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MASCULINITY, GENDER AND IDENTITY IN THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE LYRIC

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CHAPTER 5

Feminine identifications in A Lover's Complaint

A Lover's Complaint – the poem published as an end-piece to the 1609 Quarto of the *Sonnets* – has to be the most abjected part of the Shakespeare canon: slighted, sidelined, passed over, ignored, and not only by a tradition that, rightly or wrongly, has bestowed a higher critical value on the plays than on the poems, but even by an earlier readership that, if the popularity of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* is anything to go by, prized their 'mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare' more highly as a poet than as anything else.[1] In marked contrast to the narrative poems (which went through numerous editions throughout Shakespeare's lifetime and the seventeenth century, inspired hosts of enthusiastic imitations, and, in the case of *Venus and Adonis* at least, received more allusions than anything else Shakespeare wrote), *A Lover's Complaint* – which, John Benson's bowdlerized 1640 edition of the *Sonnets* aside, was not to appear in print again until published by Edmond Malone in 1780, and to which not a single contemporary reference or response has survived – left not a ripple and sank without trace. And, if current popular and scholarly interest in the *Sonnets* might be thought to make up for the relative neglect of the lyrics in the seventeenth century (there were fewer allusions to the *Sonnets* than to any other of Shakespeare's works, the only exception being *A Lover's Complaint*), then such compensation, if that is what it is, has not extended as far as the latter, publications on the *Sonnets* currently outnumbering those on the *Complaint* by a ratio of hundreds to one. When the poem *is* addressed, furthermore, it leaves its readers exercised, chary, and somewhat bemused: put on the spot by a poem that challenges norms and fails to conform to expectations of either Shakespeare or the genre. What causes dismay is not only the poem's syntax and diction – which, like that of the *Ocean to Cynthia*, strikes everyone as difficult and strange ('perplexing', 'complex', 'contorted', 'tortive', 'errant', 'obscure', 'dense', 'compressed', 'unfamiliar', 'curious', and 'odd' being just a few of the words used to describe it) – but also its imagery, its presentation of character, its narrative structure, its

ending, its genre, and its tone.[2] There is a general charge of obscurity, this 'abstruse and virtually unexplicated' poem that is 'hard to understand and difficult to love', that 'does not read easily' and even 'verges on impenetrability', being said to 'deepen the issues without quite clarifying them' and to be more 'ambivalent' than – indeed, to have 'abandoned the forceful clarity of' – the other narrative poems, and generally to induce in the reader a state of 'unease'.[3] One critic alone describes the poem and various aspects of it as 'most peculiar', 'extraordinary', 'mysterious', 'astonishing', 'complicated', 'bewildering', 'perplexing', and 'strange'.[4] Indeed, the clearest indication that the poem somehow riles its readers – managing to tantalize and to frustrate them at the same time – is the fact that the word used to describe it more than any other is 'enigmatic'. This sense of the poem as maverick and strange, moreover, periodically breaks out into doubt over who wrote it, for *A Lover's Complaint* has a long history of authorship debate. Although the poem was championed by Malone (who found evidence of Shakespeare's hand everywhere in it), its Shakespearean credentials were disputed by Hazlitt, doubted from the middle of the nineteenth century, and vigorously rejected early in the twentieth when the poem was attributed to the Rival Poet of the *Sonnets*, and, by extension, to George Chapman. Although energetic efforts were made from the 1960s to restore the poem to the canon, the question has recently been thrown open again, stylometric tests developed in part to gauge the authenticity of 'A Funeral Elegy by W. S.' having cast renewed doubt on that of *A Lover's Complaint*; the most recent candidate to be proposed as its author is John Davies of Hereford.[5]

For my purposes, however, the question of who wrote *A Lover's Complaint* seems less important, or less interesting at any rate, than the fact that the question should get asked at all (let alone so often). In what follows, therefore, I am not so concerned with the claims of this or that candidate or with the merits of a particular case as with what this strained and sometimes dismissive reaction has to say about *A Lover's Complaint* itself. For there is clearly something about this poem that troubles, that undermines confidence and certainty and exercises suspicion and doubt; for every time the authorship question is decided in favour of Shakespeare uncertainty breaks out again, drawing readers back to reconsider the old problem and to worry it obsessively like an unhealed scar. For although on the face of it there are no external reasons for doubting that '*A Lovers Complaint BY WILLIAM SHAKE-SPEARE*' – as the drop-title announces the poem in the Quarto – is his (no more substantive grounds, that is, if these are stylistic alone, for doubting this than, say, for doubting that Ralegh wrote the *Ocean to Cynthia*), the internal properties of the poem that register as

quirky and odd nevertheless urge with particular insistence that this question of authorship and authenticity be addressed. And, for some readers, these properties are anomalous enough for what is unusual or untypical to shade into what is 'un-Shakespearean' as if, while the 'problem' – whatever that is – cannot be solved or made to go away, it can at least be firmly separated from Shakespeare's name. A notional benchmark of propriety is brought into play here: some norm or expectation against which what is experienced as different or excessive is implicitly being measured. And with this comes a sense of something endangered, of a need to protect and preserve, as if the imperilled object were the iconic image of the writing subject as Master Poet, and as if notions of authorial self-consistency and orthodoxy were somehow at stake. From this perspective, the poem's long relegation to the margins begins to look a little more motivated than accidental, more defensive than benign – not so much a polite indifference as an embarrassed aversion of the gaze. There is no doubt that the general air of dubiousness that hangs over the poem has contributed in good measure to its long-term neglect. Judged difficult, doubted, or denied: in none of these scenarios, it seems to me, does the poem meet with an entirely neutral response. At best a source of unease, at worst something to be cut away or effectively disavowed, *A Lover's Complaint* has been treated as a problem, as something that draws quantities of cathexis to it like a hystericized limb, a chronic complaint of the Shakespeare corpus that, whatever action is taken, it seems, remains stubbornly resistant to cure. In this respect, the reception history of *A Lover's Complaint* has much in common with that of the *Sonnets*: for the compulsive re-ordering, re-presenting, and 'straightening' of those poems is now read as a 'hysterical symptom' – a complex response to their culturally disturbing representation of love between men and a felt need to deny, apologise for, or one way and another accommodate it.[6] Except that, if the editorial history of the *Sonnets* can be seen to symptomize the 'moral panic' induced in earlier generations of readers by the prospect of the heterosexual, 'manly' Shakespeare under threat, then whatever it is in *A Lover's Complaint* that unsettles and perturbs evidently possesses a still greater power to alarm – the reception it has met with being more akin, perhaps, to the 'similar panic when the cry goes up that Throne and Altar are in danger' identified by Freud in his essay on 'Fetishism' – since Shakespeare's involvement in this poem is perennially thrown into doubt (no matter how elusive the proof) while, however energetically imputations of homosexuality to Shakespeare may have been rejected in some quarters, it was never seriously suggested that the *Sonnets* were not his.[7]

This disturbing effect that *A Lover's Complaint* has on its readers may have something to do with the form to which it belongs: a sub-genre of the complaint tradition in which the speaker is a solitary woman who laments her mistreatment at the hands of a faithless man. The *locus classicus* here is Ovid's *Heroides*, a text in which fifteen women from the historical and mythical past appeal to and berate the male figures that have variously abused, seduced, raped, betrayed, neglected, forgotten, but at all events abandoned them. Although Ovid's text had long drawn poets and writers to it – it has been described as 'probably the most popular classical poetry of the later Middle Ages' – it seems to have held a particular fascination for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, prompting George Turbervile's translation of 1567 (which went through five editions by 1600) and inspiring analogues and imitations by Surrey, Churchyard, Gascoigne, Spenser, Lodge, Daniel, and Drayton, to name but a few.[8] Heroines had been depicted, of course, and the voice of passionate female lament heard in many texts before or alongside the *Heroides*, but the particular form that Ovid developed – a sequence of epistles in each of which the female speaker's interior monologue is laid bare like a confession overheard – allowed for the sustained articulation of a feminine *moi*, an extended exploration of female subjectivity that was new and different enough to make Ovid's boast in the *Ars amatoria* that he 'first invented this art, unknown to others' be generally accepted as justified.[9] What is important here, however, is the very distinct way in which that female subjectivity is presented: for in the *Heroides* women are not defined, as they so often are in the *Metamorphoses*, by a sexual role that positions them as the recipients of male desire, 'interpellated' as female subjects (as Lynn Enterline suggests) by a phallic god intent on rape.[10] Rather, the *Heroides* define women very specifically in relation to lack. That is to say, whatever the individual variations between one woman's story and the next, each finds herself in the position of having been deserted. It is not betrayal or mistreatment that prompts their complaint as such but, specifically, abandonment. They would not complain, or not in the epistolary format which is by definition directed to an absent addressee, if the man in question, however heinous, were actually present. As the one thing that unites them all, abandonment is the defining feature of their condition, indeed, of their femininity – for they are heroines insofar as they have been left, cut off from the men whose loss or departure it is their sole function to bemoan. Moreover, this desertion is represented as an absolute condition: there is no question, for example, of these women looking about pragmatically for a replacement, nor of there being any recuperation, rescue, or redress. The women's state is one of utter

dereliction (which is why it lends itself so often to the metaphor of the city ruined and sacked), and when some, like Medea, Ariadne or Briseis, are, in addition, displaced from family and home, their condition of exile – their loss of father and fatherland – only drives home the fact that what they are bereft of is their menfolk. The *Heroides*, in other words, rather insistently define the female condition as *privatory*: all the complainants are presented as women who have lost – and lost for good – something that, in the form of a suitor, lover, husband, or beloved, they once possessed, and that loss is the definition of their femininity.[11] From this perspective, it is not very difficult to see that, in this context at least, woman is defined according to the formula of castration.

What is remarkable, however, is that, as in the other poems considered in this book, the male poet here *identifies* with this position. Having defined woman as 'castrated', the form of female complaint allows – indeed, invites – the male poet to enter into that subjectivity so defined, to occupy that position at some length, and, in impersonating the woman's role and ventriloquizing her voice, fully to experience her 'condition'. Moreover, the fashion for appending a female complaint to the end of a sonnet sequence – of lashing Ovid to Petrarch, as it were – which Samuel Daniel inaugurated when he published *Delia* and *The Complaint of Rosamond* together in a single volume in 1592 and which set a trend many would follow in the 1590s and beyond (a trend to which it is now generally accepted that Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and *A Lover's Complaint* belong) only serves to point up the comparison and to reinforce the fact that something rather extraordinary is going on.[12] For the contradistinction between the two forms – a Petrarchan sequence in which the male voice traditionally lacks his Lady's love and pleads for 'favours', followed by a female complaint in which a woman, seduced and abandoned by her treacherous lover, her chastity and reputation gone, laments the consequences of just such a gift – is not only, as is often remarked, designed to counterpoint one with the other, the latter passing critical, ironic comment on what precedes, but it also works (issues of the 'double standard' often coming in here) to organize the binaries of before and after, cause and effect, clearly along gender lines. That is to say, the juxtaposition of 'male' and 'female' complaint has the effect of differentiating between two kinds of lack. While one, even when elevated by the Petrarchan lover into a 'virtual poetic ontology' is still, at least theoretically, conditional and temporary, dependent upon the Lady's 'grace' – the man could be content, if only 'the deare She' would give in to his demands – the other, by contrast, is irreversible and irrecuperable, not so much conditional as a permanent condition.[13] It is an indication of the discomfort that critics

feel with this transition, perhaps, that they continue to find the verses that traditionally mark this switch-point or cross-over between these male and female 'I's – the light, bawdy anacreontics that intervene between the sonnets and the complaint – irrelevant, baffling, obscure, and in some cases (Shakespeare being one of them) non-authorial.[14] And, although Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are not, of course, Petrarchan in any straightforward sense, nevertheless *A Lover's Complaint* is structured in such a way – with the seduced girl, as she reminisces about her case, citing the very pleas her seducer successfully used to persuade her – as to incorporate the male complaint within her own, making comparison between the two unavoidable. It has been suggested, in fact, that this may have been Shakespeare's belated attempt to incorporate Petrarchanism into a text that otherwise 'notably lacked' the voice of heterosexual male longing; and there is no doubt that, whatever the rationale, the 1609 Quarto – with its numbered sonnets, intervening anacreontics, and female complaint – follows the 'Delian' tradition to the letter.[15] A clear differentiation between male and female complaint – and between the male and female conditions – is, in any case, the way the seduced girl in the poem presents her situation, comparing the tears with which her seducer finally conquers her with those that she sheds in the aftermath of her seduction: 'our drops this difference bore: / His poisoned me, and mine did him restore'.[16]

