

The ambivalence of pain in the work of Giorgos Heimonas: Medical perversion or love in the beyond?

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This article is motivated by an interest in the ethical dimension of literature, as well as in the relevance of sexuality to this dimension. In this perspective it suggests a reading of the work of Giorgos Heimonas, with references to *Πεισίστρατος* (1960), *Η Εκδρομή* (1964) and *Μυθιστόρημα* (1966).

The theory of ethics that supports the following discussion is influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, because I believe that it contributes crucially to an understanding of the very essence of the sexual experience in Heimonas – namely pain – and, further, of the crucial ambivalence of pain between perversion and ethics.¹ In his *Seminar VII* (1959-60) Jacques Lacan emphasises the need for a ‘new erotics’ at the very centre of ethics, an idea promoted two years later in an essay bringing together an unexpected couple: ‘Kant avec Sade’ (1962).² The structural similarity between Kantian ethics and sadistic perversion is a shared emphasis on pain over pleasure – the pain of following the moral law before individual ‘pathology’ in Kant, pain as a means of access to sexual *jouissance* in Sade.³

The central question that arises from this similarity, and to which the following article suggests an oblique answer through the work of Heimonas, is to what extent sadistic perversion may therefore be considered as an ethical stance in love (Lacan’s ‘new erotics’). The argument is that the identification of sadism with the unconventional ethical stance implied in psychoanalysis is discouraged by the connection of sadism with the clinical setting in Heimonas – a connection foregrounded in the title of this article, which is also intended as a contribution to the ongoing discussion of the relationship of literature and medicine.⁴ The clinical setting

¹ For a book-length discussion of the interrelation between perversion and ethics in general, see Egginton 2006.

² See Lacan 1999: 9 and Lacan 1966: 243-269. Heimonas met Lacan in Paris, in 1964 and had the opportunity to attend part of his seminars (Heimonas 2000: 139). The question of a direct influence of Lacan on the work of Heimonas is very interesting, but remains beyond the scope of this essay.

³ See Žižek 1998 (<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-Žižek/articles/kant-and-sade-the-id>). Interestingly, it is in terms of duty and not pleasure that sexual activity is presented in Sade’s *Philosophy in the Bedroom*: ‘what then of the desperation of the libertine, who in the end, parodic though the scene may be, can only exhort his followers to fornicate even when there can be no more pleasure in it, to fornicate for the sake of fornication alone?’ (Egginton 2006: 64).

⁴ Heimonas has himself commented on the relationship of medicine and literature in his work: ‘η ιατρική αποτελεί έναν πολύ ζωντανό ιστό της λογοτεχνίας μου. Όχι μόνο γιατί με βοήθησε να γνωρίσω με επιστημονικές παραμέτρους τον άνθρωπο, αλλά γιατί μου εξασφαλίζει μια κορυφαία επαφή μαζί του [...] βλέπω τον άνθρωπο στην καθαρότερη αληθινότητά του, που του εξασφαλίζει ο σωματικός πόνος’ (Heimonas 2000: 142). The defense against the scientific/intellectual possession of others in this comment is not enough to dissimulate that pain is not only the utmost ‘truth’ of human beings, but also exploited in the frame of the power relations of the clinical setting. This ambivalence, which Heimonas’ literary texts clearly uncover, is made explicit in the work of Antonin Artaud, one of Heimonas’ major literary references. Like Heimonas, Artaud sees a connection between medicine and art and the former offers a metaphor for the cognitive and moral mission of the latter (Sontag 1988: xxviii; xxxiv). On the other hand, Artaud is aware of the sadistic aspect of medicine: ‘If there had been no doctors / there would never have been any sick people, /no dead skeletons / sick people to be

cancels the subversive, anti-social connotations of perversion, since it is a conservative milieu par excellence, where bioethics is exercised as a social practice shaping relations of power.⁵ However, sadism does not exhaust the significance of pain in Heimonas and a final part of this article will allude to its fundamental importance for an ethical stance to love.

