

Hurts so good: Masochism in Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children*

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This essay will examine aspects of the complex family Stead creates in *The Man Who Loved Children* (hereafter *TMWLC*) by drawing on the work of Sigmund Freud, notably his 'A Child is Being Beaten' (*SE* 19) and 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (*SE* 21). Novelist and essayist Jonathan Franzen calls *TMWLC* 'the best novel ever written about a nuclear family, and as ferocious and damning an assault on the patriarchy as can be found anywhere in world literature [...] Stead's masterpiece [...] isn't small enough or one-sided enough to be useful to theorists. The Pollits are too human to fit into a syllabus' (1). Franzen's perception that this 'too human' novel defies theoretical approach makes it a challenging and stimulating subject of study. Ann Whitehead too described *TMWLC* as 'the most powerful evocation of what it's like to live in a family that I've ever read' (*Selected* 224). *The Man Who Loved Children*² is the semi-autobiographical narrative of Christina Stead's severely dysfunctional family. Stead's alter-ego, Louie Pollit, is the only child of Sam Pollit's first wife, who died six months after Louie's birth. Sam grew up in poverty, leaving school at twelve. He eventually married Henny Collyer, spoilt daughter of wealthy fish merchant David Collyer. Through self-education and Collyer's influence, Sam became head of the Bureau of Fisheries. Despite this success, Sam's eccentric egotism causes his family great financial and emotional hardship. His complex personality is the focus of the present discussion.

Why Freud?

Although readings by Susan Sheridan and Joseph Boone focus on the psychological development of Louie, the artist as a young woman, not many psychoanalytic readings of this text have been performed, perhaps reflecting Stead's aversion to Freud's theories (*Selected* 251). Boone writes:

Stead models the progress of Louie's individuation on a step-by-step inversion of the constitutive elements of the Oedipus story, creating too precise a reversal, I suspect, to be unintentional. In Sophocles' version of the myth, Oedipus's patricide leads to union with the mother, a violation of the incest taboo for which he is punished with blindness; the question of Louie's matricide, in contrast, leads to her severance from the father, an escape from incest for which she is rewarded with quite literal sight ("How different everything looked"). As matricide is substituted for patricide in the daughter's story, so severance from the father replaces union with the mother, and sight replaces blindness. Moreover, if Oedipus's blinding brings about his insight into the truth that his end lies in his origin [...] the difference in outer perspective granted to Louie by her new vision removes her from Sam's narratological economy of predetermined origins and endings—and, by analogy, from the economy of Oedipal theories of narrative. (537)

In my reading, I propose that in this novel, Stead invokes Freud's ideas only to gainsay them. Stead's apparent inversion of the Oedipal story confirms the need for Freudian theory to

enable recognition of its exorcism, and raises questions about the relationship of the rest of her text to Freud's thought. A Freudian reading of a work believed to be anti-Freudian seems equally appropriate, since the theory against which I believe Stead writes is key to understanding this aspect of her work. Tod Dufresne claims that 'we most certainly do not need Freud to help us describe the world—inner or outer,' yet argues that Freud's work must still be used in 'the urgent task of picking up the remaining pieces and making sense of it all,' since the 'all' that exists (especially in the literary world) is partly the result of Freud's theory (ix).

As noted above, Joseph Boone reads Sam as a narcissistic sadist, and of Sam's narcissism there is no doubt: he talks 'of his own beautiful soul and sympathetic life story. He would reform the state, even the world, because through love he knew more than all the politicians' (371). Sam's sadistic tendencies are also clear, for example when he forces little Sam to shovel marlin muck even as the child vomits at its smell. Yet Franzen declares: 'brilliant as Christina Stead is in depicting Sam's misogyny and tyranny, she's no less brilliant in illuminating the weakness and fear and need at the heart of the patriarch, and making us pity him even as we hate him' (2008). Highlighting Sam's vulnerability, Franzen indicates a lacuna in the analysis of *TMWLC* to date: reading Sam as a sadist misses much of the subtlety of Stead's characterisation. Complementing Boone's reading, I argue that Sam's character appears to have a self-defeating or masochistic dimension. Freud believes that active and passive forms of perversion always co-exist in an individual, and that masochism is part of an active/passive binary: sadomasochism (*SE7*:159). Mutually exclusive sadism and masochism, Suzanne Stewart posits, exist in literature but do not exist not in the clinic (3). Sam straddles the literary and the clinical (or experiential), since Stead insists that Sam was 'really' modelled on her father, and often refers to her father, David Stead, as 'Sam' after *TMWLC*'s publication (Rowley 499). The text's raw presentation of the dynamics of familial power (McLaughlin 30), make it an excellent basis for a study of the complexities of the masochistic impulse.