Female complaint thus defines femininity as a state of abandonment – a condition brought on, it implies, by a woman having lost or been parted from the phallus she once possessed – and, as a literary form that allows the poet to take up that woman's lament, to identify with her expression of suffering and loss, it provides him with an opportunity to play the part of castration. This puts female complaint into an interesting alignment vis-à-vis masochism, furthermore, since masochism stages the scenario in which a feminine identification – the mark, of course, of the negative Oedipus complex of the boy – is defiantly paraded. Since the form of female complaint gives the poet a part to play, a role to perform, and an imagined fantasy scene in which to masquerade, it is perhaps all too obvious to say that the phantasmatic of the genre is masochistic: not only because it so clearly exemplifies the heterocosmic impulse or involves reproducing experiences of suffering and loss but, most specifically, because it puts the man in a feminine position exactly as masochism situates the male subject in the role of being 'castrated, or copulated with, or giving birth to a baby'.[17] Since, as suggested in chapter 2, masochism is (of all the perversions) in most radical conflict with society's dominant fiction, flying in the face of the pleasure principle and undermining the demands of the superego and

of civilization, then this may go some way towards explaining why Ovid's *Heroides*, the foundational text of a genre that depicts irrecuperable loss and seems to relish the experience of passive suffering without end, has so often been perceived as oppositional and subversive (it has been described as 'unheroic', 'antigeneric', 'anticanonical', 'nonhierarchical', and 'nonpatriarchal'), at odds with both the Aristotelian law of action (which states that a work of art must bring a sequence of events to their natural and logical conclusion) and with Virgilian epic (which presents that action as linear, teleological, and progressive).[18] Not only that, but as a form that deals with the experience of being – or, certainly, of *having* been – sexually used and abused by a man (in some cases explicitly as the victim of sexual violence), female complaint once again brings out into the open the inner content of masochism that is generally repressed – the male masochist's core desire, that is, to be sexually loved by the father – a content that is, as a rule, veiled over, even if not very convincingly, by the dominatrix of the classic masochistic scene. In those texts, therefore, where the poet identifies directly with a woman who has suffered sexually at the hands of a man, these disguises drop away, the effect being to actualize the unconscious wish behind the masochistic beating fantasy: 'my father is beating/loving me'. Thus Lynn Enterline, for example, is able to read *The Rape of Lucrece* as not only allowing the male narrator, through his identification with Tarquin, to take the place of the one who can have Lucrece (which, since it puts him in the place of a rapist, is bad enough, even though this is the 'culturally sanctioned direction' of male desire), but also, more scandalously still, as putting him – through his identification with Lucrece – in the 'far less admissible place of being the one who can have Tarquin'.[19] The shameful but erotic sub-text of this poem, that is, whispers a desire for homosexual rape. This story, Enterline goes on, 'might be the distortion or dissimulation that allows a prohibited pleasure a way of emerging . . . the narrator can be the one who wants Tarquin only by taking a detour through one who resolutely does *not* want him' (p. 185). Not all female complaints deal with rape, of course, and *Lucrece* has a troubled reception history of its own as critics have struggled to classify the poem and to gauge the extent to which it conforms to or deviates from the complaint tradition. All the same, the issues it brings out into the open give some indication as to why a literary form that allows male poets to identify with specifically female sexual suffering should have the potential for such serious if not explosive consequences. And, again, it may go some way towards explaining why the genre – however loosely defined – has, in terms of literary history, met with such resistance, being denied any formal terminology ('male-authored

female complaint', John Kerrigan's descriptive term, being the best currently available), and being ignored, overlooked, blanked out, one could almost say institutionally suppressed by the authorities and guardians of the canon, in spite of the fact that, endemic and universal, the literature of female abandonment has existed since poetry began and has crossed centuries, continents, and cultures.[20] From this perspective, indeed, the awkward reception with which *A Lover's Complaint* has been met seems only a small part of a larger picture, a local symptom of a deeper and longer-lasting unease.

All the same, these speculations do not entirely account for the strained response with which the poem has met, nor fully absorb its potential for subversion, for throughout this discussion one thing has remained in place and has (albeit with differing degrees of self-consciousness) been quietly affirmed, and that is the gender binary: the assumption that there are 'men' and 'women', 'male' authors and 'female' voices, and that these – however challengingly they may encounter, exchange, and overlap with one another – nevertheless remain two, distinct positions from which the players start out and to which they ultimately return. This derives in large part from the model that is used almost ubiquitously in discussions of female complaint – namely, that of ventriloquism (for one critic, indeed, female complaint is '*the* paradigmatic ventriloquized text') – for to see the genre as one in which a male subject 'assumes' a female subjectivity – dons a woman's sexual identity and performs her gender role – is necessarily to keep sexual difference in play; to see the form as an act of 'cross-voicing' or 'cross-dressing' is to imply that, whatever potential that ludic space may open up for the destabilization of gender norms, the exchange still takes place between positions otherwise, and of themselves, relatively recognizable, stable, and secure.[21] Even where the emphasis is on the way ventriloquized texts radically deconstruct and collapse gender norms, putting into question what we might have thought we meant by the terms 'woman', 'man', 'female', or 'male', those norms are still at some level presupposed even if only as a cultural fiction there *to be* interrogated and undermined. The characteristic move in John Kerrigan's *Motives of Woe*, for example – one of the most detailed studies of *A Lover's Complaint* and the tradition to which it belongs – is to set up gender stereotypes as commonplace and banal, to show how female complaint then scrutinizes and complicates them, only then (at least as far as *A Lover's Complaint* is concerned) to reinstate those stereotypes as the rule from which the exceptions depart. And while this move allows the critic to keep open the literary possibilities for the most abject of masculinities in other texts – in Richard Barnfield's *Affectionate Shepherd*,

for example, or in *The Fair Ephelia*, or in Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* – it also serves, at the same time, to protect and preserve *A Lover's Complaint* from them. Thus, however much the male author/narrator in the latter poem might be undercut by a powerful female voice (not least one complaining of male perfidy), he remains, in Kerrigan's reading at least, ultimately in control: it is he who, with cool detachment, is watching, framing, staging the scene. This pattern is repeated when the male author/narrator is again shown to be discredited and undermined, only then to be re-affirmed as phallic: as an overhearing figure who invades female space and intrudes upon female suffering, the male author/narrator (and, by implication, reader) is put in the same position as the very seducer whom the girl laments (and while some texts register a scruple at compromising him in this way, *A Lover's Complaint* is not one of them). Throughout this reading of the poem, the male author/narrator remains in the position of subject (looking at, ventriloquizing) as opposed to object (looked at, ventriloquized), as a result of which the poem's 'overarching' (p. 38) and 'controlling' (p. 39) perspective remains definitively 'male' (p. 38); and where that control really *is* threatened – mainly by the poem's unprecedented refusal to close the frame and to return the reader (whose ear has been bent by the female complainant for some 259 lines) to the male 'I' who first introduced her ('down I laid to list the sad-tuned tale', line 4) or to the old man to whom she divulges her tale – the girl and her words are characterized in such a way (as raging and emotional, as 'frippery', as 'on the edge of incoherence', with 'more than a hint of absurdity' lying in the girl's '"O" this, and "O" that', which leads to 'potentially ludicrous overtones of orgasmic excess', p. 51) as to make it difficult to deny that a certain amount of gender stereotyping is still in play.

Even when it critiques and interrogates the gender binary, therefore, criticism on female complaint can unobtrusively reproduce it, the 'difference' (line 300) that the girl in the poem posits between the teardrops, his and hers, finding itself naturalized as sexual difference, dispositions and features supposedly 'female' and 'male' coming to divide along all too familiar lines (subject/object, agent/victim, and so forth). Complaint gets gendered as feminine, for example, because abandonment leaves 'women in a more grievously trapped circumstance than is true of their masculine equivalents'.[22] With difference thus biologized once more – projected back squarely onto the body – it is easy to see how female complaint, far from subverting the dominant fiction, can actually be seen to uphold if not reinforce it. It is from this perspective, indeed, that female complaint can come to be read as a vehicle for 'patriarchal didacticism', as a calculated

ploy on the part of men to oppress women by demeaning, admonishing, criminalizing, and stigmatizing them, colonizing their authentic voice and speaking on their behalf.[23] From this perspective, again, men can be seen to masquerade as women specifically in order to empower themselves, the act of 'writing the text of female "experience"' providing them, as Wendy Wall puts it, with 'the structural ground for asserting poetic mastery'.[24] According to this reading, male poets are shown to compose female complaint – to insert themselves into the position of a clearly differentiated female other – with the sole aim of furthering their own careers and of fashioning themselves as serious male authors. In particular, it is argued that the Renaissance tradition of appending a female complaint to a sonnet sequence allowed male poets to distance themselves from the lightweight 'toys' of courtly love (the kind of thing that could end up leaving women in such a predicament) in order to present themselves as contrastingly grave and weighty writers worthy of attention and fame (in this reading, for example, *A Lover's Complaint* is said to help Shakespeare 'validate a new authorial identity', p. 259). 'The female respondent becomes one of the doubles that the writer uses . . . to introduce his own authority through masquerade. The fallen woman's critique becomes a central part of the architecture of poetic authority, as it establishes an acceptable idiom through which the new poet can be presented and formally contained' (p. 260). Any potential that feminine identification may have had to disturb the gender binary, to undermine the dominant fiction, or to subvert male authority, can thus ironically find itself turned on its head. And, if playing the woman is seen as a strategy for boosting a specifically masculine authority, then – by means of a reversal with which we are now familiar – no position can be too low, that of the utmost dereliction (being an abandoned, violated, dishonoured woman coming pretty close to the mark) being merely a ruse to recuperate the masculine subject all the more completely. In this light, female complaint can seem a vehicle not so much for collapsing sexual difference or for exploring the fields of androgyny, homoeroticism, polymorphous perversity and the like, but, on the contrary, for cementing the biological division of gender – however 'tactically' or 'strategically' – and for restoring the masculine writing subject to a position of mastery and power.

If this recuperative narrative is to be avoided, therefore, and questions of abjection and masochism – which I believe the text invites – are to be fully investigated and explored, a different approach seems to be called for: one that instead of containing and domesticating the text's potential for subversion, will try to account for its abidingly 'enigmatic' quality. And for this a clue is to be found within the poem itself. The opening lines – which

announce a 'plaintful story' (line 2) and a 'sad-tuned tale' (line 4) – clearly identify the poem's allegiance to the complaint tradition and invite us to assume that the letters and other objects which the weeping girl is casting into the metonymic stream on whose banks she sits are, as would be entirely conventional, those of the faithless lover who has deserted her. This assumption, moreover, is personified in the figure of the old man (himself the classic figure of the *senex* who has withdrawn from the court to a life of contemplation and retreat) who soon enters the scene and, like the reader or critic, 'desires to know' (line 62) and 'desires' to hear (line 66) the cause of her grief. Given his former experience 'Of court, of city' (line 59), it is quite logical that he should be presented as assuming that the scenario before him conforms to the generic expectations of courtly complaint. Yet, however acutely this old philosopher may have 'observèd' (line 60) the ins and outs of courtly life and love, he turns out – if that is his assumption – to be wrong; and it is a sign, perhaps, of his being out of place – of his not being in the poem or tradition he thought he was in – that he does not reappear again, and that the ending that he (and we) might well, following the complaint tradition, have expected – in which the girl dies of a broken heart, say, and the old man, having prepared for her a modest grave, weeps 'wise tears in a passage of concluding pathos', as one editor speculates – is, in the event, shown up as being trite and banal by comparison with the strange and unsettling ending that we actually get.[25] That *A Lover's Complaint* is departing from convention here and overturning all expectation is suggested by something that, along with John Kerrigan, although for different reasons, I think is 'of the greatest significance': the fact that the girl is not, as it happens, discarding the favours of her former lover but, rather, those of other *women*.[26] How this (which neither the old man nor the reader expected) came to be is the burden of the story that she proceeds to tell in the long speech that follows.

