wards are just the extreme end of a continuous spectrum. As Charles Brenner says, “the difference between the normal and the masochistic character is one of degree rather than of kind.”\(^7\) Everyone is a potential masochist because everyone has had some masochistic experience in early development.

Indeed, anyone who is capable of feeling guilt, of inducing guilt in others, of delaying gratification, of being devoted to a child, of working hard to achieve a goal, of subsuming personal interests to a larger cause, is by definition fulfilling some need for—or gaining some degree of satisfaction from—the experience of pain.

Consider, for example, the completely normal phenomenon of guilt. Having committed—in imagination or in reality—a transgression, one may punish oneself inwardly, that is, feel guilty. The feeling is not necessarily conscious, and is induced by a relatively autonomous internal agency traditionally termed the superego.\(^8\) The feeling of guilt can lead to corrective external action (e.g., an apology or restitution), maladaptive external action (e.g., committing a crime in order to experience the relief of punishment), or to internal maneuvering of some kind (e.g., rationalization or repentance). When guilt feelings persist they may develop into a kind of masochism in statu nascendi. For example, a person with a lingering sense of guilt may develop a tendency to welcome misfortune. In certain religious attitudes this is even explicit. Interpreting the scriptural admonition to turn the other cheek, that is, to actually welcome misfortune, the nineteenth-century Russian elder (“starets”) Ambrose wrote:

If anyone begins to tell lies about you or molests you without provocation, this is a blow to the right cheek. Do not murmur but endure this blow with patience, turning the left cheek, that is, remember your own unjust deeds [= feel guilty].
And even if at the moment you are faultless, you have sinned much in the past. You will quickly realize that you merit this punishment [i.e., feel guilty some more].

This rationalization of misfortune by means of guilt, if habitualized, can obviously have self-destructive effects. In isolated instances, however, it may be a perfectly adaptive and normal response. The Archpriest Avvakum, who often utilized such rationalization in his autobiography, was also often the victim of beatings and eventually was burned to death, while Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who only rarely resorts to it (namely, in his *Gulag Archipelago*) was actually quite adept at escaping victimization.

Avvakum and Solzhenitsyn were two different individuals with differing degrees of masochism in (roughly) the same culture. In addition to individual variation in masochistic behavior, however, there is also cultural variation. Different cultures offer quantitatively and qualitatively different opportunities to feel guilty and to be victimized. There is precious little discussion of this cultural dimension in the psychoanalytic literature proper.

No two cultures have identical expectations regarding guilt. In late twentieth-century America, for example, the typical individual earns a relatively honest living, obtains goods and services for the prices advertised, loses or gains wealth in reasonably understandable and orderly fashion, etc. True, this may sound like an idealized caricature to an American law-enforcement officer who is busy chasing criminals. But anyone who has ever lived in, say, Soviet Russia—and who consequently has experienced the pressing need to be illegally employed in order to make an adequate living, to give bribes in order to obtain goods and services, to engage in various forms of falsification and corruption in order to accomplish the simplest of life’s tasks—will understand how much more common the experience of guilt must have been under the Soviet regime. As Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov put it: “From the lowest menial worker to the highest party official, everyone survives because everyone breaks the rules. Being alive is proof of guilt.”

This insight, which is of considerable psychoanalytic value, was apparently a commonplace among the Muscovite intelligentsia during the late Soviet period.

The Soviets, however, did not invent Russian guilt. Guilt has always been a hallmark of Russian culture. Consider, for example, the way
Russians say goodbye. One expression, “Do svidaniia,” is fairly superficial and rather like English “See you,” or French “Au revoir.” The more traditional “Proshchali,” however, expresses deep emotion. There is no English equivalent. Etymologically, the word is a request to be forgiven, an exhortation that the addressee relieve the addressee of an accumulated burden of guilt. The one who says “Proshchali” may or may not have committed certain sins, but nonetheless acts as though the sins are there, and hopes that the other person will nonetheless not think badly of him or her. This guilty attitude inherent in uttering “Proshchali” has been analyzed in a very interesting article by the philologist V. N. Toporov.

