

Freud's Fallen Women: Identification, Desire,
and "A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman"

This essay selects for discussion one of the most underdiscussed texts in the psychoanalytic library, Sigmund Freud's case history of 1920, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,"¹ in order to scrutinize the submerged metaphors which underwrite Freud's theory of female inversion. Postulating that no scientific language can escape the pull of metaphor, I would like to suggest that the cognitive paradigm of "falling" which Freud provides in this case study to "explain" female homosexuality is already a rhetorical figure. The allegory of the fall—upon which Freud's entire theory of inversion hinges—activates in psychoanalysis a certain Newtonian metalogics of force, counterforce, attraction, repulsion, and reversal. These figurative traces of psychodynamics in psychoanalytic theory name more than the subject's fall into (or out of) sexuality; they critically define and delimit the operations of two psychical mechanisms Freud locates as central to the formation of any sexual identity: identification and desire. Specifically for Freud, a gravitational fall back into preoedipality, secured through an identification with the father and a concomitant desire for the mother, accounts for the "psychogenesis of a case of homosexuality in a woman." The case history Freud published under this name represents his most sustained attempt to engage with the subject of female homosexuality; Freud's efforts to trace and to codify the "preoedipalization" of the homosexual subject is largely responsible for establishing the perimeters of a sexology which is founded upon questions of space, time, duration, gravity, and motion, and which continues to set the terms of the psychoanalytic debates on sexuality today.

In the history of psychoanalysis, female homosexuality is theorized almost exclusively in terms of the "pre": the preoedipal, the presymbolic, the prelaw, the premature, even the presexual. The critical presupposition that female homosexuality occupies the space and time of an origin—that it is widely assumed to be, in a word, pretheoretical—could account for its long-term neglect in revisionist theoretical work ordinarily devoted to challenging normative definitions of sexual desire.

Part of the general critical disregard for homosexuality in contemporary theories of sexual difference may well be occasioned by a judicious devaluation of false foundationalisms and a healthy suspicion of theories of primacy—those very theories of primacy within which homosexuality has historically been understood. However, such anti-foundationalisms, while crucially challenging the dangerous ideology of natural origins, need also both to investigate how a concept like “preoedipality” is itself constituted as an effect of a cultural symbolics and, more particularly, to ask how homosexuality comes to be so routinely assigned to the regressive, conservative space of this fictive origin. How and why do psychoanalytic theories of female homosexuality position their subjects *as* foundational, as primeval, as primitive, and indeed as pre-subjects, presubjects before the normative, heterosexualizing operations of the Oedipus complex, that “legal, legalising coordinate”?²² This study will attempt to confront the limits and the dangers of preoedipality as an explanatory model for female homosexuality, focusing specifically upon the crucial role identification and desire play in Freud’s theorization of sexual identity formation.

Liminal Foundations

Let me begin by posing the following historical and institutional question: where is female homosexuality to be found in psychoanalysis? The answer is in psychoanalysis’s very foundations. Of the six case studies Freud completed, both the first case study, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905), and the last, “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman” (1920), are studies of inversion in women, studies of deviations with respect to a woman’s object choice. Jacques Lacan’s dissertation on paranoid psychosis, his 1932 thesis in medicine, betrays a similar fascination with female paranoiacs whose lack of distance from other women and from themselves (attributed by Lacan to their presymbolic, prelinguistic, preseparation relation to the Mother) constitutes the very source of their paranoia. So deep is Lacan’s early preoccupation with the question of homosexuality in women that one would have to amend Catherine Clément’s general observation, “In the beginning Lacan was interested only in women,”³ to the more precise formulation, “In the beginning Lacan was interested only in *homosexual* women.” More recently, Julia Kristeva’s work on sexual difference is noteworthy for its relative disinterest, not to say dismissal, of female homosexuality, work which addresses the question of homosexuality in women only in occasional postscriptural asides. But it is in her earliest

books where female homosexuality emerges as “foundational” and as preparatory to her later depreciation of it—especially in *About Chinese Women* (1974), where the first third of the book defers the question of the Orient to elaborate instead a theory of orientation.⁴

From Sigmund Freud to Julia Kristeva, preoedipality defines the fundamental psychological organization of the homosexual subject who never, it seems, fully accedes to the position of subject but who remains in the ambiguous space of the precultural. Beginning with Freud’s study of the “sexual aberrations” upon which he bases his entire theory of sexuality, moving through Lacan’s thorough subsumption of female homosexuality into a preoedipalized paranoid psychosis, and reaching toward Kristeva’s theory of female homosexuality as not a fulfillment of the revolutionary potential of the semiotic but a refusal of it, what we see in psychoanalysis’s positioning and repositioning of homosexuality is a critical fall back to the earliest stages of the subject’s formation. The progressive movement in psychoanalysis is backward, deep into the subject’s prehistory. The most recent work on the question of subjectivity has pushed back the point of sexual identity formation to a time before the preoedipal; the trajectory from Freud to Lacan to Kristeva advances a fast-fall from oedipal to preoedipal to semiotic (or what one might call the pre-preoedipal). The very history of the institution of psychoanalysis enacts a critical temporal inversion: the preoedipal is theorized after the oedipal, suggesting that any “pre” is a construct of the “post.”⁵ Ironically, psychoanalysis itself performs the very regressive movement which Freud, and Lacan in his famous “return to Freud,” describe as constitutive of what might be called homosexuality’s “devolutionary” process—that is, a temporal fall back, a return to a time before the beginning of time, before culture, before oedipality, and before history. Inverted in its progression, psychoanalysis uncannily follows a developmental path strikingly similar to the etiology of homosexuality first set out by Freud.