This unusual scenario demands inspection, and, on looking more closely at the objects that the girl is weeping over, what is immediately striking is (even allowing for hyperbole) their quantity – 'A thousand favours' (line 36), 'many' (lines 43, 45), 'yet more' (line 47) – and their diversity: 'papers' and 'rings' (line 6), a 'napkin' (line 15), favours of 'amber crystal and of beaded jet' (line 37), 'folded schedules' (line 43), rings of 'gold and bone' (line 45), 'letters' (line 47), as well as (as she proceeds with her story further items get added to the list) 'tributes' of rubies and pearls (line 197), 'talents of their hair' (line 204), 'deep-brained sonnets' (line 209), 'trophies' (line 218), 'similes' (line 227), and a 'device' (line 232). All these, it transpires, are love-tokens that were originally given to the youth by other women

and then passed on by him to the girl. The first thing to notice about this multitude of objects, apart from the fact that they originate with women, is – and it is a point on which the poem is emphatic – that they are all objects that *signify*: that is to say, they are all, to that extent, texts. The 'napkin', for example, is embroidered with 'conceited characters' (line 16) and 'silken figures' (line 17) that the girl reads ('often reading what contents it bears', line 19); the 'folded schedules' are similarly 'perused' (line 44); the rings of gold and bone are 'posied' (line 45), that is, inscribed with rhymes or mottoes; and the letters 'penned in blood' (line 47) with 'lines' (line 55) and 'contents' (line 56) that she reads and tears. As for the various jewels – amber, crystal, jet (line 37), rubies and pearls (line 198), a diamond (line 211), an emerald (line 213), a sapphire and opal (line 215), locks of hair entwined with gold (205), and so forth – these belong to a long history of lapidary symbolism and are to be treated as signifiers loaded with meaning. Emeralds and opals, for example, were traditionally believed to cure weak sight, so presumably the women originally sent them to the youth meaning either that he should see them and their love more clearly and/or that their sight had been dazzled by him. The pearls and rubies, moreover, set off a chain of signification. As synecdoches of the women who sent them, they are signifiers of signifiers – the 'bloodless white' (line 201) of the pearls 'figuring' (line 199) the women's pallor which in turn signifies the 'Effects of terror' (line 202), 'grief' (line 200), 'pensived and subdued desires' (line 219), while the 'encrimsoned mood' (line 201) of the rubies stands for the women's blushes, themselves 'aptly understood' (line 200) as signs of either 'dear modesty' (line 202) or 'affections hot' (line 218). Should there be any doubt about the signification of these metaphorical objects (the youth offers all these to the girl as 'similes', line 227) they come attached (see 'annexions', line 208) with more straightforwardly literary texts: that is, with 'deep-brained sonnets' that 'did amplify' (line 209) and 'blazon' (line 217) – the specifically rhetorical and literary senses being implied here – their intended meaning. In this respect, the jewels have an affinity with the 'device' (line 232) that was given to the youth by an infatuated nun and which, although not specified as such, was presumably some combination of image and text as would have been familiar from the tradition of emblem-books and courtly *imprese*.

The objects which the girl throws into the stream, then – having read and perused their contents, sighed and wept over them, and then torn, broken, cracked, or rent them – are, emphatically, all texts; and the poem suggests that in each case they derived originally from women. The question has been raised whether the youth himself might not have written directly to the girl

and have authored at least some of these missives, her exclamation, 'O false blood, thou register of lies!' (line 52), for example, being cited as evidence that the 'letters sadly penned in blood' must have been composed by the seducer whose faithlessness she here laments.[27] Yet, although we know from her own testimony that the youth is capable of seducing as much by written words as by speech – she found his 'characters and words' (line 174) equally deceiving – these apply, in the context, specifically to persuasions that he had directed at others. And, even here, there remains the possibility that these 'characters' with which he wooed former mistresses might, in turn, originally have been sent to him by earlier paramours still – his habit of passing on second-hand favours being, as we shall see, an unfailingly successful seductive ploy – a possibility that opens up an interesting scenario of infinite regress as the origin of those letters is pushed back ever further into the poem's murky narrative past (that this question of whether or not the youth wrote the letters rehearses the similar question of whether or not Shakespeare wrote *A Lover's Complaint* should not, in the circumstances, go unnoticed). The letters could as easily have been written by women as by the youth: they are tied up with silk, the same material with which the 'napkin' was embroidered, and although letters in that period were typically sealed with wax and silken thread, the use of the unusual technical term 'sleided' (line 48, meaning silk that has been separated into individual threads), and the associations this rare word has when used elsewhere, might suggest that these letters were written, wrapped, and sealed by female hands.[28] The poem, in fact, seems to taunt us with the undecidability of the issue, making great play of the enigmatic and indecipherable nature of these texts, the contents of which remain teasingly hidden from us and 'sealed to curious secrecy' (line 49).[29] As far as the girl in the poem is concerned, in any case, there is no incontrovertible evidence that the youth has ever written to her directly at all; the emphasis, rather, is that the objects he gives her have all been inscribed – 'posied', 'penned', amplified, blazoned, and so forth – by women. In line with this goes the distinct impression that this windy boy prefers to speak than to write, the stress throughout being specifically on his verbal skills.[30] He is described, for example, as 'maiden-tongued' (line 100), as the possessor of a 'subduing tongue' (line 120), as skilled in 'arguments' (line 121), in 'question deep' (line 121), in 'replication prompt' (that is, in repartee, line 122), in 'dialect' (that is, in the art of dialectic or argumentation, line 125), and in 'passions' (that is, in passionate speeches, lines 126, 295). Those who fall for him imagine 'what he would say' (line 132) not what he would write, and it is his winning speech that the girl recites to the old man. The youth's ability to move and persuade ('To make

the weeper laugh, the laugher weep', line 124), to captivate an audience that is dazzled by what it sees and hears, to use deception (see especially lines 302–15) and disguise (he did 'livery falseness', line 105, and wear the 'garment of a grace', line 316) all add up to the impression that he is above all else a consummate actor (he even knows, where necessary, how to act as a convincing audience, 'to weep at woes, / Or to turn white and sound [i.e. swoon] at tragic shows', lines 307–308).

What we have here, then, is a situation in which, contrary to expectation, a female complainant responds to texts most if not all of which are by women; a scene in which women write and women read, where these texts ('many' and 'deep') both derive from and end up in women's hands; a scenario in which, to be specific, these texts that are being written, sent, passed on, and read are ones that address and importune, blazon and praise a beautiful man. Put this way, the poem rather strikingly reverses the more familiar scheme of things in which male poets write elaborately conceited Petrarchan poems to and about beautiful women and circulate them among themselves. What gradually unfolds in *A Lover's Complaint*, that is to say, is a scene of *female* 'homosociality' in which the structure that clearly manifests itself in the practices of male coterie writing (where poems about or addressed to women are designed to establish a relation – even if mainly a competitive one – with other men) is reproduced, only here, of course, the other way round.[31] The two situations are not, it is true, exactly parallel, since here the exchange of texts is mediated by the youth: it is he who passes them on to the girl (as proof of his desirability) and not the women themselves (as proof of their ability), they being presented – albeit through the distorting lenses of the youth's words which are, in turn, reported by the girl – as expressing their desire for him in 'good faith' rather than as aiming directly at showing off or dazzling a fellow rival. But the basic model remains the same. Although it is the youth who markets himself – he who raises his own price by passing on the accumulated capital of others' love as 'tender' (line 219) and 'combinèd sums' (line 231), he who circulates himself – he nevertheless remains a commodity, an item of value that is exchanged, as the poems about him are, between women. The poem thus reproduces the structure basic to homosocial relations: that is, a triangle in which an ostensibly heterosexual relation, however ardently expressed, is accompanied by if not subordinated to a homosocial one. And it is that homosocial relation between women on which *A Lover's Complaint* rather unexpectedly insists. The temptation at this point might be to suggest that this reversal recuperates women, turning them from passive victims to active agents who are in control of their situation, able to assert their rights and

to speak as desiring subjects, empowered to write and to read each other's 'deep-brained' sonnets. To do this, however, would still be to preserve the gender binary and thereby to limit the scope of the poem's radical potential for subversion; and, while it might allow women to appropriate male power and to take back for themselves privileges otherwise denied them, it is still to keep the masterly writing subject very much in play (now only a female rather than a male one), thus bringing the abjection and castration of that subject – the masochistic choice of suffering over pleasure, of being exquisitely 'shattered' over being whole – no nearer to being understood. My aim in the remainder of this chapter, therefore, is to consider how, in this poem at least, homosocial relations can be shown to dismantle mastery and to play havoc with sexual difference, and I propose to do this by looking in turn at two aspects of the homosocial relation: identification and desire. Insofar as members of the homosocial group see themselves and one another as desiring subjects and take their identity from that, the homosocial relation is necessarily an identificatory one. And, insofar as the ties that join those members to one another are no less close, affective, homoerotic, indeed, for being competitive and rivalrous, it is also a model of desire. The distinction between identification and desire is to some extent an artificial one since, as is increasingly being noted, the two are intimately connected, the step between desiring what others desire and desiring those others being but a small one. Although they will merge and blur with each other throughout the discussion, therefore, I will in what follows take identification and desire in turn if only for the purposes of organizing the argument and of giving due space to the considerations that are raised by each.

The girl's primary relation, then, is one of identification: before she desires the youth she *identifies* with those who desire him, and any relation she comes to have with him is mediated from the outset by the fact that he is already in relation with others. She desires him not for himself but because he is desired of others – it is their desire and nothing else that motivates her own – and this, indeed, is the burden of the long speech she makes by way of explanation to the old man who seeks to know the 'grounds and motives' (line 63) of her woe: the content of most of lines 71–147 – the first part of her speech – is an account of how she came to fall for the youth in the first place. For what she details – in describing the reactions of a besotted community, 'the general bosom' (line 127), that is 'enchanted' (line 128) and 'bewitched' (line 131), driven to an erotic frenzy, prompted to speculation and debate, moved to laughter and tears by this male equivalent of Zuleika Dobson – is not so much the youth himself, his particular attractions and charms, as the devastating effect these have on

others. If her description is anything to go by, this is ultimately of greater concern to her than the youth himself – who always remains a somewhat distanced figure, pedestalized and seen from afar – the important thing, it seems, being not so much the boy as the vantage point from which he is seen: that is, her identification with those others who are so enthralled. Her descriptions of the youth thus periodically slide over to descriptions of those who are looking at him: 'Each eye that saw him did enchant the mind' (line 89), 'Many there were that did his picture get / To serve their eyes' (lines 134–35). Right from the start, the girl sees the youth through others' eyes, viewing him from the position of the admiring audience with which she has already identified, relating herself not to him, in the first instance, but to those others who are held in fascinated thrall. And although these include men as well as women – since this youth (like that of the *Sonnets* – a connection that has not gone unnoticed) appeals to 'sexes both' (line 128) – the group with whom she identifies most particularly are his female admirers, those who 'Sweetly supposed them mistress of his heart' (line 142). That she has already identified with this group before he even approaches her or begins to woo is suggested by an image that has struck several editors and commentators as in need of explanation: the youth's beauty was such, she says, that he had 'maidens' eyes stuck over all his face' (line 81). If in looking at him what she is primarily doing is looking at others looking, then it makes sense that what she sees there is not so much his good looks as the looks of the other women gazing thereon. Her relation with him, that is, comes to be overshadowed by what prompts and structures it: her relation, in the first instance (conscious or otherwise), with the other maidens.