In her biography of the writer, Rowley remarks that Stead read Freud at the University of Sydney (Rowley 50)³ and from her own writing it is clear she emphatically rejected his ideas: 'I wish we would ditch Freud and all his works. He succeeded in making every thought, every act guilty [...] Life is not guilty [...] It can be deformed or sick or anything—but let us bury Freudian guilt, I say. It is wrong' (*Selected* 251).⁴ It follows from this broad rejection of Freud's thought that Stead was definitely not constructing a moral masochist in the Freudian sense. Though I have not found evidence that this counterexample to Freud's masochist was created deliberately, that Stead could (even inadvertently) create such a counterexample is consistent with her rejection of Freud's ideas, and with her conviction that an author's strongest beliefs are reflected in her writing.

Sam displays many of the external characteristics of Freud's moral masochist, but Stead delineates very different motives than the abhorrent guiltiness Freud hypothesised. Stead wrote: 'I feel that the characters in *TMWLC* are very, very real: recreated, but real [...] I am opposed to inventing in life. Life is so strange and we know it so little, that nothing is needed in that direction, we need only study [it...] an intelligent ferocity [...] is what is my aim [...] *TMWLC*] is terribly lifelike' (*Selected* 236-7). She commented that *TMWLC* 'was written as a true tragedy and a description of the role of governor of the family that present society gives to the male' (Stewart, H.1), implying that Stead saw Sam's shortcomings at least partly as the product of his socio-economic context. Having savaged David's real-life character in

print (via Sam) Stead is curiously generous: ‘About Sam Pollit—I have said enough! He meant well’ (*Selected* 260).⁵ Stead described her father as humane and courageous, believing in ‘men of goodwill getting together and producing happiness for all;’ more darkly, he believed ‘in himself so strongly that, sure of his innocence, pure intentions, he felt he was a favoured son of Fate [...] and he could not do anything but good. Those who opposed him, by simple reasoning, were evil;’ he was capable of turning contradictions of himself ‘into a three-ring circus’ (*Ocean* 483-491). Her comments are equally apposite to Sam.

Freud’s Masochist

The signifier ‘masochism’ is diluted in mainstream culture to convey quirky enjoyment of anything painful or tiresome. Yet the word retains its transgressive signification in the *Concise Oxford* definition: ‘[a] form of (esp. sexual) perversion in which a person derives pleasure from his own pain or humiliation.’ Although masochism is the subject of an extensive body of scholarship, there exists ‘no universally agreed-upon meaning’ (Siegel 2). Freud’s model, though widely acknowledged to be flawed (Dufresne *vii*) remains pervasive, and informs other models.

Freud’s explanations of sadomasochism, which he calls ‘the most common and the most significant of all the perversions’ (*SE7*:157), are products of a more gracious age, unfettered by the need for clarity or concision. On one hand, in ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism,’ Freud repeatedly identifies masochism as simply ‘pleasure in pain’ (*SE19*:161-2), yet elsewhere states: ‘of course, it is not the pain itself which is enjoyed, but the accompanying sexual excitation’ (*SE14*:129). In ‘Instincts and Their Vicissitudes’ he proclaimed that masochists are ex-sadists: ‘masochism is actually sadism turned round upon the subject’s own ego’ (*SE14*:129). His second theory reversed this order, making masochism fundamental to the human psyche, libidinally binding the death instinct, thus protecting the individual from self-destruction before partially morphing into sadism (*SE19*:163). Both accounts predicate the possibility of bi-directional transitions between the active and passive forms of sadomasochism.

