



The Confessions of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch (Re/Search Classics)

By Wanda von Sacher-Masoch

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The Confessions of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch is the first English translation of this early 20th century feminist classic by an SM pioneer. It is the racy and riveting memoir by the woman who was married for ten years to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the author of *Venus in Furs*. The games Wanda played called into serious question who was the Master and who the Slave. Some amazing adventures and wild characters populate this love story, including the mysterious Ludwig II of Bavaria, creator of the amazing Neuschwanstein castle and other baroque wonders.

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Editorial Review

Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

From the Back Cover

Finally available in English: the racy and riveting Confessions of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch--married for ten years to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (author of *Venus in Furs* and many other novels) whose whip-and-fur bedroom games spawned the term "masochism." Originally published in French in 1907, this narrative of an idealistic, sensitive woman embroiled in a net of sexual peril, betrayal, and deceit is well ahead of its time.

A feminist classic, this is the story of a woman living in an era when dependence on the husband could force one to face literal starvation and poverty. Blackmailed by Leopold, who insisted that he could not write and earn their living unless she "cooperated," she was forced to play "sadistic" roles in his exotic sexual fantasies to ensure the survival of herself and her three children--games which called into serious question who was the Master and who was the Slave. Besides being a compelling study of a woman's search for her own identity, strength and, ultimately, complete independence, this is a true-life adventure story--an odyssey through many lands people by amazing characters, ranging from the famous (Ludwig II; Liszt) to the unsung great (the totally fearless adventuress-skeptic Catherine Strebinger). Underneath its unforgettable poetic imagery and almost unbearable emotional cataclysms reigns a woman's consistent unblinking investigation of the limits of morality and the deepest meaning of love.

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THE CONFESIONS OF WANDA VON SACHER-MASOCH by the wife of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the author of *Venus in Furs*

In 1907, during a meeting at *Mercure de France*, Paris' foremost publishers, a little old lady in a ratty fur coat marched in and announced herself at the reception desk. Immediately her name, whispered from ear to ear, triggered a flood of memories in the minds of onlookers: "Madame de Sacher-Masoch . . . the *Venus in Furs* . . . Wanda, the bride, naked under her furs." Incredulously, those present stared at this legend whom they did not even know was still alive--this old woman, whose gray tufts of hair sprouted under a seedy worn hat; her thin figure beneath a peeling, shedding old fur. Decades earlier her pioneering, flamboyant "S&M" lifestyle had inspired numerous articles and several books, then she had fallen into poverty and obscurity. Out of a decrepit handbag she retrieved a thick manuscript, which *Mercure de France* would publish that year under the title *Confession de ma vie*.

For ten years this woman, herself a gifted writer, had been in the public eye while married to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, a popular, charismatic author whose life overspilled into his work--the term "masochism" derives from his name. Leopold's best-selling novel *Venus in Furs* (1870) provided a behavioral archetype whose influence persists to this day: "The entire constellation of symbols that has come to characterize the masochistic 'syndrome' can be found here--fetishes, whips, disguises, fur-clad women, contracts, humiliations, punishment and of course the perpetual and volatile presence of a terrible coldness." (overleaf from *Masochism*, Zone Books). The executive who hires a prostitute to tie him up and beat him is generally unaware that he is merely re-staging the fantasy which Leopold imagined and detailed over a hundred years ago.

Shortly after they had married, Wanda and Sacher-Masoch drew up a contract which she wrote (under his direction) and he signed:

"If you love me as you say, you must sign this contract and add a few words confirming that you accept all my conditions and give your Word of Honor to remain my slave until your last breath. Prove that you will have the courage to become my husband, my lover, and my dog. You must completely give up your Self. You will have no will besides mine . . . You are nothing but a slave at my feet, and I can exert all forms of cruelty, and if I mutilate you, you shall accept it without complaint. You must work for me like a slave, and if I live in luxury and leave you in need; if I trample you, you must without protest kiss the foot that crushes you . . . If I ask you to commit a crime, you must become a criminal to obey me . . . If you cannot stand my domination; if these chains become too heavy for you, then I will have to kill you, because I will never give you back your freedom."

This "contract"-Leopold's unrestrained fantasy-must be considered in the context of a society where women were not allowed to own property, and poverty and destitution were an independent woman's well-founded fears. Leopold may well have pretended to be the victim during their whipping sessions, but afterward Wanda remained his economic plaything. Real control-economic and legal-never left Leopold's hands; he successfully won possession of the child he wanted and was never accountable for child support or alimony. Despite the masochistic rituals which some have interpreted as socially radical behavior, the underlying power dynamics remained faithful to the status quo-according to Wanda these games were not consensual.

Well ahead of her time, in an era when a single woman had mainly two survival options: bodily labor or prostitution, Wanda writes a scathing indictment of the marriage institution: "If Sacher-Masoch and I had not married in a church but had gone to a notary and had a contract drawn up . . . not only the ridiculous farce of the religious marriage ceremony but the cruel, repugnant procedure of divorce would have been spared me . . . Why does the feminist movement not intervene here? Why does it not advance to the root of the evil, so as to sweep away all of this old rotten institution of marriage-so contrary to our modern thought and feelings? Or if it cannot sweep it away, then ignore it? . . . Then things will change. The woman and the man will not be bound by law but solely by their will, their love and friendship. There will be no more laws that reduce a woman's love to a duty and make her the property of the man."

Besides giving a vivid panorama of a woman's struggle for autonomy against the backdrop of late 19th century European society, the Confessions offers a great cast of characters who effortlessly etch themselves on the reader's memory; and spectacular journeys and adventures, from the castle of Sefer Pasha to the graveyard of Esed to the bustling life of high society Paris. Sardonic descriptions of social intrigue and political and religious corruption abound. Wanda's keen sense of observation, her unfailing irony and humor, and the wisdom with which she views her life in retrospect, all combine to make this a most captivating narrative as well as a social documentary unmasking a world in which really very little in the way of male-female relations has changed. Here, at last available in English, is an essential classic in the annals of feminist literature whose history is slowly but surely becoming visible.

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