“Proshchali” fitted into a general pattern of asking forgiveness (“prosit’ proshcheniia”) on certain threshold occasions among the peasantry. Ethnographer M. M. Gromyko devotes an entire chapter to this practice in her recent book. She observes, for example, that when a peasant set out on a long journey, he customarily gathered together all who were close to him and, bowing down before them, asked each one for forgiveness. At the end of the Maslenitsa holidays (which often included considerable sexual licentiousness), individuals were supposed to beg each other’s forgiveness. This usually occurred on the last Sunday before Lent, a day which was termed “proshchenyi den’” (forgiving day) in many areas.

“Only God is without sin,” according to traditional peasant belief, and everyone else is guilty of some sin or other. “There is no getting away from guilt,” asserted the peasant. Numerous such proverbs may be found in Dahl’s collection, and in other collections:

Even the righteous one falls/sins seven times per day (I pravednik semidzdy v den’ padaet [ili: sogreshaet]).
The day (spent) in sinning, the night in tears (Den’ vo grekhakh, noch’ vo slezakh).
Unintended sin lives in everyone (Nevol’nyi grekh zhivet na vsekh).
Everything in the world happens because of our sins (Vse na svete po grekham nashim deetsia).

If indeed everything happens because of one’s sinful nature, then one is motivated to welcome, or even provoke misfortune, that is, one is more
likely to behave masochistically than if this guilt-ridden attitude were absent. These internal psychological attitudes are important, but external social structure can also foster masochistic events. Chronic guilt seeks an object. In most Western countries, for example, the average middle-class masochist has to exercise some ingenuity, short of hiring a dominatrix, stepping out onto a busy freeway, or committing a crime outright, in order to find punishment. In Russia, on the other hand, you don’t have to be very provocative at all. There’s always a line to stand in, a restaurant to refuse you admission, a bureaucrat to abuse you, an icon to bow before, a sin to repent for, a bathhouse to beat yourself in, an informer to report on you, an official who demands a bribe, and so on. Indeed, unless you are a privileged member of Russian society (e.g., you are included in the Soviet nomenklatura or its post-Soviet derivatives), it is very difficult to go about daily life without experiencing considerable pain. One might almost say that, in such a cultural environment, it helps to be a masochist.

This is precisely my point. In a country where the opportunities for experiencing guilt and suffering are legion there is strong psychological pressure on individuals to choose masochistic solutions to everyday problems. The Russian soul is a slave not only because certain psychological dynamics in early ontogeny universally favor the development of masochistic attitudes (they do), but also because cultural expectations and social organization in the adult world push the individual toward masochism.

Americans who go to Russia (either Soviet or post-Soviet) for an extended period of time like to say they are there “for the long haul.” Whatever their motives for being there, they do recognize that they are going to experience hardship and deprivation. Russians who come to the West, on the other hand, express no such sentiment about the West. They may miss their homeland, they may even disapprove of many aspects of life in the West, but I have never heard a Russian visitor or emigré say that life in the West is a hardship, or that they are in “for the long haul.”

Ergo, Russian society and culture must offer an overall greater opportunity for suffering than does the West. This is true regardless of whether any given individual who happens to be living in Russia actually
takes advantage of the opportunity. Moral masochism may be a phenomenon intrinsic to the individual psyche, but it can also be encouraged or discouraged by the sociocultural milieu. Moral masochism is an individual matter, but a culture of moral masochism is constituted by individuals in their interaction with an environment that encourages specific tokens of that masochism.

*The Swaddling Hypothesis Revisited*

There is a feature of early ontogeny in Russia that, although not unique to Russia, is not often encountered (anymore) in the developed countries of the West. I have in mind another potential source of masochism, the traditional Russian practice of swaddling infants.

Among the peasantry since time immemorial, and even today among most urban dwellers, mothers customarily wrap up their infants in narrow strips of cloth ("pelenki") from birth. These swaddling bands serve both to contain the child's excretions and to severely restrict bodily motion. The arms and legs of a swaddled child are rendered immobile. When fully swaddled the entire child (except for its face) is tightly embraced in a kind of womb-substitute.