According to Freud, masochism originates in an unresolved Oedipal complex, or a male child’s desire for sexual union with his mother, and the concomitant rivalry with, and even the yen to kill so as to replace, his father. In order to achieve ‘normal’ heterosexual maturity, the child must successfully negotiate this complex. For Freud, he does this out of fear of retributive castration by the father (*SE19*:176). Freud conjectures that not long after realising that his mother is not built like him, in that she lacks a penis, he concludes his mother is castrated as punishment for harbouring incestuous desires, which means that he too is in danger of castration if he competes with his father. He therefore chooses to align himself with his father, and to reject his mother as love object; failure to successfully resolve this stage results in various psychosexual complications during adulthood, one of which is masochism (*SE19*:176). Unconscious guilt over repressed desire for the mother motivates the masochist’s unconscious longing for punishment (*SE19*:161-5).

Sam: Moral Masochist?

It requires no stretch of the imagination to see in Louie’s play, ‘*Herpes Rom*’ (based on Shelley’s incestuous tragedy *Cenci*, 400-404), a reversal of the Electra complex—specifically its location of sexual desire. In Louie’s version, the paternal psyche and not (as Freud has it) that of the female infant, is the site of sexual desire in the father-daughter relationship. McLaughlin writes that Louie’s play ‘reveals her understanding of the psychological incest her father practices in “violating” her spirit and freedom and in attempting to “know” her

mind' (35). Using similarly anti-Freudian logic, I read Sam as Stead's reply to Freud's masochist: a character outwardly resembling the masochist—attracting and revelling in suffering—yet his motivations do not conform to those Freud attributed to the moral masochist.

A striking feature of Sam Pollit's personality, considering the fact that he is a natural scientist and committed to an overtly rational view of life, is his fascination with Fate and suffering. Another is his irresponsibility. Freud's theory proposes a connection between these two via the alleged unconscious guilt of the moral masochist. Accordingly, I will first examine Sam's posture in relation to Fate. I then consider Sam's irresponsibility and the related issues of ruined moral consciousness and childishness.

'Fate Loves Me, Kids' – suffering Sam

Sam's personal theology of suffering is a ubiquitous motif of *TMWLC*, and in Sam's mind suffering and Fate are intimately connected: 'Fate puts stones in the path of those she wants to try,' he says (131). Sam sees suffering as the training ground designed by Fate for her chosen favourites. However, unlike Freud's masochist, he regards suffering as a challenge to grow, never explicitly as a sign of his innocence. Long before Sam's fall from grace at work (marking a downward turn for the family's material and psychological well-being) he explains his suffering as the initiation process of a great destiny: '*Fate puts brambles, hurdles in my path, she even gives me an Old Woman of the Sea, to try me, because I am destined for great things*' (21, italicized in original). Sam consistently interprets his adversities as evidence of Fate's benevolence toward him; he tells the children: 'Fate loves me, kids, or she wouldn't give me so many hurdles to jump' (296). When he recalls how he was forced by poverty to leave school at twelve years of age and work in a fish market, he tells the children triumphantly that, '*in the fish market I would meet my fate*' (17, italicized in original). Sam's fervour concerning Fate contrasts with the rationalism inherent in his beloved vocation of natural science.

Freud identifies three forms of masochism: erotogenic, feminine, and moral. The type ostensibly relevant to Sam is the third, which is 'chiefly remarkable for having loosened its connection with what we recognise as sexuality' (*SE19:165*). Freud's claim is that moral masochism is profoundly sexual, but in an introverted, psychological sense. This is because in moral masochism the relationship between the superego and the ego is resexualised. Siegel defines moral masochism as the 'pursuit of social suffering not eroticized in any conscious or obvious way' (142). The sexuality of moral masochism is implicit, so that the erotic function of suffering is hidden in the unconscious, even from the subject himself. (Thus we see the great strength of Freud's theory: it is impossible to falsify, since who but Freud can say what occurs in the unconscious?)