A brief account of the theoretical grounding of the ambivalence of pain between perversion and ethics is here necessary. The central imperative of Lacanian ethics is *ne pas céder sur son désir* ('do not give ground relative to your desire').⁶ It is an imperative to pursue desire beyond the utilitarianism dictated by society and its hedonist prioritisation of pleasure, pursuing it, that is, beyond the 'pleasure principle' and towards *jouissance* ('painful pleasure', 'suffering').⁷ Because of his anti-utilitarian conception of ethics Lacan admired the elimination of the realm of sentiment from the criteria of morality proposed by Kant.⁸ Indeed, Kant's categorical imperative ('act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law') has no other content than the universality of the moral law. What the parallel reading of Kant and Sade uncovers, however, is, first, that Kant often disguises the ethical in a semblance of something specific and preconceived as 'good', instead of preserving it, as promised, beyond the economy of good and evil, of pleasure and pathology.⁹ Second, that in Sade the supposedly impersonal voice of the moral law takes on specific, pre-established features, not those of the 'good', as in Kant, but those of the executioner-torturer who utters the law in his all too passionate engagement on behalf of the Other's *jouissance*.¹⁰ What distances both Kant and Sade from Lacanian ethics is therefore that they obscure 'desire's groundlessness and its imbrication with laws whose contingency undermines any notion of ultimate good or right', and proves that 'the chase of desire is not supported by any presence in the Other – that the Other is, in essence, lacking'.¹¹ By contrast, the awareness of the subject that the Other (God or any transcendental guarantee of meaning) knows (that he is dead) is for Lacan the very foundation of modern ethics.¹² The Sadean fantasy of endless suffering may be said to pose the structural problem of the relationship between pleasure and *jouissance*,¹³ but does not resolve it. In Lacan's formulations about ethics, desire must not only understand the fantasy that supports it, but also traverse this fantasy, look beyond the window of fantasy to the spectacle of the subject's death, in order to encounter *jouissance*.¹⁴ In this process the subject accepts the contingency of the object-cause of desire that

butchered and flayed, / for it was with doctors and not with sick people that society began' ('Insanity and Black Magic', in Sontag 1988: 529).

⁵ For a brief account of this idea in Foucault, see Frank and Jones 2003: 180.

⁶ Lacan 1999: 319.

⁷ Lacan 1999: 303; 184.

⁸ Lacan 1999: 76; 79. See also 'Kant avec Sade': 'cette réjection radicale du pathologique, de tout égard pris à un bien, à une passion, voire à une compassion, soit la réjection par où Kant libère le champ de la loi morale' (Lacan 1966: 248).

⁹ Egginton 2006: 61.

¹⁰ Žižek 1999: 290; 297. In support of this view, see also Miller, who argues that Lacan uncovers a division in Kant's work thanks to his reading of Sade: for Kant the subject supposedly 'auto-affects' himself with the voice of duty, but Sade reveals that there is always 'someone else who enunciates the duty, and he who enunciates the duty is not dutiful [...] he is a vicious character' (Miller 1996: 222).

¹¹ Egginton 2006: 73; 66.

¹² This awareness is manifest throughout Heimonas' work, marked by the rejection of the metaphysics of logocentric tradition (Voyiatzaki 154).

¹³ Zupančič 2000: 81.

¹⁴ Zupančič 2000: 231; 253.

sustained the fantasy (*objet a*), and *jouissance* is the painful pleasure in the essential absence of this object, the no-thing (*l'achose*).¹⁵ To sum up, whether pain is an element of perversion or ethics depends on whether it serves to disavow or accept what psychoanalysis calls the lack of the Other.¹⁶ While in sadism the sadist assumes the position of the instrument of the Other's *jouissance*, by inflicting pain on other people,¹⁷ an erotics that would be at the basis of ethics consists in accepting the pain of the Other's lack.

Let us now turn to the work of Heimonas and discuss the first of the above cases: pain as part of a sadistic fantasy, whose conservatory character is implied by its integration in a clinical setting. In *Πεισίστρατος*, the first novel Heimonas wrote, the concealed, libidinous element in the representation of medicine is clear in a number of scenes, where the patient appears to be physically and psychically humiliated by the doctor.¹⁸ In its indiscretion and self-sufficiency, the doctor's gaze does not differ from that of the noisy, athletic teenagers in his waiting room, whose curiosity is captured by the image of the suffering female body, totally exposed in some medical journal:

Είχε και μιαν εικόνα που έδειχνε τ' απόκρυφα μιας γυναίκας γεμάτα κοκκινίλες και σπυριά κι ένας φώναζε κοίτα κοίτα κι ο διπλανός του τον σκούντηξε και του είπε σε τόνο αυστηρής επίπληξης ρε σύ ξεχνάς πως είσαι αθλητής μα κι αυτός δεν άφηνε με τα μάτια του την εικόνα.¹⁹

The passage here is very suggestive about the scopic drive operative in the representation of the human body by modern science; where knowledge becomes a means of domination and control.²⁰ The curiosity underlying clinical anatomy is dangerously close to 'the most archaic sadistic impulses' of what we could call 'the contemporary bio-medical perversion'.²¹ The photograph in the passage just quoted indeed verges on 'medical pornography', where the female body is offered for display, fixed in time and space by the bio-medical gaze.²²

¹⁵ Chiesa 2006: 353.