Lev Tolstoy, in an autobiographical fragment of 1878, tells us how this can feel:

I am bound [ia sviazan], I want to stick my hands out and I cannot. I cry and weep, and my cry is disagreeable even to me, but I cannot stop. Some people are standing bent over me, above me... I remember that there are two of them, and [crossed out: they feel sorry for me, but because of some strange misunderstanding they] my cries have an effect on them: they are alarmed by my cries but do not untie me [ne razvivaizvait menia], which I wish they would, and I cry still louder. To them this seems necessary (that is, that I be bound), while I know it is not and I want to prove this to them [crossed out: and it is this misunderstanding that tortures me most of all and forces me] so I let forth a cry repellent to myself but irrepressible. I feel the unfairness and cruelty not of people, because they feel sorry for me, but of sud'ba and I feel sorry for myself.⁸⁹

Tolstoy may not actually be remembering the experience of being swaddled, that is, he may be having what psychoanalysts would term a screen memory.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, this description is written by one of Russia's greatest authors, an acknowledged master in the depiction of human emotions. It is not unreasonable to assume that a swaddled child feels much the way Tolstoy says it feels.
There is an enormous anthropological, psychoanalytic, and medical literature on swaddling practices worldwide. In Russia medical specialists and journalists have denounced swaddling ever since the middle of the eighteenth century—but largely in vain. Psychoanalyst Geoffrey Gorer made the Russian version famous when he advanced his "swaddling hypothesis" in 1949:

When human infants are not constrained they move their limbs and bodies a great deal, especially during the second six months of life; it seems probable that much of this movement is physiologically determined, as an aspect of biological maturation. Infants tend to express emotion with their whole body and not merely their face, for example arching their back or thrashing about or hugging. They also explore their own body and the universe around them with their hands and their mouth, gradually discovering what is edible and what inedible, what me and what not-me. While they are swaddled in the Russian manner, Russian infants can do none of these things; and it is assumed that this inhibition of movement is felt to be extremely painful and frustrating and is responded to with intense and destructive rage, which cannot be adequately expressed physically.

Tolstoy's remembered experience certainly confirms this idea that swaddling generates rage in the child. Gorer goes on to say:

These feelings of rage and fear are probably made endurable, but also given emphasis, by the fact that the baby is periodically loosed from the constraints, and suckled and petted while unwaddled. This alternation of complete restraint without gratifications, and of complete gratifications without restraint, continues for at least the first nine months of life. It is the argument of this study that the situation outlined in the preceding paragraphs is one of the major determinants in the development of the character of the adult Great Russians.

According to Gorer, swaddling contributes to such supposedly Russian adult characteristics as: the need for authoritarian constraint alternating with total gratification of impulses (e.g., orgiastic feasts, prolonged drinking bouts); the ability to endure pain and deprivation for long periods; a generally inward orientation and great concern with matters of the soul; persisting guilt feelings which require periodic absolution or purging; and others.

Unfortunately it is not always clear just what the connection is between swaddling and whatever psychological phenomenon Gorer happens to be discussing. Nor does Gorer always get his facts about Russia right. But it does not seem unreasonable, on the face of it, to expect that
swaddling would have some effect on the child’s (particularly emotional) development, or that it be one of the determinants of the character of adult Russians.

Subsequent empirical studies have shown that swaddling does not usually retard motor or cognitive development, and that it does not necessarily provoke a rage reaction in the child. Indeed, once the swaddling bands are in place (after some initial fussing by the child), and as long as the infant is not too old or has had no experience of this treatment, then swaddling seems to have at least a temporary calming effect. This is clearly a boon to an overworked mother.

I once ran into a couple with their swaddled child in a Moscow elevator. I asked the mother if the child was swaddled tightly. She replied: “Yes, he is such a little bandit!”

Ninety-six of Kluckhohn’s sample of 172 Russians stated that they had been swaddled. Twenty-two said they did not know, and twenty-six reported that they definitely had not been swaddled. The remaining subjects evaded the question or equivocated. Kluckhohn noted that most subjects tended to feel very uncomfortable about discussing this topic. I have noticed the same discomfort in conversations with Russian colleagues and friends.

From my own casual observations of swaddled children in Russia over the last fifteen years or so, and from conversations with urban Russians who have children, it would appear that swaddling is still a widespread practice. The Russian mother is still more likely than not to swaddle her infant. The severity of swaddling seems to have decreased, however. Often the arms are left free, and the bands are not tight (“tugo”). Swaddling also seems to be terminated early in urban areas, that is, after two or three months.