This, moreover, explains the point and content of the next part of the girl's story (lines 148–77) in which she describes how, *unlike* those others, 'some my equals' (line 148) with whom she otherwise identifies, she did not yield straight away but held out for a while and defended her 'honour' (line 151) from the youth's advances. For the purpose of this narrative delay – which creates a space within which the youth has to court her, persuade her, and win her round, the ultimate weapon in his armoury being the love-tokens he has received from others – is less to impress us with her virtue than to demonstrate the compelling force of her identification. Critics have struggled to explain why, right from the start, the girl is described as a 'fickle maid' (line 5), but if she has identified herself with the youth's other admirers from the beginning, then the description is wholly appropriate. Ironically, her 'resistance' merely provides an opportunity for proving her complete susceptibility to his ploy. For, if she identifies with the youth's other devotees, then his tactic of giving her the love-tokens he had previously received from them only confirms and validates that prior relation. That is

why his ruse works – why, indeed, it cannot fail – for it was this identificatory relation with the other women that initially established him as an object of longing and the existence of such tokens of devotion that aroused her desire in the first place. The girl, in fact, more or less admits this when she tells the old man that she knew the youth's devious tactics all too well but went on desiring him all the same: she 'knew the patterns of his foul beguiling' (line 170), 'patterns' here referring both to examples of those he had already deceived and to his particular mode of beguilement. It is as if she knew that he had persuaded others as he would persuade her, by exploiting their mutual identification, but that she was as helpless as they. To this extent, the girl is pre-persuaded, already in love, although in a more complex way, perhaps, than Kenneth Muir suggests when he says that she had 'fallen in love with him before he began to woo'.[32] For she responds to the youth in the way that she does because she is already in identificatory relation with the doting women. The girl does not need to be persuaded by the youth because – insofar as she identifies with these women and sees herself as one who desires him – she has already been persuaded of his desirability by them. The seducer's trick succeeds so well because, by putting the women who collectively adore him in touch with one another, he is effectively closing the loop – or, more accurately, the triangle – that structures homosocial desire. While some find it odd, therefore, that the youth should approach the girl by referring to his previous conquests, in the light of the bond that exists between the women, it makes perfect sense to do so and, indeed – insofar as it taps into this powerful (if not necessarily conscious) relation – it explains why the girl should find it so irresistible. That is why she insists to the old man that she had no choice in the matter and that her fall was inevitable ('whoever shunned by precedent / The destined ill she must herself assay?', lines 155–56); why she argues that anyone like her, or like the others, would have been so persuaded ('who, young and simple, would not be so lovered?', line 320); and why (in a move that is, in the circumstances, entirely logical, even if some have taken exception to it on moral grounds) she says that she would do it all again: 'Ay me, I fell; and yet do question make / What I should do again for such a sake' (lines 321–22):[33]

> O that infected moisture of his eye;
> O that false fire which in his cheeks so glowed;
> O that forced thunder from his heart did fly;
> O that sad breath his spongy lungs bestowed;
> O all that borrowed motion, seeming owed,
> Would yet again betray the fore-betrayed,
> And new pervert a reconcilèd maid.
> (lines 323–29)

For one critic, that anyone 'with even a modicum of logic and a minimal knowledge of human behaviour' should succumb to the youth's persuasions – let alone go into the situation with their eyes open and knowingly be prepared to repeat the whole experience – seems 'unbelievable'.[34] But to the extent that it demonstrates the identificatory relation between the women and the homosocial bond that subtends their heterosexual desire, it seems psychologically all too plausible – a shrewd, even compelling depiction of the wayward workings of human desire.

Moreover, the youth's tactic has worked not only with this particular girl but also, conceivably, with the entire group. The possibility suggested earlier that he may have used the same trick on the very women with whom the girl identifies – that he may have given them each others' love-tokens or those of supposedly earlier lovers still – seems, now, ever more likely. If so, he would have succeeded with them as smoothly as with the present girl because they, too, are in the same position – all madly identifying with one another – that being precisely the situation he is exploiting. Indeed, there is no one who does not desire him in this way, no love for him that is not mediated by an existing relation with fellow rivals, for the prospect of there ever having been one originating, 'authenticating' passion for him and him alone recedes ever further into the fictional past to become nothing other than the illusion by means of which he panders himself. As with collective hysteria over a celebrity or a media icon, the youth is never desired directly or for 'himself' but only as the deflected object of others' desires – he is the mediatory relay (albeit a crucial one) that allows desire to circulate between his adoring fans. That this, indeed, is the model of desire that the poem presents – a triangulated structure in which the heterosexual relation is to some extent also a homosocial one – is reinforced by the repeated emphasis on the sheer quantity of women who are enamoured of him – 'Many there were' (line 134), 'So many' (line 141), 'Among the many' (line 190), 'many a several fair' (line 206), 'all these hearts' (line 274). Such a multitude of devotees can only suggest a model in which desire is produced and proliferated by identification with others. And, although the youth singles out the infatuated nun as a particularly notable example of his success, the poem is not structured in such a way as to suggest that the girl is moved to love him by identifying with this single conquest alone. Rather, the poem works to create a sense of collective frenzy – a crowd of numerous, mostly undifferentiated others, all spurred on to desire the youth by one another. Indeed, not only is an entire community shown to be united in the same mutual identification: the very environment gets caught up in the hysteria and comes to be identified as a desiring woman itself. Thus, the girl finds herself in a landscape that is not only populated

by figures like herself – she being one 'afflicted fancy' (line 61) among many 'wounded fancies' (line 197), 'proofs new bleeding' (line 153), 'broken bosoms' (line 254), and so forth – but that is also, by means of transferred epithets (the river's 'weeping margin', line 39) and the pathetic fallacy (the 'concave womb', line 1, of the resounding hill and its 'sist'ring vale', line 2; the 'world' of the poem being stormed by the girl's sighs and tears, 'sorrow's wind and rain', line 7) in danger of being personified as a clamorous woman itself, the entire locality metamorphosing into a choric complainant that threatens finally to disappear once and for all into a vanishing, echoing voice.

This has some interesting consequences for our interpretation and understanding of the poem. To begin with, it re-orientates any pre-existing notions we may have had about its genre or, indeed, about the genre of the complaint form more generally. For if the girl identifies with the other desiring women (and they with one another), then to *be* a desiring woman is her (and their) heart's desire. She (and they) want to want the youth – on that rests their whole identity. Instead of seeing the girl as a tragic victim who has been abandoned and is therefore 'complaining' about it, the poem invites us rather to see her as someone who has exactly what she desires – which is to *be* someone who desires – that being her position, after all, from beginning to end. She does not, that is, seek to change her situation any more than a crowd of screaming fans are calling for urgent assistance. Like them, the girl wants and chooses to be in that state and, indeed, works it up to a fine pitch. 'Big discontent' (line 56) is paradoxically what contents her, the state of privation, lack, 'castration', her masochistic mode of choice.[35] She means it when she tells the old man that it gives no 'satisfaction to our blood / That we must curb it upon others' proofs' (lines 162–63) because, insofar as she identifies with the 'proofs new bleeding' (line 153) of the youth's previous conquests, she positively desires to 'bleed' like them – that to her is 'sweet' and 'good' (line 164). Callous as it might seem, the youth's statement of his former mistresses – that 'They sought their shame that so their shame did find' (line 187) – is, in the light of this more complex vision of desire, largely true. A hint that this is the correct reading, moreover, is to be found once again in the fate of the old man. Old-fashioned and possessed, perhaps, of a simpler or more benign understanding of human motivation and desire, he bustles in and, full of good intentions, assumes that the girl wants to alleviate her pain, offering to 'assuage' her 'suffering' (line 69) and so to effect some curative change to her condition. That the girl does not actually want this and that his understanding of the situation is therefore largely off-target is suggested by the fact that he completely

disappears, never to close the frame. The old man's disappearance leaves space for a darker and more compelling depiction of human desire – one, indeed, more in keeping with the *Sonnets* (the later ones, at any rate) – in which heterosexual desire is complicated and triangulated by homosocial identification, and in which it is (for that reason) irrational, insane, obsessive, perverse, driven, self-destructive, addictive, masochistic in a compulsively repetitive way, wholly immune from considerations of worth or desert or from the pursuit of happiness or satisfaction, but no less irresistible for that. The speaker of the *Sonnets*, like the girl of *A Lover's Complaint*, 'well knows' the heaven that leads to this hell (sonnet 129) but remains as incapable of shunning it as she. In a recent article on Ovid and Shakespeare, Gordon Braden has suggested that the most fitting epigraph to the *Sonnets* might come not from the 'ameliorative end' of the *Metamorphoses*, but rather from the lips of one of Ovid's most famous complaining heroines, Medea: 'I see the better and approve it', she cries, describing her fateful passion for Jason, 'but I follow the worse'.[36] The same desire for desire – the same compulsion to choose the worse over the better, pain over pleasure, guaranteed separation and loss over marriage and a 'happy ending' – could make this the right epigraph for *A Lover's Complaint* as well, were that poem not, in articulating the same message more or less to the letter, itself the true epigraph for the *Sonnets* that the critic perhaps is looking for.

There is no doubt that the girl and women in *A Lover's Complaint* are presented as being driven to repeat their painful experiences. Indeed, if the poem is about anything it is about repetition: its landscape is littered with women who have succumbed (and, as an echoing voice, that landscape exponentially reduplicates their story a thousand times); and, in a way that has seemed so baffling to many, the particular speaker maintains that she would do it all again, go through the same painful experience any number of times. As Heather Dubrow notes (citing sonnet 129 again), repetition of this kind both 'writes and is written by erotic desire' because it demonstrates how 'that impulse is never finally satisfied and hence never finally controlled – "Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme"'.[37] In the case of *A Lover's Complaint*, desire is necessarily repetitive, structurally incapable of resolution or closure, because the poem specifically activates the homosocial triangle by means of which desire circulates between its three elements – the women, the youth, and the girl – round and round without end. As Colin Burrow comments, there is 'no escaping from a loop in which someone is desired for having treated others so badly that they longed for him, and no escape from the consciousness that when you have been abandoned by him too that might make him even more desirable'.[38]

Hence the circularity of *A Lover's Complaint* – the sense that it never seems to get anywhere, to change or achieve anything – which has led to complaints about the poem's 'pointlessness' as critics are obliged to admit that, unlike more openly homiletic and thereby conventional examples of the complaint tradition, *A Lover's Complaint* is bound by no such didacticism and 'promulgates no forthright moral'; the desire for an ethical reading that would wind up the story, redeem the wrong done, and satisfy readerly expectations finding itself here well and truly stumped, silenced and seen off as effectively as the old man.[39] Attempts on the part of the reader to introduce the moral standpoint which the poem so conspicuously leaves out – such as the 'unremitting Christian outlook of the Renaissance' that one critic brings in to try to adjudicate the situation – seem as out of place as the old man, and fail not only to make sense of the poem but somehow to do justice to it as well.[40] While Lucrece, Burrow notes, manages to 'break out of the potentially endless process of complaining' (p. 145) by taking her own life, there is no such promised end for the girl of *A Lover's Complaint*, who goes on and on and keeps the cycle repeating itself indefinitely. Where Lucrece protests loudly, both before and after the rape, her suicide being the ultimate refusal of the way she has been treated, the girl and women of *A Lover's Complaint* positively court and invite such mistreatment. If Lucrece, at great length and in no uncertain terms, says 'no' to what happens to her, then the girl and women of *A Lover's Complaint* say 'yes', 'more', and 'again', not to being raped, of course, but certainly to being seduced. In her reading of *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lynn Enterline suggests that Shakespeare is critiquing the male homosociality of the more traditional Petrarchan scenario – where men commodify woman and trade her between themselves – by asking what that woman as subject might have to say about such violent objectification. But if Shakespeare's 'ethical inquiry' (p. 156) into Petrarchanism seeks in part to recuperate woman by giving her a voice and a subjectivity otherwise denied her, then *A Lover's Complaint* (unsettling the desire for ethical readings once again) puts a new and disturbing angle on the whole scene. For although the poem turns conventional homosociality on its head by making it a man who circulates as the object of female desire, it neither 'recuperates' that man by making him protest against such objectification (quite the reverse), nor does it 'empower' the women by making them active agents, the wilful mistresses of their own erotic desire: on the contrary, they are shown to choose dereliction and abandonment every time.[41] Or rather, if this reversal does position the women as subjects, then the poem reveals that subjectivity to

be the very opposite of masterly – that is, as wilfully self-destructive, and superbly, exquisitely masochistic.[42]