¹⁶ It is on this basis, of disavowing the lack of the Other, that Hyldgaard writes about the 'conformity' of perversion, despite its supposedly unconventional, subversive connotations (2004 : <http://www.lacan.com/conformperf.htm>).

¹⁷ Žižek 1999:296 – or, as he writes elsewhere, 'the aim of a sadist is *faire exister l'Autre*: by means of my victim's pain, I make the Other exist. The victim's pain has the weight of an ontological proof: it demonstrates that the Other exists in the real, beyond symbolic fiction, in the fullness of his/her being (Žižek 1996: 105).

¹⁸ '...κι ο άρρωστος που ήταν ένας νεαρός αλλοίθωρος και κοκκαλιάρης γελούσε χαζά με αμηχανία [...] γιατί δεν ήταν συνηθισμένος να δείχνει την κοκκαλιάρικη γύμνια του [...]. Ύστερα ο γιατρός του είπε να κατεβάσει το βρακί του [...] κι ο γιατρός του φώναζε πιο κάτω πιο κάτω κι εγώ έκανα τάχα τον αδιάφορο κι έκανα πως κοιτάζω ένα μεγάλο πίνακα που δειχνε έναν γιατρό ασπροντυμένο που πάλευε να τραβήξει μια γυμνή κόρη από την αγκαλιά ενός σκελετού που θα ήταν ο χάρος' (Heimonas 2005: 54).

¹⁹ Heimonas 2005: 55.

²⁰ Braidotti 1994: 21.

²¹ Braidotti 1994: 24.

²² Braidotti 1994: 26.

It should not escape our attention that the body most often objectified by this gaze is indeed the woman's body.²³ In another passage from *Πεισίστρατος* we read about people in the hospital's waiting room, among whom a beautiful Turkish girl with black eyes and white skin – a beauty that will be violently shattered by the male gaze of the narrator. Every time a patient ('ένα κέρνιο λιπόσαρκο πράγμα') appears, the girl nervously brings her hand towards her abdomen. This gesture clearly brings suffering and pleasure together, but its meaning remains obscure until another incident occurs. A man enters the hospital holding a little girl who has lost her senses, injured by a sharp, rusty piece of iron. The doctors take the girl

Άρπαξαν στα χέρια τους το κορίτσι και το φουστάνι που ήταν κεντημένο με αστράκια γαλανά ανασηκώθηκε και μπροστά μου και μπροστά στην τουρκάλα [...] το φουστάνι του κοριτσιού ανασηκώθηκε κι είδαμε το άτριχο το άγουρο το άνηβο αιδοίο πλημμυρισμένο αίμα μια πληγή στο αιδοίο γεμάτη αίμα πηχτό σχεδόν μαύρο. Τότε η τουρκάλα άρχισε να τρέμει και τα χέρια της ανέβηκαν στο στόμα πρόλαβαν και δεν αφήσαν να βγει η φωνή και πόσο δυνατή την άκουσα αυτή την ανήκουστη φωνή.²⁴

The whole incident is libidinally charged not only because of the explicitness in the description of the girl's body, but also because of the centrality of the Turkish woman's 'soundless voice', which plays a central role in the fantasy, both here and in *Η Εκδρομή* (see below). The narrator's reaction upon 'hearing' this 'soundless voice' is interesting: η καρδιά μου χτυπάει νιώθω τον χτύπο της σ' όλο μου το κορμί κι έτρεξα ξωπίσω της μαζί μου τρέχει ένας εχτοετής και δυο νοσοκόμες. The Turkish girl stumbles and falls on the ground, but the narrator continues