In 'A Child is Being Beaten' Freud declares that the masochist's desire for the mother is transferred to the father, and so he comes to replace the child being beaten in his fantasy with himself: 'I am being beaten by my father' (*SE17:104*). 'Being beaten stands for being loved' says Freud (*SE17:113*). In the moral masochist's mind, being punished by the father is equivalent to being loved by him. Freud explains that 'being beaten by the father is simultaneously the punishment for desire for the father, and the regressive substitute for genital relations with the father' (*SE17:107*). Thus the masochist becomes erotically attached to his father, represented in his psyche by his superego; but this transfer of desire to his father

only deepens his unconscious guilt. To try to atone for this guilty and unspeakable desire, the masochist unconsciously attracts punishment.

In Stead's novel, Sam's courting of chastisement is sometimes unconscious, and therefore could be read as corresponding to Freud's model. His decision to marry Henny despite realising before their wedding that they would not be happy together (130), for example, invites the Freudian interpretation that he is motivated by an unconscious desire for punishment. Later, when Sam is chosen to go on the Smithsonian Expedition, he believes it will be 'a bold step forward on his path of fame' and that he is 'going to glory' (17). Contrary to these great expectations, the trip precipitates Sam's downfall. Sam gets 'under [the] skin' of Colonel Willets, his superior on the expedition, who ultimately ends Sam's career at the Bureau (229, 308). It is not his conscious intention to offend Willets (nor to endanger his own job), but a Freudian interpretation might see his behaviour throughout this incident as an unconscious desire to attract punishment. However, Stead's scenario seems simpler and more plausible: Sam's egotism naturally irks others, with inevitable consequences.⁶ He subsequently refuses to do what would be necessary to avert the loss of his job, regardless of the disastrous financial consequences for his family. Again, a Freudian reading might see this inaction as the result of Sam's masochistic belief that suffering is a signifier of his unconscious father-figure's love for him, and therefore not something he should oppose. In Stead's hands, though, the self-defeating Sam will not defend himself because his 'truth crushed to earth would rise again' (514). Delusional, he is self-righteously convinced that he will be vindicated because of his altruistic ideals.

In Freud's work, the masochist sees his suffering as a positive good, a sign of the father's love for him, and therefore something to be desired and embraced. In Stead, Sam's response when Henny attacks him with a kitchen knife could exemplify this Freudian-masochist interpretation of pain as an indication of love: 'The worst part of it is, Pet, that you love me still in a way; everything you do—even this!—show me that. I know it!' (145). Yet Sam's reaction seems more plausibly explained by his narcissistic idealism and his egotistic belief in his own goodness and innocence. Henny says Sam has 'a blessed martyr air' (145) and his closest friend⁷ denounces Sam's 'air of Christian martyrdom' (311). Instead of trying to rectify the miscarriage of justice Sam believes is being perpetrated against him, he wishes to suffer even more, by going to jail to demonstrate the profundity of his beliefs (317). Henny, 'house-jailed and child-chained' (34), is not fooled by Sam's idealism, exposing his fantasies as hypocrisy, labelling Sam 'the little, tin Jesus' (269). Again, when Sam piously refuses to defend himself, 'There is a faith men live by; I have it in me. I cannot sully it by entering the forum of public debate' (312), Stead may be said to provide a convincing alternative to Freud's explanation of masochism, via Sam's distorted and self-centred sense of honour.

(Im)moral Masochism: Guilt, Passivity and Irresponsibility

Freud believes guilt is the core of masochism: the masochistic ego unconsciously seeks expiation of his sins from the sadistic superego (*SE*19:169). By attracting suffering, the masochist attempts to escape his guilt and appropriate for himself the perceived moral superiority of the victim. The passivity of masochism results in irresponsibility, partly because of the masochist's unconscious guilt over his homoerotic desire for the father and his attempt to escape this guilt by transferring all blame onto the mother. The masochist reasons that if he does not do anything at all (since everything is done by the mother) he cannot be guilty. However, since the ultimate root of his unconscious guilt is his desire for his father, he is unable to escape his guilt.

