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Review of: Falaky, Fayçal. Social Contract, Masochistic Contract: Aesthetics of Freedom 252 and Submission in Rousseau.

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FALAKY, FAYÇAL. *Social Contract, Masochistic Contract: Aesthetics of Freedom and Submission in Rousseau*. Albany: SUNY, 2014. ISBN 978-2-86820-378-6. Pp. 236. \$70.

The strength of this work resides in the fact that it is not *just* an important contribution to the fields of Rousseau studies. As the title indicates, the book is a reflection on the masochistic tendencies that can be detected in all of Rousseau's important texts. They reveal themselves in his repeated attempts to translate the dominant religious values of the pre-Enlightenment era into a secular episteme and

to reimagine desire and personal sexual politics after “the death of God” (7). At the same time, *Social Contract, Masochistic Contract* is also a book about Rousseau, written by someone who is clearly fascinated by Jean-Jacques, and who uses the methods of literary criticism—from close readings to theoretical grounding—to make sense of what has traditionally been seen as internal contradictions in Rousseau’s writings. The focus on Rousseau’s life-story and on the psychological processes at play in his self-analysis are what make Falaky’s monograph so enjoyable to read—and, at times, a page turner. The reader is invited to meet again with an old friend and to revisit works of political economy through the prism of autobiographical and fictional texts. This strategy helps Falaky trace the philosophical and moral continuities in Rousseau’s thoughts across a range of texts all written by the same author, but different in style and ambition. Even though Falaky takes the unusual approach of focusing on the author’s emotional presence in his writings (and thus, for instance, reads a novel like *La nouvelle Héloïse* as the expression of Rousseau’s own phobias and desires), he systematically grounds his insights in detailed and powerful textual analyses. Consequently, his intimate knowledge of Rousseau, rather than becoming an excuse to leave the textual material aside, allows him to weave together excerpts from different works that echo and reinforce each other and point to a unified Rousseauian worldview. *Social Contract, Masochistic Contract* explores the extent to which theoretical models developed in the twentieth century can inform and enhance our understanding of eighteenth-century texts: more specifically, Falaky suggests that “recent literary theories on masochism [...] introduce a different and fresh perspective on the connections Rousseau draws between his sexuality, his art, and his philosophical thought” (8). For him, Rousseau’s strategy of projecting his own experience of sexuality onto the state of innocence of natural man is not too different from the way psychoanalysts ask their patients to return to an original moment of crisis in their childhood. Rousseau also prefigures Deleuze’s definition of masochism as “a self-protective strategy by which the subject seeks to suspend the real through an all-absorbing ideal” (32–33). Rousseau’s tendency toward introspection, which allows him to explore in depth the events that shaped his sexuality—and, through this, to self-analyze his engagement with the world—is both “a natural aesthetic and a theoretical method” (8). This is why analyzing Rousseau’s sexuality is also “a rereading of his politics” and why using the filter of Rousseau’s “psycho-aesthetic experience” (8) brings new meaning to his political writings.