Όμως προσπερνάω και τρέχω ακόμα γιατί δεν ήταν το κορίτσι που κυνηγούσα ήταν μια φωνή μια ατέλειωτη αγωνία μια θλίψη ασύλληπτη που μ' αιφνιδίασε με την άγρια αλήθεια της κι έτρεχα να την φτάσω.²⁵

In psychoanalysis the voice, together with the gaze, belong to these leftovers of a prephallic *jouissance*, that support the subject's fantasy (they are the examples par excellence of Lacan's *objet a*) and function, of course, as an obstacle to the fulfilment of the sexual relationship (δεν ήταν το κορίτσι που κυνηγούσα).²⁶ The true 'object voice' is devoid of meaning and signification, since, precisely, it is not part of the symbolic order. It refers to 'a silent scream', to 'the moment when a silent scream *resounds*. The true object voice is mute, "stuck in the throat," and what effectively reverberates is the void: resonance always takes place *in a vacuum* [...] The object is here as long as the sound remains un-articulated.'²⁷ This is precisely what we have here. The inaudible feminine voice is the *objet a* which sets off the narrator's desire and traps him in a dialectics of desire and law, in a fantasy he cannot

²³ Braidotti 1994: 20. See also the incident with *θείσσα Ντομνή* in *Πεισίστρατος* (Heimonas 2005: 71-2), on which Voyiatzaki comments that the male speaking voice 'survives at the expense of a female sacrificed body' (2002: 17).

²⁴ Heimonas 2005: 78.

²⁵ Heimonas 2005: 79.

²⁶ Žižek 1996: 3.

²⁷ Žižek 1996: 93.

escape/traverse.²⁸ The ‘object voice’ opens up the abyss of the lack in the Other, but this lack is, in a properly perverse fashion, immediately disavowed and covered up by well-known knowledge, the knowledge of the professional.²⁹ It is not accidental that immediately after the incident the narrator is informed by the older medical student about the cause of the Turkish woman’s presence in the hospital, which is a tumor in her vagina: είν’ αυτή κάτι στον κόλπο της όγκος δεν θυμάμαι ο κύριος υφηγητής είπε πως στον κόλπο της.³⁰

At any rate, the woman’s disease explains her reaction at the sight of the little girl’s uncovered body, which brings her too close to her own cause of desire/suffering, with the result that the limit of pleasure is transcended towards unbearable *jouissance*. Fallen on the ground, caught in the snares of *jouissance*, which exposes the kernel of her being beyond any symbolic/imaginary role (her καθαρότερη αληθινότητα, as Heimonas would put it? –see note 4 above), the woman becomes the object sustaining masculine fantasy par excellence. The whole narrative exposes the decency of medical morality, the supposedly scientific stance reserved to the ‘normal’ individual,³¹ whose involvement in the situation turns out to be not objective but all too passionate and interested.

Medicine and degenerate sexuality are also linked in Heimonas’ work that followed *Πεισίστρατος, Η Εκδρομή*. In support of this argument, we should note that narratives of illness are repetitively and emphatically framed as oral narratives within the main body of Heimonas’ text. This becomes significant in conjunction with the centrality of listening in the libidinal economy of the texts of Sade, where the voiced story, the ‘object voice’ offers the illusion of a true encounter with satisfaction.³²

Storytelling is a dominant practice in *Η Εκδρομή*. The narratives of illness are introduced with phrases such as Σταθείτε να σας διηγηθώ λέει με ορμή,³³ Ξαφνικά ένας λέει θα σας πω μια ιστορία.³⁴ One example is the story of the encounter between some friend of one of the narrators and a pretty neighbor (πραγματική καλλονή του σινεμά). The woman knocks at the friend’s door to have sex and the friend’s eyes are captured by the spot on the woman’s cheek (μια μεγάλη μαυριδερή ελιά), as if her beauty and her body in its entirety had a limited effect on him.

Όμως ο φίλος μου πού να ξεκολλήσει από την ελιά, κι όλη του δηλαδή να πούμε η ερωτική του προσοχή στην ελιά και να γλύφει και να ρουφάει και να δαγκάνει την ελιά κι όλο μούγκριζε την ελιά σου την ελιά σου δεν ξέρω τι με είχε πιάσει μου είπε [...]. Και γυρνάει η γυναίκα με απάθεια ενώ πριν από λίγο. Με απάθεια τελεία γυρνάει και του λέει. Δεν είναι ελιά είναι καρκίνος. Ελάτε στη θέση του φίλου μου.³⁵

The object cause of the subject’s desire is here clearly identified with the source of the other’s suffering: the woman’s spot is in reality the symptom of her cancer. The spot

²⁸ As Dolar explains, the ‘object voice’ is marked by an inherent ambivalence: on the one hand it transcends the signifier of masculine logos and points to the Lacanian problem of feminine *jouissance*. On the other, it is ‘the aspect of *jouissance* pertaining to Law itself’ (Dolar 1996: 17-25).