As noted earlier, the relationship between the superego and the ego is resexualised in moral masochism, a process Freud believes ruins moral consciousness (SE19:169). This is because in Freud's schema, the conscience, or superego, is produced by a subject's successful negotiation of the Oedipal complex; the masochist fails to make this transition and therefore has a faulty or unreliable conscience. This is in part because in escaping overt homosexuality the moral masochist nevertheless retains what Freud regards as a feminine passivity (SE17:114). Freud declares that 'the wish to be beaten by the father stands very close to the other wish, to have a passive (feminine) sexual relation to [the father]' (SE19:169). I do not accept Freud's conflation of passivity and femininity. However, Freud's argument that the masochist desires to see himself as non-agentic or passive, thereby transferring responsibility and guilt to the mother, seems (within Freud's implausible framework) a plausible explanation for the masochist's irresponsibility. As a compounding factor concerning irresponsibility, in order to attract the punishing-cum-erotic attention of the internalized father, the masochist must behave in a morally reprehensible manner. But because of his unconscious commitment to passivity, the masochist's transgressions most often take the form of sins of omission rather than of commission. Irresponsibility is therefore a trademark of the moral masochist.

Sam's friend, Saul Pilgrim, tries to appeal to Sam's sense of responsibility, and attempts to persuade him to answer the charges made against him: 'You will lose everything, Sam: position, salary, pension. What about your children?' (313). Still, Sam refuses, and says that if his children 'have to live in utmost poverty, let them do what I have done. "Sweet are the uses of adversity, which like a toad ugly and venomous, still has a precious jewel in its head"' (313). The children also beg him to answer the charges (334-5). But instead of doing everything within his power to protect his family, Sam spends his time philosophising about the treasures of suffering. By ignoring the very practical and immediate repercussions for his family of his self-righteous decision not to explain himself, Sam displays the irresponsibility typical of the masochist described by Freud.

Sheridan notes the irresponsibility inherent in Stead's dramatization of Sam Pollit (139). I have already mentioned the disastrous expedition that ends Sam's career at the Bureau of Fisheries. As we saw, on this seemingly auspicious journey Sam alienates Colonel Willets (222), provoking his retaliation and thereby indirectly strengthening the position of Sam's existing departmental enemies. His many flirtations further evidence his irresponsibility, both toward Henny and toward the women whose hopes and desires he stirs. Sam behaves irresponsibly in other subtle ways as well. After losing his job, he pretends not to know where the household money is coming from (370), yet by unquestioningly spending the money Henny somehow scrapes together, he silently makes himself complicit in the promises, lies and tricks' Henny uses to get the money (369). In this way Sam victimises Henny even as he adds to her responsibilities by shirking his own. He justifies to himself the transfer of the responsibility to provide material support for the family from himself to Henny, saying it is 'only right that the mother too should fend for her offspring' (370). Yet Sam retains all authority in the relationship. He is willing to offload the burdensome responsibilities of his patriarchal position, but declines to share its privileges with Henny. Selfishness and narcissism are sufficient to explain Sam's behaviour. Stead depicts a character with the self-defeating traits of the masochist, such as irresponsibility, but provides Sam with convincing alternative motives for those behaviours.

When the reader first meets Sam, he is walking home, late, from work (16). The passage is in free indirect discourse, ostensibly spoken from Sam's point of view. We read that 'he never

broke his word' to the children (16), but as free indirect speech lends itself to irony, it is likely that the narrator's voice here hijacks Sam's thoughts to highlight his hypocrisy. Dorothy Green reads this episode as a revelation of Sam's 'fundamental dishonesty; or self-delusion' (185) since he has in fact come home much later than he told the children he would. The subtlety of the discrepancy in this episode between Sam's beliefs and his behaviour illustrates the often elusive quality of his inconsistency, through which he is able to maintain the image of himself as upright and good, thus effectively 'hiding' his transgressions from himself.