It is not surprising, then, that critics seeking an ethical reading of *A Lover's Complaint* should find themselves at a loss, for what emerges is that the poem presents a view of human motivation and desire that is profoundly at odds with all that might seem logical or reasonable, let alone ethical, and that it promulgates the strange but undeniable reality that Freud found himself having to confront – namely, that human beings are not necessarily driven by gain, greed, or self-interest but, as often as not, by impulses that are obviously harmful, self-destructive, and masochistic, a clinical and all too observable fact that forced Freud to the conclusion that, peculiar as it may seem, 'there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which over-rides the pleasure principle'.[43] Since the masochistic impulse remained, even to Freud, 'mysterious', 'incomprehensible', 'obscure', and 'puzzling', it no longer seems so strange that *A Lover's Complaint* should, as noted earlier, so often have been described in similar terms; in which case, 'enigmatic', the epithet applied to it more frequently than any other, might now be seen as an apt descriptor – as indicating the poem's depiction of a truly masochistic subjectivity and desire – rather than as the faintly disgruntled response of readers who feel they cannot get to the bottom of it and sense that the poem is somehow withholding something from them.[44] It seems to me, in fact, that *A Lover's Complaint* is best understood if it is seen as a text that looks ahead to recent developments in psychoanalytic theory – developments which suggest that an originary masochism is constitutive of all human subjectivity. Indeed, the poem begins to make sense when it is seen to anticipate recent suggestions that the figure of the seduced girl might, perhaps, be the prototype of all human sexuality, 'male' no less than 'female', for according to these speculations, 'feminine' masochism is not some weird perversion, a distinct pathology which afflicts a few, nor even a sub-category within a slightly wider field (one that includes, classically, 'erotogenic' and 'moral' masochism as well), but is, rather, the fundamental point of origin in the psychic history of all human beings. In this account, the figure of the seduced girl comes to exemplify the foundation of all subsequent psychic development, in men as well as women, because, in the words of Jacques André, it 'presents a privileged affinity with the originary position of seduction of the child vis-à-vis the adult'.[45] Like the seduced girl, the child too is situated as the passive recipient of a sexuality that comes to it from the outside in the form of enigmatic, untranslatable messages from the other, a sexuality that is intrusive and exogenous, penetrative and

traumatic, that breaks in upon and 'shatters' the child into subjectivity and sexuality alike. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that – although present at the very foundation of psychoanalysis in Freud's early analyses of female hysterics, and still evident to some extent in the 1919 essay on masochism, 'A Child is Being Beaten' – this possibility of a primary masochism, of an early 'femininity' as the putative origin of all later human psychic and sexual development, came to be subjected to no less a repudiation, no less an institutional 'blanking out' in later Freud than that suffered by the literary genre of female complaint.

The scene of female homosociality that *A Lover's Complaint* unfolds, then, has much to say about the position of the women in the poem, for they now seem less the victims of a heartless brute than a group who are bound together in a willed and self-chosen masochistic identity. It also has something to say, furthermore, about the women's attitude to poetry, metaphor, and art. For if the youth is a mere pretext – the mediatory relay for the interpersonal relations that exist between them – then it no longer seems so surprising that the women should all fall for someone who is so openly callous and wicked. As a means to an end, the youth was never desired for himself or on his own merits (nor was anyone under any illusion that he was) because he was never really the object of interest or attention at all. Some critics register a sense of outrage at the youth's blatant manipulations and assume that the writer of the poem is as appalled and horrified as they. As the girl (along with her fellow sufferers) is a 'victim' of the youth's false praise and empty rhetoric, so the author of the poem is taken to be delivering a devastating critique of such falseness – a lesson powerful enough, in one case, to orientate the critic's interpretation not just of *A Lover's Complaint* but of the *Sonnets* as well, the entire sequence now seen, in the light (or, rather, the shadow) cast back over it by the concluding complaint, to be a bitter warning against the 'mendacity of metaphor' and the 'perils of invidious hyperbole'. This reading – which sees Shakespeare as a scrupled poet who, 'alert to the ethical implications of his art', warns against the power of metaphor to falsify – seeks to redeem the situation by restoring what is real and true, the essential 'nature of things' that lies behind the deceptive surface of smoky words.[46] The narrative of *A Lover's Complaint*, however, suggests that the girl and women of the poem are *not* so deceived. As the girl confesses to the old man, 'further I could say this man's untrue, / And knew the patterns of his foul beguiling . . . Saw how deceits were gilded in his smiling, / Knew vows were ever brokers to defiling' (lines 169–70, 172–73), and no doubt the other women would have added their own voices to hers, in the same collective conviction. The

implication, in other words, is that the women knew the youth's dastardly tactics all too well but went on desiring him all the same. They were never deceived by his false vows; they never believed the content of his words – least of all his transparent claim never to have loved 'Till now' (line 182). Never under any illusion about the falseness of his words, they allowed themselves, rather, to be moved – stirred to a passion, no less – precisely *because* those words were specious and empty and never pretended to be anything otherwise.

What galvanizes the women is specifically the surface and not the content of the youth's words. The situation might be compared to an episode similar enough to have struck one critic at least as being a likely analogue or source for *A Lover's Complaint*, namely the story of Dido and Pamphilus in Book II of the *New Arcadia*.[47] There, too, a group of women are driven to erotic frenzy by a callous youth who manipulates them in exactly the same way as the youth of the complaint: in 'the stirring of our own passions', explains Dido, the inamorata who speaks for herself and the other unfortunates, 'there lay his master's part of cunning, making us now jealous; now envious; now, proud of what we had, desirous of more; now giving one the triumph to see him, that was prince of many, subject to her; now with an estranged look making her fear the loss of that mind which, indeed, could never be had' (*NA* 238). As with their fellows in *A Lover's Complaint*, moreover, these women were never deceived by Pamphilus – they were fully apprised of his faults from the beginning, never thought he was anything other than a worthless, exploitative deceiver – and yet, enigmatic though it might seem, that did not warn them off him in the least; quite the opposite. 'And, which is strangest', Dido continues, 'I must confess even in the greatest tempest of my judgement was I never driven to think him excellent, and yet so could set my mind both to get and keep him as though therein had lain my felicity – like them I have seen play at the ball grow extremely earnest who should have the ball, and yet everyone knew it was but a ball' (*NA* 238). Quite apart from exemplifying with peculiar neatness the homosocial situation in which, as a mediatory relay for relations between women, the man finds himself passed around like an object from one to the other, the image of the ball-game also suggests much about the women's attitude to fiction and art. For the women here, like those of *A Lover's Complaint*, never doubt that the ball is 'but a ball', but that does not motivate them any the less to enter with full gusto and enthusiasm into the spirit of the game. They 'believe' in the youth's words, that is, in the same way that an audience or readership of poetic fictions 'believes' in poetic fictions that never made any claim to be true – that ball that 'was but a ball' having echoes, after all,

with that stage-play door marked 'Thebes' that a theatre audience is no less willing to accept for the duration, no matter how clear they are that it is not Thebes. In which case, the women of *A Lover's Complaint* might seem less the tragic victims of a vile seducer than the all too willing players and spectators of a tragic play (the masochistic heterocosm once again). Rather than seeing the poem as an attack on metaphor that belies the inner truth or essential reality of things 'in themselves', then, it is possible to see it as an experiment (for good or ill) in the power of fictions if not to teach or to delight then most certainly to move.

The scene of female homosociality that gradually unfolds in *A Lover's Complaint* thus subverts norms and expectations in several ways. Where we might have expected a single woman bemoaning her fate, her situation redeemed if not by personal salvation then at least by the poem's delivery of some wise counsel – a fine moral message in its parting words – what we actually get is a team of women bound together in complicit, masochistic identity who, heedless of warnings, are determined to go on playing the game (indeed, wise counsel seems only to spur them on: 'For when we rage advice is often seen / By blunting us to make our wits more keen', lines 160–61). In the way it defies the pleasure principle, thereby subordinating pleasure to pain, closure to repetition, and in the way it undermines the metaphysics of 'presence' (any presumption that meaning or a 'point' might inhere within or behind the screen of words) thereby subordinating truth to fiction, content to surface, seriousness to play, this scene of feminine identification goes a long way towards explaining the egregiousness of the poem and the prickly reception with which it has been met.[48] It is in order to go further still, however – to account in full for the poem's radical potential and to consider ways in which it might be seen to put mastery into question, to dismantle the gender binary, even to defy theorization and to flout critical thinking altogether – that, in what remains of this chapter, I shall turn to that other aspect of the homosocial relation, one that, although already touched on in much of what has gone before, I have reserved for a full discussion until now: desire. For although some critics, anxious to establish a 'redemptive' reading of the poem, have sought to recuperate the girl by seeing her as a 'strong' woman, a modern, liberated type who is to be congratulated for making 'a conscious decision to follow the force of her desire', it is by no means clear that, unconsciously, at any rate, her desire is only – or even predominantly – heterosexual.[49] On the contrary, the relation in which she seems engaged most intensely, immediately, and powerfully is that complex knot comprising mutual rivalry, treachery, imitation, and identification that ties her to the youth's other mistresses, and indeed they

to one another, the whole group being bound together by ties as intimate, close, and affective – homoerotic, no less – as any that might have united their male counterparts in the traditional model of male homosociality with which we are more familiar. Another critic, again with a 'redemptive' reading in mind, sees the girl's relation with other women and with the feminized landscape in which she finds herself as effecting a 'sympathy of woe', the girl joined by Echo – as Lucrece is joined by Hecuba and Philomel – in a sisterhood that offers mutual support and relief and aims to redeem the duplicitous rhetoric of devious male seducers.[50] But the relation between the women in *A Lover's Complaint* is, I suggest, neither so sisterly nor so innocent; and, although it does not open up a scene of overt lesbianism (for that we shall have to wait for Donne's *Sapho to Philaenis*), the poem nevertheless accompanies its story of heterosexual seduction with a powerful undertow of homoerotic attraction and desire. When the girl looks at the youth, for example, her view of him is so conditioned by her prior relation to his previous conquests that her gaze is met, as has already been noted, not by his but by these other 'maidens' eyes' (line 81). When she looks at the youth, in other words, what she actually sees is other girls: young, beautiful, smooth, 'maiden-tongued', his curls like 'silken parcels' (line 87), the youth presents a highly feminized object of desire. He is regularly described in terms that are usually reserved for women – the compliment that he embellishes his adornments rather than the other way round, for instance (lines 114–19) traditionally being related to female beauty. The conceit that Love made a 'dwelling' in the youth's 'fair parts' (lines 82, 83) also fits in here. The commonplace – conventional enough when applied to the female beloved (as, say, when Stella's heart is said to be Cupid's 'room' in *Astrophil and Stella* sonnet 43) – is here, unprecedentedly, reversed: the 'iconography of love', in the words of one critic, is 'being turned inside out'.[51] For here Love is feminized – '*She* was new lodged and newly deified' (line 84), the inhabitant, that is, is Venus not Cupid – so that when the girl gazes on the youth it is the erotically invested body of a woman that she sees and admires. Moreover, since the girl is one of a group of women bound together in identificatory relation, she is not just describing her own experience: arguably, all the women see him in the same way – as a woman. Seen in this light, the youth himself is but a decoy, a means by which the women can come to be in relation with other women, their noisy desire for what the others desire being in truth only camouflage for something that is never very far away: their desire for one another. There is a point in the poem, indeed, where the youth – as mediatory relay for the circulation of this homoerotic desire – almost seems to drop out of view altogether,

to leave the women communicating directly with each other. As the girl recounts it, the youth handed her the love-tokens of her fellow rivals with these final words:

> Now all these hearts that do on mine depend,
> Feeling it break, with bleeding groans they pine,
> And supplicant their sighs to you extend
> To leave the batt'ry that you make 'gainst mine,
> Lending soft audience to my sweet design,
> And credent soul to that strong bonded oath
> That shall prefer and undertake my troth.
> (lines 274–80)