²⁹ See Hyldgaard 2004 : <http://www.lacan.com/conformperf.htm>: ‘The pervert’s relation to knowledge is that of the professional, the savant.The pervert’s identification with the non-lacking Other’.

³⁰ Heimonas 2005: 79.

³¹ Braidotti 1994: 27.

³² Fardinger 2005: 58/59.

³³ Heimonas 2005: 119.

³⁴ Heimonas 2005: 121.

³⁵ Heimonas 2005: 122.

stands for ‘this paradoxical uncanny object’, the *objet petit a*, which Lacan also calls *plus-de-jour*, ‘the surplus enjoyment that designates the excess over the satisfaction brought about by the positive, empirical properties of the object’.³⁶ The status of this object is precarious, since, as the story here suggests, it may at any moment transform itself from a sublimated into a monstrous object, and reveal the void of the Real, which until then it served to veil. The narrator of the story invites the audience – and the reader – to put itself in his friend’s place (Ελάτε στη θέση του φίλου μου), which is the place of someone witnessing such a transformation. As will be suggested below with the occasion of *Μυθιστόρημα*, the decision to face and endure this transformation points towards the properly ethical attitude in love.

The link between medicine and sadism becomes explicit in *Η Εκδρομή*, when one of the storytellers narrates an incident about himself being present to a surgery and having the sense that Κάτι το εγκληματικό σχεδιάζεται εδώ μέσα το σαδιστικό.³⁷ The key to the whole scene is that the surgeon postpones the surgery with no apparent reason.

Μπαίνει στο χειρουργείο όλα έτοιμα κι ο άρρωστός μου. Όλοι περιμένουν οι βοηθοί στην σειρά οι νοσοκόμες. Από την πρώτη στιγμή λέω με το νου μου κάτι δεν πάει καλά. Δηλαδή ο χειρουργός έδειχνε μιάν αδράνεια κι αδιαφορία δεν πλησιάζει καν στο κρεβάτι.³⁸

This postponement is what gives the surgeon’s attitude properly sadistic overtones, according to the very definition of sadism by Lacan, who claims that the crucial element in the sadistic fantasy is not to harm the victim, but to generate the anxiety of the victim, and, beyond that, to isolate *objet a*.³⁹ Indeed, in the previous scene, the surgeon generates the anxiety not only of the narrator, but also of one of the nurses, who almost faints (Βγάζει μια φωνίτσα και παραλίγο να πέσει).⁴⁰ As in the case of the Turkish woman the nurse appears here in a state where support in the symbolic is momentarily lost and the real kernel of existence exposed,⁴¹ driving the surgeon mad with desire: Την προφύλαγε και την έκρυβε μέσα του και καταλάβαινες πως εκείνη η ανυπεράσπιστη στιγμή της νοσοκόμας πως τον είχε συγκλονίσει [...].⁴² Devoid of signification, in its pure physicality, the nurse’s voice has an irresistible spell. It lures towards the privileged realm of the Sadean heroes, a realm before the subject’s division in language, where existence can be extinguished.⁴³ The very setting where

³⁶ Žižek 1996: 105.

³⁷ Heimonas 2005 : 130.

³⁸ Heimonas 2005 :129-130.

³⁹ ‘Ce n’ est pas tellement la souffrance de l’ autre qui est cherchée dans l’ intention sadique, que son angoisse. [...] L’ angoisse de l’ autre, son existence essentielle par rapport à cette angoisse, voilà ce que le desir sadique s’ entend à faire vibrer [...]’ (Lacan 2004: 123). For Lacan the sadist is someone for whom the law has not operated, which would retroactively constitute an object as *a*, and this is the reason why the sadist ‘plays the part of the Other in his scenario in order to make the Other exist, and seeks to isolate for his victim the object to which the law applies’ (Fink 1997: 191).

⁴⁰ Heimonas 2005 : 130.