Yet evidence of Sam's ruined moral consciousness abounds: he entertains the children by kissing pictures of pretty girls in magazines: 'Oh, mwsk, mwsk! [...] I'll marry her! Hello beautiful!', describing them as 'young and juicy' (28, 29). Sam maliciously makes fun of the neighbours to the children—of one portly neighbour he sings 'as she walks she wobbles' (64). Louie and Little-Sam are incensed by their father's crude jokes about the neighbours: 'You're disgusting,' says Louie; and 'I'm tired of you, [...] you make me sick!' says Little Sam (66, 67). Even Evie, the compliant daughter, interprets Sam's request to his sister Jo to bring him chocolate as hypocritical: 'Oo, Taddy, you said never to ask for anything' (97). Sam 'trains' the children to do housework, telling them that all must work, but the children see his hypocrisy and 'all hastened to jump on him and point out that he did no work,' a judgement narratively underscored by his hiding of the items hardest to wash for 'the women' to do 'next time' (372-3). Sam preaches to the children that congenitally deformed people like Popeye Banks should be 'sent to a lethal chamber, or just nipped in the bud at birth' (427); and (foreshadowingly) to Louie, that 'murder of the unfit, incurable, and insane should be permitted [...] Murder might be beautiful, a self-sacrifice, a sacrifice of someone near and dear, for the good of others—I can conceive of such a thing, Looloo!' (135). Henny believes Sam married her out of self-interest—to advance his career and to benefit from David Collyer's wealth and influence (138). Although Henny is sure of Sam's 'long fidelity to her' (149) she interprets this negatively, as mercenary cowardice rather than virtue: she thinks Sam 'hasn't the courage to get a mistress' because he would do 'anything rather than lose [her] expectations' (138). Even Sam's sister Jo, usually his champion, calls him an 'irresponsible' father (113). Louie intuitively perceives that the unhealthy relationship between Henny and Sam 'was ruining their moral natures' (333). Sam consistently sees himself as blameless. He seems incapable of recognizing his own lack of consideration and self-centredness. Throughout *TMWLC* Sam exhibits the ruined moral consciousness consistent with Freud's masochist. Yet Stead's alternative analysis of this behaviour, as stemming from narcissism, egotism and mistaken idealism, account for it at least as effectively as Freud's hypotheses.

Your poor little Samuel

Childishness is the final potentially masochistic characteristic Sam displays. Following Freud, Bernhard Berliner observes: 'The masochist has a particularly great need for being loved in the passive infantile way' (323). That is, the masochist's emotional development is arrested in childhood by his failure to successfully negotiate the Oedipal complex, so that even when he reaches physical adulthood he desires to be the helpless and passive object of a powerful and protective love. Sam's mental image of himself even in adulthood is that of a dependent child, desiring and believing himself deserving of the protection of parents or parent substitutes such as Fate. And even Henny, after more than ten years of marriage to him, remarks: 'she had married a child whose only talent was an air of engaging helplessness by which he got the protection of certain goodhearted people' (325). Elsewhere we read that 'All the children, though, believed that Sam was utterly innocent, which in fact he was,

innocent too, of all knowledge of men, business, and politics, a confiding and sheltered child strayed into public affairs' (334-335). Sheridan notes that 'your poor little Samuel' is Sam's favourite way to refer to himself when speaking to the children: it is 'his constant appeal for sympathy' (140), and evokes his desire to imagine himself as a child. Sam is, after all, the man who loves children. The narrative's unrelenting irony urges an ironic interpretation of its eponymous description.

Berliner's work offers a further insight that potentially provides a logical connection between Sam's status as a youngest child and his enchantment with suffering, arguing that 'suffering is the weapon of the weak [...] where undisguised aggression is dangerous' (331). That is, suffering is a strategy learned in childhood and never outgrown. The salience of Berliner's comment to Sam's case is supported by Stead's observation: 'Sam is a child—he was the youngest of his family. A member of a family tends to retain his position, throughout life; the youngest remains the engaging, dependent youngest, however clever' (*Selected* 257). It is easy to imagine how a child such as Sam, growing up with several older siblings, might learn to display signs of suffering to ward off attacks, or to gain parental sympathy and protection against those stronger than he. As an adult, he retains the childhood belief that visible suffering is a way of recommending himself to his superiors, such as his wealthy father-in-law: he 'had always believed [...] that Old David liked him better than his own boys, *because of his struggles*' (305, italics added). Sam sees himself as a child who expects 'adults' to pity his suffering and come to his aid. Clearly, the theoretical mechanism of masochism is not necessary to this behaviour: it is again simpler to explain the desiring and attraction of suffering as Stead does, as a habit that has grown out of behaviour found by the individual to be effective in childhood.

