

The Potential of Periphery

The Austrian Writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and his Functionalizing of Galicia

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Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836 – 1895)

The Galicia-born Austrian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch started a brilliant career with his "Galician Tales", posing successfully as something of a Slavic exotic for his Western European audience. At the same time he was criticized as a controversial propagator of inconsistent Austro-Slavic ideas in a climate of increasing Prussification and known as a versatile provocateur with vainglorious proclivities. Later on, his public reputation suffered heavily when, due to the piquant role of women in his oeuvre, he was accused of displaying signs of 'sexual pathology' – resulting in the eponym "Masochism".



Recently, research added further nuances to Sacher-Masoch's image as a notorious masochist by a more differentiated approach to this ambivalent author. However, the currently fashionable focus on Sacher-Masoch's Galician facets still tends to reduce him to an imaginative romancer wandering a landscape of lost childhood.

My thesis concentrates on the writer's actual engagement with Galician history, culture and the politics of his time. Moreover, the project explores Sacher-Masoch's allusions to Galicia, not from the hitherto dominant perspective of German studies, but from a comparative angle, integrating Polish and Ukrainian sources. Furthermore, it attempts to investigate Sacher-Masoch's Galicia - commonly perceived as Habsburg Empire's easternmost periphery - as a belletristic playground not only for colonial fantasies, but also for sociopolitical utopias as well as subversive border-crossings.

The Making of a "Galician Writer"

Inquires into the theatrical elements of Sacher-Masoch's (genealogical) self-fashioning and its impact on the European literary and political stage. Sacher-Masoch's unceasing self-invention oscillated between marketing strategy and Central European identity crisis in an age of increasing nationalization.

Furthermore, an analysis of the ambivalent history of Sacher-Masoch's public success as well as his disparagement as a "Galician writer" in the „West“ poses questions as to how processes of incorporation and exclusion tend to have been executed in the Polish and Ukrainian press from the 19th century until today.



Border-Crossing in the Borderlands

Interrogates multicultural Galicia as an experimental field for ambivalent identity games by taking into account Sacher-Masoch's "weakness" for performance, raiment and costume. A striking omnipresence of carnivalesque scenes, tableaux vivants, acts of inter-ethnic cross-dressing and gender-switching raises curiosity about the hybrid qualities of this Habsburg borderland.

Galicia appears as a potential breeding ground for blurred identities in an age of increasing ethno-national commitment. Carnival and costumes create conditions for the transcendence of social hierarchy as well as gender borders, ascribing elements of subversion to the inter-ethnic relations taking place at this Habsburg „periphery“.

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Examines Sacher-Masoch's manifold narrative functionalization of the Galician space. Galicia represents on the one hand a space into which Western ideas of a particular "Poetry of the East" and encompassing notions of exoticism and eroticism could be projected.

On the other hand, it was also utilized as a space for the implementation of progressive societal ideas, a utopian space for revolutionary societies intellectually moving between early French socialists' theories and the idea of Slavic proto-communism, which Sacher-Masoch depicted within the emancipation process of the Ruthenian peasant.