⁴¹ This is how the moment of stumbling is described: Είμαστε μια χαρά και ξαφνικά βρισκόμαστε στο πέλαγος κι ολωσδιόλου απροσπάτετοι και γελοιοι. Μια απογύμνωση στο δευτερόλεπτο (Heimonas 2005: 130).

⁴² Heimonas 2005: 131.

⁴³ On the voice as a figure alluding to the emergence of ‘the undivided subject previous or beyond the advent of his participation in language’, see Fardinger 2005: 58/59. The fascination with this pre-linguistic moment of the subject also brings to mind the Sadean ‘second death’, where the executioner aims at the victim not as body but as signifier, and strikes ‘to the unyielding nothing – the thing – that

this scene takes place contributes to the doubling of the clinical scenario by a sadistic one: the surgery room is emphatically characterized by exclusivity, by singularity as a necessary constituent of fantasy: Μια σκηνή εξονυχιστική παραβιάζε την αυστηρότατη αποκλειστικότητα εκείνου του δωματίου. Χειρουργείο. Υπάρχουν χώροι αυστηρότατα αποκλειστικοί [...] είναι ωρισμένοι χώροι αποκλειστικοί.⁴⁴

The representation of medicine in Heimonas may be read in the light of Antonin Artaud's view on the dependence of doctors on the Other, in the sense of the social order and its norms, in whose name the pain of other men, fellow human beings, is managed and controlled.⁴⁵

Contrary to the attitude of the sadist who enjoys 'père-versely, that is for the Father/Other, by thinking that the latter is One', there is the possibility for the subject to acknowledge the lack of the Other and deliberately assume the pain of this awareness, thus achieving an ethical stance.⁴⁶ In the domain of love accepting the lack of the Other is arguably equivalent to realising the impossibility of a sexual relationship between a man and a woman (*il n' y pas de relation sexuelle*, according to Lacan's notorious formulation).⁴⁷ Heimonas' novel *Μυθιστόρημα* arguably describes an alternative to the always failing sexual relationship, an alternative based on the knowledge of its impossibility.⁴⁸

In this novel the central character is T (είναι το αρχικό από τη λέξη τέρας, Heimonas explains). T lives with his wife called A (*αγάπη*), her mother, and a girl, Margarita, who, always in the dreamy atmosphere of the work, turns out to be his lover. One day a stranger knocks at their door. He is called Γ (*γνώση*) and intends to kill T.⁴⁹ However, T's wife, A, kills Γ in order to protect T. At the end of the novel Margarita undertakes to kill T herself, and also, it is implied, to follow him in death.

About T it is said that O T. έχει μιαν εκπληκτική ομορφιά, γοητεύει τους ανθρώπους. Στην πραγματικότητα είναι τέρας.⁵⁰ Γ is aware of T's monstrous nature, and for this reason T is furious when A kills Γ, as he feels he has lost his chance for a relationship based on knowledge, which would transcend one απλό ερωτικό πάθος, μια κοινή ομοφυλοφιλία.⁵¹

lies beyond the signifier', in a vain attempt to cancel existence not only as a biological, but also as a linguistic event (De Kesel 2009: 138).

⁴⁴ Heimonas 2005: 131.

⁴⁵ On this connection in Artaud, see Chiesa 2006: 350-51.

⁴⁶ Chiesa 2006: 338.

⁴⁷ 'There is no such thing as a sexual relationship because one's *jouissance* of the Other taken as a body is always inadequate – perverse on the one hand, in so far as the Other is reduced to the *objet a*, and crazy and enigmatic on the other' (Lacan 1998: 144). In *Η Εκδρομή* the failure of sexual relationship is comically dramatized in the episode with the παράξενο ζευγάρι who retreat from the world trying in vain to achieve the perfect relationship (Heimonas 2005: 137- 38).

⁴⁸ Interestingly, *Μυθιστόρημα* has attracted critics' attention from the point of view of ethics. Aristinos writes of μια νέα ηθική του οριακού βιώματος in this work. Although the connection of ethics to *ενήδονη χαρά* (1981: 75), which Aristinos suggests does not capture the essence of *jouissance* as 'pleasure in pain', he is certainly right to insist on something 'αλλόκοτο και σατανικό' at the very centre of ethics here (1981: 68).

⁴⁹ On the significance of the characters' initials, see Heimonas 2001: 42-43.

⁵⁰ Heimonas 2005: 199.