The youth is still peddling his old 'economic' argument here – that the accumulated capital of others' desire for him should so raise his price as to increase the girl's desire for him exponentially (this is the same argument that Venus tries on Adonis – and no more successfully, it has to be said – when she tells him that 'I have been wooed, as I entreat thee now, / Even by the stern and direful god of war . . . Thus he that overruled I overswayèd . . . O be not proud, nor brag not of thy might, / For mast'ring her that foiled the god of fight', *Venus and Adonis*, lines 97–98, 109, 113–14). But at the same time the youth so minimizes if not erases his own place within the circulation of texts and of desire as to expose the real purpose of the homosocial relation, which is, at bottom, to put the fellow combatants, rivals, poets, lovers, in intimate touch with one another. For the picture that these lines allow us briefly to glimpse is one in which desiring women are in direct communication with other desiring women, supplicating each other with 'sighs', propositioning each other with 'bleeding groans'. This, indeed, puts an interesting new gloss on those mysterious 'letters sadly penned in blood' which the girl appears to revile – 'O false blood!' – for if, as now seems more possible, they were actually written not by the desiring youth but by the desiring *women* and in some peculiar way (made possible by the youth's mediation) addressed to her, then her exclamation may have as much to do with the mutual involvement and betrayal that binds her to her fellow rivals as it has to do with any relation she has or had with the youth himself, her relation to the women being as close if not closer than anything she might have experienced with him.[52]

The reason why this scene of female homoeroticism is so radical is that it takes us beyond the transgressions of even the negative Oedipus complex. I suggested earlier that in the tradition of female complaint the poet defines woman as 'castrated' – abused, seduced, abandoned, and so

forth – and then identifies with that position. In line with masochistic fantasy, this allows the male poet to activate and rehearse his negative complex – that is, the structure in which he identifies with his mother, 'behaves like a girl', and desires to be sexually used by the father – as in *The Rape of Lucrece*, for example, where, alongside the apparently more gender-compatible identification with Tarquin, the narrator can also be seen to identify with Lucrece, thereby putting himself in the classic masochistic position of a woman who is violently loved/beaten by a man. As a libidinal position this is transgressive enough since it realizes and literalizes what is normally repressed – what, as a 'construction of analysis', Freud had to re-insert as the core 'phase 2' of the masochistic fantasy sequence – namely, 'my father is loving/beating me'. But in those cases where, as in *A Lover's Complaint*, the poet identifies with a female figure who in turn desires other *women*, the male subject is no longer – or not only – exercising his negative complex: somehow or other he is also contriving to insert himself into the negative complex of the *girl*. This completely scotches the model by which transgression, subversion, and perversion have been theorized hitherto – that is, as 'negative' or counter-identifications that cut across and destabilize culturally sanctioned 'positive' ones. As an example of how psychoanalytic theory can find itself nonplussed when faced with such unorthodox situations, one might recall what happens in chapter 5 of Kaja Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* where, in the course of discussing male masochism, she turns briefly to the classic beating fantasies reported, according to Freud, by his female patients. For these fantasies, which routinely position the female subject as a *boy* who is being beaten by the father or a father-surrogate, all converge around one thing: 'a narcissistic investment in a subject-position which it would be transgressive for a man to occupy', she writes, 'but which is almost unthinkable for a woman, since it implies an identification with male homosexuality' (p. 203). What we find in *A Lover's Complaint*, I am suggesting, is exactly the same situation only the other way round: a male subject identifying with female homosexuality. The reason why identifications of this kind should fall 'so far outside the social pale', she goes on, is that 'even what generally passes for "deviance" is held to a recognizable and "manageable" paradigm, i.e. to one that reinforces the binary logic of sexual difference, despite inverting its logic' (p. 203). Thus, when a woman fails to 'identify with a classically female position, she is expected to identify with a classically male one, and vice versa in the case of a man. The female version of the beating fantasy', Silverman concludes – and here we might add the male identification with female homoeroticism that *A Lover's Complaint* turns up – 'attests to the

desire for imaginary variations that fall outside the scope of the psychoanalytic paradigm' (p. 203). Transgressive as it is, then, the negative Oedipus still has its place: as that which counters and runs contrary to the positive complex, it may thoroughly destabilize the latter – inexorably shadowing the heterosexual imperative with homosexual inclinations and so forth – but in theoretical terms it is stable and secure, you could almost say, in its very oppositionality, fixed and locked into position. In these other scenarios, however, where subjects stray beyond what is marked out for them as culturally transgressive or perverse – their own negative complex – into what is transgressive or perverse for someone else, we are in uncharted territory: for the man who identifies with female homosexuality, or the woman with male homosexuality, occupy positions that are no longer locatable as simple cross-identifications. However complex – indeed, infinite – the permutations the 'complete' Oedipus complex allows for (with boys and girls both identifying with and desiring mother and father, to produce masculine men, feminine men, masculine women, feminine women, and so on and so forth) in these new scenarios oedipal structurations become increasingly blurred as distinctions between boy and girl, male and female, homo- and heterosexual, identification and desire begin to slide out of control and threaten to dissolve altogether. Silverman, it has to be said, struggles to re-contain the theoretical chaos her argument has potentially unleashed, doing her best to gather the whole question back into the recognizable and 'manageable' paradigm she has effectively deconstructed (for example, by unselfconsciously restoring the sexual difference that has just been demolished: there is 'an ineluctable difference at work here', she observes, 'since it is clearly not the same thing, socially or even psychically, for the girl to be loved/beaten by the father as it is for the boy', p. 204). She does this, presumably, to re-assert some kind of order over a topic that otherwise threatens to get out of hand, to enable the 'unthinkable' to be brought back under control and to be rigorously re-thought and theorized. She thus pulls back from the more radical position that her own argument opens up in order to preserve the theoretical paradigm with which she started out – 'perversion always contains the trace of Oedipus within it – it is always organized to some degree by what it subverts' (p. 186) – effectively putting masochism back in a box, re-containing it as a 'perversion' of the norm, and re-domesticating it as the 'negative' of the positive.[53] But the genie is out of the bottle; and, in the trouble this scene of 'perverse' perversion causes the theoretician we might perhaps see an illustrative parallel with *A Lover's Complaint*. For, as it ventures beyond the 'social pale', beyond any structure that is recognizably oedipal to a position that exceeds even the most

convoluted of oedipal couplings or cross-couplings, so the poem's scenario of a man identifying with female homosexual desire takes its readers to a place where the 'psychoanalytic paradigm' is stymied and the theorist (like the old man, once again) once more baffled and at a loss.

In fact, *A Lover's Complaint* goes even further in a radical direction than I have here made out. For to say that the poet/narrator identifies with the negative Oedipus complex of the girl is still to some extent to explain the situation – however 'unthinkable' – in oedipal terms. It is to imply that what the male subject identifies with is the girl's original identification with her father and her subsequent sexual orientation towards women: that is, it is still to keep identification and desire separate, still to operate within a broadly heterosexual framework. As the female masochist who inserts herself into the negative complex of the boy identifies with his feminine identification and so arrives at a version of femininity, albeit one 'borrowed' and 'radically denatured' (p. 204) by this complex detour, so, according to this model, the male subject who inserts himself into the negative complex of the girl identifies with her masculine identification and is, thus, still in touch with a version of masculinity however bizarrely distorted it might have become in the process. But this is not, actually, what happens in *A Lover's Complaint*, and although I suggested a moment ago that there the poet/narrator enters into the negative complex of the girl, this was more a *façon de parler* than a strictly accurate statement of the case. For there is, in fact, no indication that the girl and women in the poem are masculinized, no suggestion that any covert 'lesbianism' between them might derive from a masculine identification, and no hint that they desire each other as if they were 'men' desiring women. In other words, their mutual desire, such as it is, cannot, ultimately, be explained – or explained alone – as being the product of their negative complex. Something else is going on. It might clarify matters at this point to compare *Venus and Adonis*: for although the male object of desire in that poem is similarly feminized (like the youth, Adonis too is young, beautiful, girlish, smooth, and so forth), there Venus is in sole command of the field: there are no other female figures in the vicinity for whom Adonis might serve as the displaced object of lesbian desire. As we have seen, however, the landscape of *A Lover's Complaint* positively teems with them, so that we are invited if not encouraged to interpret the feminized male body in this way in the complaint as we are not in the epyllion. Besides, big, red, and hard, Venus is obviously – even comically – masculinized, so that although traditional gender roles are reversed, the relation between the couple still falls clearly within the heterosexual paradigm, with a masculinized subject desiring a feminized object.

In *A Lover's Complaint*, by contrast, nothing is masculinized. On the contrary, the girl and women remain feminine – 'masochistic' and 'castrated' – throughout, and are closely identified not with the youth or with other men but, as suggested above, with one another. Indeed, the poem seems strangely determined not just to denature masculinity but to eliminate it altogether. Male figures are either absent (the youth, for example, has long gone) or present so tenuously as soon to vanish into thin air (like the old man or the narrating 'I'). Instead we are given a field populated by women (indeed, the landscape itself threatens to become one of them), and – as they identify with each other as desiring subjects and see in the youth a version, however idealized, of themselves – a very female scene (even, perhaps, an *exclusively* female scene) of desire.

As an example of the way identification and desire can so spectacularly collapse into one another and slip between otherwise distinct heterosexual structures and the 'manageable' oedipal paradigm, another case presents itself here which – although deriving from a quite different context and remote in every way from the late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century poem – nonetheless presents, in its basic triangular structure, affinities enough to make it an interesting analogue and point of comparison. I am referring to the dream of the abandoned supper party that was reported to Freud by one of his female patients and recorded by him in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.[54] Briefly, the scene involves a triangle between a witty butcher's wife, her husband, and her attractive female friend – a friend she is relieved, in the dream, *not* to be inviting to supper. Discussing the numerous interpretations which this dream – 'one of the primal scenes of psychoanalytic interpretation' – has thrown up, starting with Freud, Diana Fuss shows how they all, in their different ways, read it as a scene of more or less oedipalized identifications (positive or negative).[55] The butcher's wife, for example, is seen either as identifying with her female friend (thereby wanting to be the woman whom her husband desires – a classic case of 'hysterical identification' in Freud's view); or as identifying her own desire with her friend's desire for her husband (thereby wanting to be a woman who desires a man); or as identifying with her husband (thereby wanting to be a man who desires a woman).[56] As Fuss points out, however, in all these readings identifications and cross-identifications remain structured along a heterosexual axis, as if it were impossible to conceptualize homosexuality except as the inverse or 'negative' of heterosexuality, or as if lesbian desire can *only* come about when a woman identifies with a man. For her own part – and this is where a comparison with *A Lover's Complaint* begins to seem apt – Fuss asks whether there might not be situations in which female homosexual desire could bypass the masculine altogether and whether, if the wife *does* identify with her husband here, that need necessarily mean a masculine identification (might the wife not, for example, be identifying with her husband's feminine identification, that is, with *his* desire to be the female friend?). The wife's sexual jealousy – her fear that her husband might be attracted to her friend – would thus function as a 'disguised declaration of the very opposite suspicion': that *she* is attracted to her friend. Fuss asks, in other words, whether it might not be possible to imagine a scenario of feminine-identified lesbianism – one in which female homosexuality need not be mediated by any prior identification with maleness – and, while allowing for differences in context, her own interpretation of the story might be seen to have some interesting parallels with *A Lover's Complaint*: 'this narrative of identification and desire', she writes, 'might easily be read as a story of "between women", with the butcher [or our youth], at most, a convenient identificatory relay for a socially prohibited lesbian desire' (p. 31).