Highly educated Russians still give the same old, peasant-style answers when asked why the child is swaddled in the first place: “so that his legs will not grow crooked”; “so that he will not scratch his eyes”; “so that he will not tear off his ears” (a child whose arms are not swaddled may have to wear special little mittens). These statements are absurd, but psychologically revealing. Since they are manifestly untrue, they probably apply to the adults who make them rather than to the infants. In declaring that infants will harm themselves unless swaddled, that is, in declaring that their infants are natural masochists, adults are
revealing that they themselves are preoccupied with masochistic ideas. The same goes, incidentally, for grown-ups who are generally oversolicitous and overprotective of children (Urie Bronfenbrenner has noted the extreme solicitousness of adults toward children during the high Soviet period). Indeed, the same applies to intrusive altruists in Russia generally, for example, the complete stranger who approaches you on the street and tells you to button up your coat.

Fathers, it should be noted, do not swaddle. Mothers do. The swaddling scene is pre-Oedipal, or at least a-Oedipal.

Swaddling is an aspect of the pre-Oedipal mother’s control over the child. Although swaddling may calm the child for a time, initially the child fusses, and later, when the child becomes hungry or otherwise agitated, there is obvious discomfort with the swaddling bands. Only a prompt unswaddling by the mother can prevent a full-fledged rage reaction. But what if the mother does not react, or is not able to react soon enough, or is not available to react? It seems unlikely that rage and defiant feelings can be averted, even with good-enough mothering. Or more precisely: it seems unlikely that rage and defiance of the mother herself can be averted.

If, in addition, the infant is regularly “steamed” by its mother in a bathhouse (including whipping with birch switches—see below, chap. 8), then it is difficult to imagine how the child could avoid rage at its mother. Also, if the child is later (as a toddler) tied for several hours with a rope to a table or a shelf for misbehavior—as was known to happen among the peasantry—then again it seems very likely that the child must become enraged at its mother. Finally, in times and places where there were high childhood mortality rates, surviving children may have developed ambivalent and problematical attitudes toward their mothers (see above discussion of sud’ba, 74).

While mothers in all cultures exercise considerable control over the movement and actions of their infants, mothers who in addition swaddle their infants exercise considerably more control. Initially this control may seem rather impersonal, both because the infant has little idea of what a person is, and because the control is exercised “at a distance” from the mother. The mother does not directly hinder the child's movements, the swaddling bands do. The bands are inexorable. Perhaps at first the child is incapable of making a mental connection between the
bands and the mother. But the repeated experience of being unbound and bound up by the mother, especially if this extends well beyond the commencement of the separation-individuation process (i.e., around four months), must eventually make it evident to the child that the mother is the one who does the hateful restraining.

With swaddling, then, there is an enhanced potential for the mother-child relationship to become problematical, and a problematical relationship with the pre-Oedipal mother itself offers an opportunity for the development of masochistic feelings and behaviors, as we saw above. From the child's viewpoint, there is pain and anger (as if there weren't already enough pain and anger when swaddling is absent!). The mother's control and authority must seem utterly absolute. At the same time the child must feel abandoned by the mother, all alone with powerful emotions that, initially directed against the mother, may then be directed against mother-substitutes (e.g., defiant rebellion against Mother Russia), or turned around against the self (giving rise to guilt, as Gorer argued). Here it is rage turned against the self which is of primary interest.

Swaddling may be said to encourage masochism in the sense that it stimulates the child to "give up" any resistance to constraint by the swaddling bands (this is in fact the physiological response in very young infants—they tend to go limp). But swaddling also fosters masochistic feelings. Tolstoy says that he felt extremely sorry for himself, that he let out a scream that was repellent even to himself (yet he kept screaming). He did not blame those who swaddled him (possibly his mother and nurse together)—which was already a first step toward blaming himself. But even if he did not blame himself, he blamed sud'ba—that is, a mental construct which, as we saw earlier, is ripe with masochistic possibilities.

It appears, then, that swaddling—especially when severe ("tugo") and prolonged—contributes to masochism in Russia. Whether it contributes to other adult psychological characteristics is another question which I will not deal with here.

According to psychoanalytic theory, masochism has its roots in the pre-Oedipal period of early childhood. This is probably true cross-culturally, although there is great sociocultural variation in the quantity and quality of opportunities for adults to behave or to fantasize in masochistic
fashion. In Russia there are opportunities galore. In addition, there is a climate of guilt which pushes adult individuals toward masochistic solutions to life's problems. Add to this the traditional Russian abuse of infants by swaddling and associated practices, and it becomes difficult to imagine how masochism can be avoided in Russia.