⁵¹ Heimonas 2005: 214. Contrary to the relationship between T and Γ, the heterosexual norm (T and A) is described in terms of the sadistic fantasy we have seen thus far: η A τον κοιτάζει και δεν μιλά ο T

The love that fails between T and Γ is ‘realised’ between T and Margarita, who, as a woman, suggests the possibility of an Other *jouissance*, a *jouissance* that does not exist (since it cannot be articulated in the symbolic), but ‘ex-ists’, implied beyond desire and phallic *jouissance*.⁵²

At the beginning of the novel we learn that Η Μαργαρίτα έχει δέος κι έναν πόθο για τον Τ. σχεδόν δεν τολμά να τον αγγίξει.⁵³ In this sentence T seems to be the sublimated object for Margarita, the object she has arbitrarily placed at the level of the Real, so as to veil its void, the lack in the Other. However, Margarita is strong enough to endure the knowledge of T’s monstrosity beneath the veil of his dazzling beauty. Before his murder, Γ had begged Margarita to describe her knowledge of T. and Margarita responds. Θα σας περιγράψω πώς είναι το σώμα του γυμνό. The first thing to notice about the description is that T as an object of true love is beyond the barrier of sexual difference and sexual orientation, which only make sense in the frame of fantasy. He appears as an androgynous figure: έχει μια θηλυκιά σφιχτή σάρκα.⁵⁴ It is not irrelevant that both Γ and Margarita are in love with T. As Lacan has famously stated, *quand on aime, il ne s’agit pas de sexe* a formula signifying that love is situated beyond sexualisation, ‘outside the limits of the law’.⁵⁵ Margarita’s description continues

Η καμάρα των μοιρών κι οι μαρμάρινες κλειδώσεις οι τένοντες λυγρές βέργες και κοπάδια αίλουροι σκαρφαλώνουν σκαρφαλώνουν. Το πρόσωπο βρεγμένο από τα φύκια βυζαίνω τον μακρύ σταλαχτίτη την πελώρια κρεμαστή καρδιά ρουφώ το αίμα της το καταπίνω.⁵⁶

Margarita’s words depart from ordinary representations of sex and thus open up a space where a non-alienated and socially determined desire may be conceived.⁵⁷ What dominates her description of T are the carnal details underneath and beyond the skin as a border between separate individuals, as well as the cannibalistic element of sucking the blood dripping of T’s heart.⁵⁸ As Leo Bersani argues, this latter motif of devouring the beloved would seem to fulfil Lacan’s idea of ‘love in the beyond’, the

την κλωτσάει τι ξέρεις για μένα της πατά το χέρι στο πάτωμα. [...] φίλησε το χέρι μου λέει απότομα ο Τ φίλησε τα γόνατα μου λέει ο Τ γδύσου (Heimonas 2005: 215).

⁵² See on this issue Fink 2004: 161.

⁵³ Heimonas 2005: 201.

⁵⁴ Heimonas 2005: 205.

⁵⁵ Within queer theory this Lacanian view is seen as a liberation of desire from heterosexuality: desire in Lacan is detached from gender, since it is not determined by object choice, but by *objet a* (see Restuccia 2006: 130).

⁵⁶ Heimonas 2005: 205.

⁵⁷ The correlative of sexual alienation is linguistic alienation, which also implies determination by the Other. In both cases, the subject must alienate itself from symbolic alienation, effecting, as it were, an ‘alienation of alienation’ (Chiesa 2006: 340). For an idea of how Heimonas achieves this in the case of language see Voyiatzaki’s remarks on the connection between grammatical/syntactical disfigurement of language and narrative incoherence on the one hand, and a rebirth of the subject within language after the death of the logocentric tradition on the other (Voyiatzaki 2002: 178).