Apt as it is, however, this explanation does not provide a final answer – a longed-for solution to the 'enigma' – for, as Fuss herself concludes, even her own interpretation is but one of many re-tellings, but another re-casting of a story that demonstrates, ultimately, a 'powerful resistance to interpretative mastery', for this flighty tale, that impishly eludes capture, refuses finally to submit to anyone's last word. If there is any story to be told, she comments, then it is rather the capacity of narrative to generate yet more narrative, to proliferate for ever without end: 'the critical desire for a readable and concise ending to the story of the butcher's wife – not only to the dream but to Freud's interpretation of the dream – paradoxically defers closure and keeps the story open to further rereading' (pp. 31–32). In much the same way, *A Lover's Complaint* also dodges conclusion and, as we have seen, weaves in and out, teasing the reader and defying efforts to make sense of it or to pin it down, the critical desire to 'redeem' the poem with some ethical reading that would at last provide a moral or a message or a point being routinely denied satisfaction until criticism itself comes to be caught up in – and fiendishly compelled to repeat – the same open-endedness, circularity, and failure to arrive anywhere that the poem taunts it with. And the reason for this is simple enough. The reader, critic, or theorist is never in a position to 'master' stories of this kind – to rationalize or explain them once and for all – because they obviate critical logic and run rings round basic habits of thought. The psychoanalytic paradigm (a 'recognizable' and 'manageable' one, at least) strives to keep identification and desire apart. So long as the two are dichotomized and kept mutually exclusive – so that identifying

with the parent of one sex necessarily involves desiring the other, and vice versa, the twin poles of the Oedipus complex – then positions can be clearly located as negative and positive, and sexuality can be theorized as hetero- or homosexual, as 'normative' or 'perverse'. But where, as here, identification and desire refuse to keep to their allotted positions and instead slide out of control to converge with and ultimately to collapse into one another, there the situation confounds not just 'legitimated' sexual identities – if these are the heterosexual norm – but 'inverted' ones too. Here we stray into territory where traditional psychoanalytic theory is at sea, its recognized landmarks gone and its classifications duly confused – to a place where (to use Judith Butler's examples) a woman might find the 'phantasmatic remainder of her father in another woman or substitute her desire for her mother in a man', in which case a certain 'crossing' of hetero- and homosexual identifications and desires takes place; or where a man might 'identify with his mother, and produce desire from that identification', in which case, if he desires a man or a woman, is his desire 'homosexual, heterosexual, or even lesbian?'.[57] It is just such grey areas that the dream of the abandoned supper party or *A Lover's Complaint* show up: men and women identifying wildly, simultaneously, and illogically with each other's masculine and feminine identifications. Where identification and desire prove so friable, so apt to blur into one another, we are no longer dealing with recognized deviations – with masculine women or feminine men, for example – but with situations that, while definitely out of line, can neither be identified as strictly 'negative' nor theorized as 'perverse'. Contravening the paradigm, such situations fall outside the Oedipus altogether, outside the schema regulated by difference, proving 'unthinkable', as Silverman proposed, because they defy logical thought and its principle of non-contradiction giving instead 'complex crossings of identification and desire which', to quote Butler again, 'might exceed and contest the binary frame itself' (p. 103).

Such radical contestations, however, have an important – indeed, a crucial – part to play, for they are not, after all, restricted to a single poem or to an individual neurotic patient. On the contrary, the field of human practice in all its diversity offers up examples enough, for there are lives led, relationships conducted, roles assumed, positions held, that do not necessarily conform to any 'theorizable' subjectivity; the world is 'densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject' (p. 3). In other words, such non-systemizable and non-categorizable positions, Butler suggests, constitute the realm of all that is 'unthinkable' – illogical, illegible, non-viable, incoherent – all that must be excluded and repudiated (*abjected* is her word) in order for the 'thinkable', the theorizable

and coherent, to emerge. This abjected domain is not, importantly, the opposite of the other – 'for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility' – rather it is the 'excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside' (p. xi). As such, it provides the contours, the backdrop, the set of infinite possibilities, the 'discursive limits' and constitutive constraint without which 'coherent' positions could not emerge – whether they are a coherent heterosexuality or a coherent homosexuality, a coherent gay or a coherent lesbian identity, or within that the coherent 'butch' or coherent 'femme', or even a coherent masochistic identity. It is a crucial point, as Laplanche and Pontalis observe, that a subject's identifications, 'viewed as a whole', in no way constitute a 'coherent relational system'.[58] It is in the nature of identifications to multiply, overlap, and contradict one another, so that conforming to a coherent, recognized gender identity, even a socially transgressive one (being a 'masochist', for example, or a 'pervert') is at the price of repudiating the myriad identifications and identifications with identifications that do *not* conform to the paradigm – all those 'abjected spectres' (Butler, p. 113) the like of which *A Lover's Complaint* or the dream of the abandoned supper party throw up. Coherence is thus maintained only at the cost of a subject's complexity, at the price of those 'crossings of identifications of which it is itself composed' (p. 115), an unwarranted – and ultimately unsuccessful – reduction and simplification of the 'multiply constituted subject' (p. 116), which is what every subject is. For every living, desiring being is constituted by this range of 'illogical', repudiated possibilities, constrained 'by not only what is difficult to imagine, but what remains radically unthinkable'. 'In the domain of sexuality', Butler continues, 'these constraints include the radical unthinkability of desiring otherwise, the radical unendurability of desiring otherwise, the absence of certain desires, the repetitive compulsion of others, the abiding repudiation of some sexual possibilities, panic, obsessional pull, and the nexus of sexuality and pain' (p. 94).[59]

It is just such positions, I have been arguing, that *A Lover's Complaint* experiments with and explores – masochistic, repetitive, driven, obsessive, playful, painful, contradictory, illogical, impossible, unthinkable, unethical, and obscure. The poem brings to the fore those spectral identifications that are otherwise repudiated – that lurk beyond the edges of binary thinking or on the outside of the psychoanalytic paradigm – so that it is no longer (or no longer only) a question of the 'male' poet identifying with the figure of an abandoned woman, whatever possibilities that might open up for experiencing 'castration' or for activating a classic masochistic fantasy, although that would have been transgressive enough. Rather, the poem goes

further still, acknowledging and accessing the range not only of forbidden but of excluded and abjected identifications, making present elements from the whole welter of dispositions which – however disallowed, however in excess of what can comfortably or 'manageably' be theorized – nonetheless, in their very repudiated aspect, form the material from which all subjectivity must emerge. More than revealing an abject male who positions himself as an abandoned woman, as the masochistic victim of male sexual predations, the poem also actualizes the male poet's own abjected identifications – what it means for a man to 'be' a woman who wants to 'be' and to 'have' other women who, in their turn, want to 'be' and to 'have' other women – the result being resolutely to deconstruct any notion of identity that we might have started out with. Lifting the curtain on the multiple identifications that go to make up every one of us, the poem radically problematizes any pre-existing ideas of gender identity – of a 'male' poet, or, for that matter, of a 'male' or a 'female' reader – giving instead a scene in which multiply constituted subjects are left contemplating one another. Any pre-conceived notion of masculinity – of the poet/narrator who voyeuristically intrudes or who frames and so controls the scene – vanishes like a chimera, the old man and the narrating 'I' finding themselves 'swept away', as John Kerrigan complains, to leave the poem, denied their wise, parting words, 'on the edge of incoherence'.[60] This is an incoherence that certainly puts paid to any readerly or critical mastery – any attempt to finalize or to explain what is going on – but it is also one that acknowledges the maximal range of identificatory possibilities that being able to tolerate such 'incoherence' can allow for. And this, finally, may go some way toward accounting for the poem's enduringly enigmatic quality: its uncanny power to fascinate and to repel, its persistent refusal to fit or to conform, its pointed ability to pique and to irritate, and its capacity to raise the very questions which it will always refuse to answer.

NOTES

1. Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (1598), in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), ii.317. This chapter represents an expanded version of my 'The Enigma of *A Lover's Complaint*', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Michael Schoenfeldt (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 426–40.
2. 'perplexing', 'complex', Katharine A. Craik, 'Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* and Early Modern Criminal Confession', *SQ* 53 (2002): 437–57, esp. pp. 441, 437; 'complex', John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and 'Female Complaint'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 10; 'contorted', John Kerrigan, ed., *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 389, John Roe, ed., *The Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 73, and Ilona Bell, '"That which thou hast done": Shakespeare's Sonnets and *A Lover's Complaint*', in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), pp. 455–74, esp. p. 455; 'tortive and errant', Kerrigan, *Sonnets*, p. 12 (citing *Troilus and Cressida*, I.iii.9); 'obscure', Charles Knight (1841) cited in Hyder E. Rollins, ed., *Shakespeare: The Poems*, New Variorum Edition (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1938), p. 586, and Bell, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets', p. 471; 'dense', Bell, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets', p. 455; 'compressed', Colin Burrow, ed., *The Complete Sonnets and Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 139; 'odd', Roe, *Poems*, p. 73, and Robert Giroux, *The Book Known as Q: A Consideration of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), p. 213; 'unfamiliar', 'curious', Roe, *Poems*, p. 73.
3. 'abstruse and virtually unexplicated', 'hard to understand and difficult to love', Bell, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets', p. 455; 'does not read easily', Roe, *Poems*, p. 73; 'verges on impenetrability', Craik, 'Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint*', p. 437; 'deepen the issues without quite clarifying them', 'ambivalent', Roe, *Poems*, pp. 67, 66; 'abandoned the forceful clarity', Kenneth Muir, '"A Lover's Complaint": A Reconsideration', in *Shakespeare the Professional* (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. 204–19, esp. p. 218; 'unease', Roger Kuin, *Chamber-music: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Pleasure of Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 85, 86.
4. Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press, 1989): 'most peculiar', pp. 440, 456; 'extraordinary', p. 441; 'mysterious', p. 441; 'astonishing', p. 442; 'complicated', p. 444; 'bewildering', p. 445; 'perplexing', p. 457; and 'strange', pp. 441, 444, 448, 454, 458.
5. See Ward E. Y. Elliott and Robert J. Valenza, 'Glass Slippers and Seven-League Boots: C-Prompted Doubts About Ascribing *A Funeral Elegy* and *A Lover's Complaint* to Shakespeare', *SQ* 48 (1997): 177–207; and Brian Vickers, 'A rum "do": The Likely Authorship of "A Lover's Complaint"', *TLS* 5 December 2003, pp. 13–15, who puts the case for John Davies of Hereford.
6. Peter Stallybrass, 'Editing as Cultural Formation: The Sexing of Shakespeare's Sonnets', in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Schiffer, pp. 75–88, esp. pp. 77, 86.
7. 'moral panic', *ibid.*, p. 77; 'similar panic', Freud, 'Fetishism', *SE* xxi.153.
8. Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 35.
9. Ovid, *Ars amatoria*, 3.346: '*Ignotum hoc aliis ille novavit opus*', in *The Art of Love, and Other Poems*, ed. J. H. Mozley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), p. 142.
10. Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 33.
11. 'The typical situation of the heroine is private in a double sense', notes Götz Schmitz in *The Fall of Women in Early English Narrative Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 'she is deprived of the hero's (and

often all other) company, and she is concerned with personal affairs', *ibid.*, p. 24.

12. Since Katherine Duncan-Jones made the case in 'Was the 1609 *Shake-Speares Sonnets* Really Unauthorized?' *RES* 34 (1983): 151–71, it is now generally accepted that the *Sonnets* and *A Lover's Complaint* belong to the same 'Delian' tradition.
13. Enterline, *Rhetoric of the Body*, p. 15.
14. Katherine Duncan-Jones speaks for many when she admits that she 'cannot explain why these writers felt it appropriate to "sign off" their sonnet sequences with lightweight Anacreontic poems', 'Was the 1609', p. 169.
15. See Burrow, ed., *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, p. 143.
16. *A Lover's Complaint*, lines 300–301, Burrow's edition to be cited throughout.
17. Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924), *SE* xix.162; masochism is thereby 'an expression of the feminine nature', he adds p. 161; see also 'A Child Is Being Beaten' (1919), where male masochists are said to 'invariably transfer themselves into the part of a woman', *SE* xvii.197; as well as Freud's discussion of masochism being perceived as 'truly feminine' in 'Femininity' (1933), *SE* xxii.116. On femininity assuming the status of a 'subjective conviction' for the male masochist, see Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 209. I use 'phantasmatic' here in the sense defined by Laplanche and Pontalis as a 'structuring action' that 'should not be conceived of merely as a thematic' but as a 'dynamic, in that the phantasy structures seek to express themselves, to find a way out into consciousness and action . . . constantly drawing in new material', *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 317.
18. On the *Heroides* as 'unheroic', see Schmitz, *Fall of Women*, pp. 26, 60; as 'antigeneric and anticanonical', and as 'nonhierarchical and nonpatriarchal', see Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 32, 47.
19. Enterline, *Rhetoric of the Body*, p. 185.
20. Kauffman, for example, argues that this literature has been 'disparaged or repressed by the structures of official thought from Ovid onward', *Discourses*, p. 22; and Lipking, that the 'standard literary histories offer no explanation' of it, that it has been 'suppressed or accused of illegitimacy', 'continues to be ignored by critics and other authorities', and has been subject to 'stigma or censorship or even public burning', *Abandoned Women*, pp. xvi, 2, 29, 227.
21. Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 140.
22. Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, p. 8. See also Bell: 'Being a woman, the female complainant is far more vulnerable (as the "concave womb" of line 1 hints) than the sonnet speaker', 'Shakespeare's Sonnets', p. 468.
23. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices*, p. 141. While registering the charge of essentialism, Harvey nonetheless follows Irigaray in maintaining a strategic or 'tactical essentialism' throughout, on the grounds that 'women and men (and their respective voices) are not politically interchangeable', *ibid.*, p. 13.

24. Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 252.
25. Roe, *Poems*, p. 72.
26. Kerrigan, *Sonnets*, p. 17.
27. In his gloss to line 56, Roe notes that the force of the girl's accusation of 'false blood' at line 52 indicates that 'the young man must be their author'. Richard Allan Underwood concurs, in *Shakespeare on Love: The Poems and Plays. Prologomena to a Variorum Edition of* A Lover's Complaint, *SSEL* 19 (1985), p. 65, as does Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 240–41, whose reading of the poem depends on the youth's authorship, the latter being a figuration, as he sees it, of Shakespeare's own self-identification with such a poet.
28. In *Pericles* IV.Chorus.21, 'sleided silk' occurs in the context of the specifically female textile arts, and in *Troilus and Cressida* V.i.31, the related 'sleave-silk' (meaning raw, unwoven fibres) is used as an insult to the feminized Patroclus, Achilles' 'masculine whore' (line 17).
29. 'The poem plunges its readers into a world where interpretation is all', comments Burrow: 'objects have a high emotional charge to the characters in it, but since the meaning of those objects depends on prior stories to which readers of the poem are not fully party those objects remain to them darkly laden with hidden significance', *Complete Sonnets*, p. 141. See also Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, p. 46, who also emphasizes that these texts remain 'unread' and 'unglossed'.
30. As if to add to the sense of the youth's breeziness, the girl's blazon on his charms twice associates him with the wind (see lines 86 and 103). For an extended discussion of the breath – *anima, l'aura* – as a figure for the fragility and waywardness of the poetic voice in Ovid, Petrarch, and their followers, see Enterline, *Rhetoric of the Body*, pp. 49–74. In this context, see also the youth's reference to the 'airy scale of praise' (line 226), in which, according to Kerrigan's gloss, praise is dismissed as '"breezy", "insubstantial" rhetoric'. It is a central part of Cheney's argument that the youth represents both a poet *and* a playwright – a figure who authors not only 'deep-brained sonnets' but also 'tragic shows' (line 308) – both literary forms being shown by the poem to be dangerously specious or false in their persuasions.
31. For the classic statement on male homosociality, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
32. Muir, 'A Reconsideration', p. 216.
33. Roche, for example, finds this ending 'astonishing', 'unlike any of the other complaint poems', and in 'open defiance of conventional morality', *Petrarch*, p. 442; for Vickers, too, it reflects a 'rejection of rational ethics', 'A rum "do"', p. 15.
34. Roche, *Petrarch*, p. 452; Vickers also finds the success of the youth's tactic a 'psychological improbability', 'A rum "do"', p. 13.
35. On this see Shirley Sharon-Zisser, '"True to Bondage": The Rhetorical Forms of Female Masochism in *A Lover's Complaint*', in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's*

A Lover's Complaint, ed. Shirley Sharon-Zisser (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 179–90.

36. '*video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor*', *Metamorphoses* vii.20–21, ed. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), p. 342. See Gordon Braden, 'Ovid, Petrarch, and Shakespeare's *Sonnets*', in *Shakespeare's Ovid: The* Metamorphoses *in the Plays and Poems*, ed. A. B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 96–112, esp. p. 109.
37. Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 36–37.
38. Burrow, *Complete Sonnets*, p. 146.
39. 'pointlessness', 'no forthright moral', Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, p. 50. See also Roe, *Poems*, p. 72: 'the narrative denies its reader the expected conventional dénouement. The maid's last-line confession, that the injury and her response to it seem destined to recur perpetually even if circumstances could be repaired, removes any possibility of a gesture towards formal consolation and insists on the power of betrayal as an ultimate statement.' Cheney finds the conclusion of *A Lover's Complaint* problematic because of the way 'it uses poetry to challenge one of the dominant projects of Shakespeare's plays . . . [namely, that] we become fully human only through compassion for the other'; the ending of the poem thus constitutes 'the most baffling denouement in the canon', *Shakespeare*, p. 263.
40. Roche, *Petrarch*, p. 443. I for one remain unconvinced by Roche's suggestion that the old man opens up, in both the *Sonnets* and *A Lover's Complaint*, 'the possibility of Christian love', *ibid.*, p. 454.
41. James Schiffer, for example, sees the girl 'trapped in an endless circularity that includes both remorse and masochistic ecstasy', '"Honey Words": *A Lover's Complaint* and the Fine Art of Seduction', in *Critical Essays*, ed. Sharon-Zisser, pp. 137–48, esp. p. 144.
42. Enterline's reading does in fact allow for this, since the subjectivity Shakespeare accords Lucrece is shown to be self-alienated and self-dispossessed: 'in a deeply Ovidian exploration of the tenuous, alienating conditions of self-authorship, Shakespeare's *Lucrece* explores an author's eccentric, dislocating place in his "own" language through a woman's "uncertain" and "untimely" voice and writing', *Rhetoric of the Body*, p. 180.
43. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), *SE* xviii.22.
44. 'mysterious', 'incomprehensible', 'obscure', from 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', *SE* xix.159, 161; 'puzzling' from Lecture 32 on 'Anxiety in Instinctual Life', in *New Introductory Lectures* (1933), *SE*.xxii. Discussing Freud's description of masochism as 'enigmatic' in this essay, Jean Laplanche notes that 'an enigmatic question is one in which the enigma has a function in the very content of the question, and not merely in its form', 'Masochism and the General Theory of Seduction', in *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 197–213, esp. p. 201. Laplanche's notion of enigma – in the form of the 'enigmatic' signifier or message – is, of course, central to his thesis about the primary relation between child and adult, that

message being 'enigmatic' because unconscious on the part of the adult who sends it and untranslatable on the part of the child who receives it. On this, see his discussion of 'A Child is Being Beaten' and the replaying of such enigmatic messages in masochistic fantasy, in 'Interpretation between Determinism and Hermeneutics: a Restatement of the Problem', in *Essays on Otherness*, pp. 138–65.
45. Jacques André, 'Feminine Sexuality: A Return to Sources', in *Jean Laplanche and the Theory of Seduction*, ed. John Fletcher, *New Formations* 48 (2002): 77–112, esp. p. 111.
46. Kerrigan, *Sonnets*, pp. 18, 23, 29, 23; for Kerrigan, the narrator of the poem stands by in 'appalled fascination' at the youth's deceptions, *ibid.*, p. 17. Cheney finds in the poem 'a critique of literary production in which both men and women are complicit in an economy not merely of cultural shame but also of artistic sham', *Shakespeare*, p. 244. See also Roe who finds that the poem stares at the situation it depicts in 'bemused, appalled fascination', *Poems*, p. 67. Roche and Vickers also protest at the immorality of the situation throughout their interpretations of the poem.
47. See Joan Rees, 'Sidney and *A Lover's Complaint*', *RES* 42 (1991): 157–67. While, for Rees, Sidney eventually provides a redemptive conclusion to this episode and clarifies the moral issues that it raises, 'Shakespeare does neither', *ibid.*, p. 166, this refusal to provide a moral to the tale being what makes the poem ultimately 'enigmatic', *ibid.*, p. 167.
48. Although a number of critics have commented on the 'awkward humour' of *A Lover's Complaint* (Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, p. 65), and seen it as a parody or satire of the complaint form (Underwood, *Shakespeare*, pp. 44, 60) and as a 'joke', however bitter or black (Underwood, *Shakespeare*, p. 100; Giroux, *The Book*, pp. 210–11), these readings all have a 'corrective' force as if the poem's playfulness had an overall moral point (to mock absurdity, pretension, and so forth). Contrast James Schiffer's more abyssal reading of the seduction of the poem as 'a kind of game, with its own rules and character roles', '"Honey Words"', p. 138.
49. Bell, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets', p. 469. See also Craik, who argues that, whereas most male-authored female complaints serve to incriminate the 'sexually assertive woman', 'Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint*', p. 450, this poem does not do so but presents her, rather, in a sympathetic light.
50. Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 79.
51. Roche, *Petrarch*, p. 445: 'I can think of no other poet', he adds, 'who makes love feminine in such a circumstance'.
52. 'The argument has come full-circle', complains Roche, 'in that the woman is now being supplicated by those very women from whom she was so different at the beginning', *Petrarch*, p. 452. In fact, the poem works to emphasize the similarities between the women and the repetition of their respective experiences and situations. The argument comes 'full circle', and the texts circle back to their beginning, I would suggest, precisely because desire is circulating, via the youth, between the women. Take, for example, the figure Roche calls a

'most mysterious nun', *ibid.*, p. 441. Here we have a woman who starts out chaste, autonomous, self-contained who then becomes a woman who desperately desires: she writes a text or composes a 'device' that ends up in the hands of a woman who, similarly, starts out chaste, autonomous, self-contained and who, too, then becomes a woman who desperately desires. In an example such as this, the poem reduces the homosocial relation to its barest, most minimal structuration. The youth, as supposed object of desire, drops away – his role being nothing more, in the final analysis, than that of mediator – while the women are left arousing desire in one another. Roche finds the nun 'most mysterious', perhaps, only because, structurally speaking, she is basically the *same* as the girl, the poem's subordination of development, difference and closure over circularity, sameness, and repetition being precisely what rattles this particular critic. In his provocative essay on *The Rape of Lucrece* – 'Shakespeare's Will: The Temporality of Rape' in *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition: Essays Toward the Release of Shakespeare's Will* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 165–221 – Joel Fineman has some interesting and, in the circumstances, not irrelevant things to say about such repetitions and the 'uncanny' way in which a letter seems to come back to the person who sent it, this being his formula for the distinctively new literary subjectivity Shakespeare developed in his poems and plays: 'a sender who receives his message back in an inverted form (inverted by the movement of re-turning or re-versing repetition) describes the way in which *all* Shakespeare's strong literary characters acquire their specifically psychologistic literary power', p. 200.

53. In her conclusion to this chapter Silverman again retreats from the more radical position she had opened up in order to re-contain masochism and restore the sexual binary of the 'psychoanalytic paradigm': thus 'masochism in all of its guises is as much a product of the existing symbolic order as a reaction against it. Although in its masculine variants it shows a marked preference for the negative over the positive Oedipus complex, it nevertheless situates desire and identification within the parameters of the family', *Male Subjectivity*, p. 213. Her argument, I suggest, is straining to go further than she here allows it.
54. See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *SE* iv.147–51.
55. Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 28.
56. The readings summarized here refer, respectively, to: Freud's in *The Interpretation of Dreams* ('hysterical identification', p. 149); to Lacan's in 'The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, ed. and trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1977), pp. 226–80; and to Catherine Clément's in 'No Caviar for the Butcher', in her *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 103–47. Fuss also considers an interpretation of the dream by Cynthia Chase in which the wife's identification with her husband represents a pre-oedipal identification with the phallic mother.

57. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 98–99.
58. Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 208.
59. Thus Stephen Whitworth finds that Shakespeare's poem gestures 'in the direction of the analytically unthought or unimagined', '"Where Excess Begs All": Shakespeare, Freud, and the Diacritics of Melancholy', in *Critical Essays*, ed. Sharon-Zisser, pp. 165–77, esp. p. 174.
60. Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, p. 51.