



The First Masochist : a biography of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch

James Cleugh

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This is a biography in English of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, known to posterity for giving his name to one of the extremes in man's emotional makeup, masochism. He was born in 1836, in Lemberg, Galicia. His father was the Chief of Police, his mother a noblewoman. A nervous and excitable child, he was once badly thrashed by an aunt he adored, and though he later recalled the pain as terrible, he was enraptured by it. Later in life, he demanded sexual stimulus of an incredible nature: the whips had to have specially sharpened hooks or nails, and they were called for several times a day. But Sacher-Masoch was also an amiable and sentimental man, fond of children and animals. Above all else, he was a talented and extraordinarily prolific writer—he had 90 novels to his credit before he died. It was sympathetic writing of Polish-Jewish life in Galicia that at once distinguished him from other representatives of his class at the time. Indeed, his compassion for the oppressed, if only literary, was one of his most likeable characteristics. In all his strivings for humiliation (which often involved arranging for his mistresses to be seduced by others, with himself as voyeur), he never lost the touch of humanity absent in his opposite, the Marquis de Sade.

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