⁵⁸ For a parallel cannibalistic scene, see *Ο Γιατρός Ινεότης*, where Τενάγκνε devours the ‘stranger’: Ξεσπά τον τρώει! δαγκάνει τον ξένο κόβει μασά τον τρώει! (Heimonas 2005: 249). Τενάγκνε follows the stranger in death, as does Margarita with T in *Μυθιστόρημα*. In a recent article Sofia Voulgari interestingly construes this suicidal act as an indication of feminine, or Other, *jouissance* (Voulgari 2010: 5).

fusion of two desubjectified beings, while desire as a defense against *jouissance* consolidates subjectivities and thus opens the way to social regulations.⁵⁹

The resistance to ordinary sexuality towards absolute *jouissance* is suggested even more strongly at the moment when Margarita kills T, and seems to be following him in death, whereby the two lovers are able for a brief moment to confront the Real of their existence mutually.⁶⁰

Η Μαργαρίτα κρατά ένα πλαστικό δοχείο με βενζίνη. Στο κέντρο της πλατείας ο Τ. σταματά κι αρχίζει να φωνάζει. [...]. Η Μαργαρίτα στέκεται μπροστά του και τον αγκαλιάζει αρχίζει κι αυτή να φωνάζει. Προσπαθεί να ταιριάσει τη φωνή της με τη φωνή του Τ. Κοιτάζει το στόμα του για να μαντέψει τον σκοπό. Αλλά δεν μπορεί και μοναχά όταν παύει ο Τ παύει κι αυτή κι ύστερα αρχίζουν πάλι κι ευτυχισμένη η Μαργαρίτα προσπαθεί να ταιριάσει την φωνή της με την φωνή του Τ κι οι άγριες φωνές τους.⁶¹

Moving beneath the skin, devouring, murder – all these motives support the idea of true love beyond degenerate desire, but at the same time imply its essential impossibility for humans. The question remains if love can nevertheless achieve the impossible, while preserving it as such, if, that is, there is any conceivable way *jouissance* can be ‘humanised’ and the immaterial Real materialised. Based on the work of theorists from the Slovenian psychoanalytic school, mainly Žižek and Zupančič, I suggest answering this question positively.⁶² The key to the answer lies in Margarita’s endurance of the knowledge of T’s true, monstrous nature. More specifically, it has been suggested that true love is when the other loses the *agalma*, ceases to be the sublimated object within a fantasy frame – and nevertheless survives this loss.⁶³ Margarita’s love for T is true, ethical love, because it does not stop at the dazzling beauty that turns T into a sublimated object of fantasy, but reaches beyond beauty, the ‘real kernel of the object’.⁶⁴ Transcending desire towards *jouissance* would not therefore suggest an unrestrained death drive, but loving someone for what he is. This involves moving directly to the Thing, and finding oneself with the beloved as an object who is no more protected by symbolic or imaginary identifications, an object, that is, that can appear weak, lost, ridiculous, even monstrous.⁶⁵ True, ethical love is love for such an object.

⁵⁹ See Restuccia’s discussion (2006: 128;124).

⁶⁰ For a parallel case in film, see Restuccia on Louis Malle’s *Damage* (2006: 93). This cruelty towards the other is different from the one occurring in sadism and the difference is crucial for the distinction between perversity and ethics. What we have here is not pain inflicted in the name of the Other, but a cruelty inherent in difference-effacing love: to love someone else ‘as myself’, is to find in the other the same evil ‘I retreat from within myself’ and thus ‘is necessarily to move toward some cruelty’, which does not exclude myself, since myself and the other are not distinct but the same (Lacan 1999: 198).

⁶¹ Heimonas 2005: 219.

⁶² For a brief account of these views, as well as bibliographical references, see Restuccia 2006: 104-11. Restuccia remains, however, towards the ‘humanisation’ of *jouissance*.

⁶³ Restuccia 2006: 104.

⁶⁴ For this expression, see Žižek 1994: 197.

⁶⁵ This view is expressed by Zupančič in her article ‘On Love as Comedy’, *Lacanian Ink* 20: 62-79 and discussed by Restuccia 2006: 107.

With the occasion of Lacan's essay 'Kant avec Sade', it was argued that pain does play a crucial role at the intersection of love and ethics, but should not be situated at the level of sadic perversion, whose conformist character is revealed by its framing in biopolitical/bioethical agendas related to the clinical setting. Although apparently transgressive, the pervert's behaviour is in fact caught up in the very ethical systems it claims to oppose and practices the secret fantasies that sustain the predominant public discourse. By contrast, it may be argued that pain as an essential dimension of ethical love becomes meaningful as an acceptance of the lack in the Other, which translates in daring to look at the Other as he/she really is when the veil of fantasy withdraws, a piece of the real, literally – a monster (*Μυθιστόρημα*). This idea exposes the inadequacy of both neo-conservative tendencies and a supposedly permissive attitude towards sex, and points towards a different way to insist on the political significance of sexuality as a realm where social determination should be resisted.

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