(Un?)Happiness ?

Most tellingly, unlike Freud's miserable masochist, Sam is happy:

Sam was naturally lighthearted, pleasant, all generous effusion and responsive emotion. He was incapable of nursing . . . sorrow in his bosom; and tragedy itself could not worm its way by any means into his heart. Such a thing would have made him ill or mad, and he was all for health, sanity, success, and human love. (47)

The more Sam suffers, the happier he is. In the depths of the family's difficulties the narrator reports that 'poverty was a beautiful thing to him, something he was born to and could handle' (347). This reading of Sam contradicts Freud's view of the masochist as a miserable person. Siegel writes that Deleuze, too, problematises Freud's view of the masochist 'as an unhappy, ineffectual victim of a repressive society and his own thwarted, inward turned drives' with his claim that 'masochism can best be understood as an indirect means to power over others' (110-111). That is, where Freud sees an unhappy man who shuns responsibility because of his guilt, Deleuze sees a man who chooses to play the idealistic weakling as a cover for controlling others. There is evidence in *TMWLC* that Stead, like Deleuze after her, saw weakness and idealism deployed in a self-serving manner, to manipulate others: Henny despairs at the negative consequences of the 'hothouse flower of idealism' she sees 'bursting out in [Sam]' (315). Likewise, Louie perceives the real nature of Sam's deceptive idealism: dreaming of an ideal world of peace, love and understanding (49), Sam says: 'My system, which I invented myself, might be called Monoman, or Manunity' (50). The perspicacious Louie interjects: 'You mean Monomania' (50). Louie's interjection indicates that Sam's

familiar fantasy appears to her to be an elaborate cover for his desire for uninhibited power. In contrast to the truly pathetic masochist Freud describes, Stead sees a deluded idealist convinced that his innocence and the natural triumph of Truth will inevitably result in his vindication or success.

Conclusion

Whether consciously or not, then, Stead constructs in *TMWLC* a character who outwardly conforms to Freud's description of the moral masochist, yet one who is free from the guilt identified by Freud as the chief motivation of the self-defeating personality. In other words, behaviours described as masochistic and declared by Freud to be caused by feelings of guilt are demonstrated in Sam to be more plausibly explained by narcissistic idealism and egotism. In *TMWLC* Stead foreshadows the demise of Freud's theories, producing a convincing vision of a self-defeating personality not driven by guilt but by a nexus of idealistic narcissism and unbridled egotism. Long before Freud's ideas were widely recognized to be mistaken, Stead gave the world persuasive evidence of Freud's misunderstanding of masochism.

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¹ This essay is based on an honours thesis completed under the supervision of Dr Andrew Ng at Monash University, Sunway Campus, Malaysia, 2011.

² This and all subsequent references are to the 1965 edition of Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children*, hereafter *TMLWC*.

³ It is possible (but seems unlikely, given Stead's fascination with psychology) that Stead was only aware of Freud's earlier works, not of his theory of masochism, since the latter was published after her time at Sydney University.

⁴ Letter to Ron Geering, later Stead's literary executor.

⁵ In answer to a question posed by Sally Bearman, a postgraduate student at the University of New England (*Selected* 257).

⁶ Willets accuses Sam of 'always [...] taking glory' for himself (230) after Sam is named by a journalist (but Willets is not) in a newspaper article on the Expedition (to which Willets refuses to give photographs, but to which Sam contributes). There is also a quarrel between Sam and Willets when Sam is supposed to travel in a car with Willets but instead accepts the invitation of 'the Governor' because it will give him the opportunity to

speaking with an anthropologist from Cambridge (229). The Colonel is somewhat mollified when Sam pays for his unused seat, but remains stung by the incident.

⁷ Saul Pilgrim could be read as a pragmatic foil for the idealistic Sam. His name symbolically recalls the Apostle Paul, called Saul until his experience on the road to Damascus; the novel tells us that this 'Pilgrim' saw Sam's plight in a 'resigned and human way' (312).