What this essay does not address is the question of female homosexuality’s “etiology” (the “cause” or “origin” of inversion)—a question that can only assume in advance what it purports to demonstrate. Rather it seeks to understand how female homosexuality is not only structurally situated in the inaugural moments of psychoanalysis but theoretically located at the site of an origin, the origin of *any* female sexual identity. These latter questions will tell us far more about what Patricia Williams has recently termed “inessentially speaking”⁶ than what even Freud recognizes as the pointless resuscitation of debates over etiology (i.e., is homosexuality innate or acquired?).⁷ Inessentiality is a particularly useful figure for describing homosexuality’s foundational yet liminal

position in psychoanalytic accounts of identity formation. The preposition “in” in “inessential,” which here doubles as a prefix, connotes at once a relation of exteriority or nonessentiality (in the sense of incidental, superfluous, peripheral, unimportant, immaterial, lesser, minor, secondary . . .) and a relation of interiority, of being inside essentiality (in the sense of indispensable, central, important, fundamental, necessary, inherent, vital, primary . . .). Homosexuality is “inessential” in this double sense, positioned within psychoanalysis as an essential waste ingredient: the child’s homosexual desire for the parent of the same sex, essential to the subject’s formation as sexed, is nonetheless simultaneously figured as nonessential, a dispensable component of desire that ultimately must be repudiated and repressed. Could repeated emphasis on the essential inessentiality of homosexuality, its status as repressed excess, reflect a secondary reaction-formation against psychoanalysis’s own attraction to an economy of the same, its desire for the homo, and indeed its narcissistic fascination with its own origins?

Homosexuality, Law, and Excess

I want to turn now to Freud’s “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman”⁸ to begin to work through this question of the essential inessentiality of homosexuality in women. We are faced immediately with a certain ambiguity in the title, where “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman” can be glossed as either the psychogenesis of an *instance* of homosexuality in a woman or the psychogenesis of Freud’s own *study* of homosexuality in a woman. In the first case, Freud characteristically bases an entire theory of female sexual inversion on a single case history: that of an eighteen-year-old girl, “beautiful and clever,” from a family of “good standing,” who has become infatuated with a woman ten years her senior, a “lady” of “fallen” circumstances known for her “promiscuous” behavior. In the second case, Freud traces, also in characteristic fashion, the genesis of his own work, reminding us that psychoanalysis has always been fascinated with beginnings, especially its own, and preoccupied with its relation to the law, indeed its status *as* law. The case begins: “Homosexuality in women, which is certainly not less common than in men, although much less glaring, has not only been ignored by the law, but has also been neglected by psychoanalytic research” (147). In their specific relation to the question of homosexuality in women, psychoanalysis and the law are analogously related: neither is able to see what is immediately before it. Homosexuality constitutes not an absence,

strictly speaking, but an over-presence, an excess, a surplus, or an overabundance; homosexuality may be “less glaring” in women than in men, but it is still “glaring” (*lärmend*). Freud’s choice of the word *lärmend* (riotous, noisy, unruly) to describe homosexuality insinuates that the blindness issues from homosexuality itself, its very excess an assault upon the senses, a blinding and deafening spectacle. The law has “ignored” homosexuality in women and psychoanalysis has “neglected” it not because homosexuality is invisible but because, apparently, it is too visible, too audible, too present. The precise characterization of homosexuality as “glaring” permits Freud to deflect psychoanalysis’s concentrated “work of elucidation” (171) away from its own powers of definition and concealment, for it is the law of psychoanalysis to establish the frame of reference, the conditions of visibility and audibility, by which sexual identities can be seen and heard in the first place and, in the case of homosexuality, *as* first places, as sites of origin.

Freud continues: “The narration of a single case, not too pronounced in type, in which it was possible to trace its origin and development in the mind with complete certainty and almost without a gap may, therefore, have a certain claim to attention” (147). Although elsewhere, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud theorizes three different kinds of inverts—absolute (inverts whose “sexual objects are exclusively of their own sex”), amphigenic (“psychosexual hermaphrodites” whose “sexual objects may equally well be of their own or of the opposite sex”), and contingent (inverts who “under certain external conditions . . . are capable of taking as their object someone of their own sex”),⁹ he prefers to psychoanalyze in his practice only the latter kind, contingent inverts, cases “not too pronounced in type,” where libidinal change is possible and a turn away from the same-sex love object can be effected by the analysis. It is crucial to point out here that there is at least an implied distinction in Freud’s work between “homosexual women” and “homosexuality in women.” At the end of this particular case study Freud concludes that “a very considerable measure of latent or unconscious homosexuality can be detected in all normal people” (171), that “latent” homosexuality is, in fact, a central precondition of all “manifest” heterosexuality. But whereas homosexuality can be found in all women, not all women are homosexual. For Freud there must be some “special factor” (168), some libidinal remainder or surplus, which converts the contingent homosexuality in women into homosexual women.

Here we need to turn to the case history itself to understand the dynamics of this object conversion. Freud’s patient is an adolescent girl, the only daughter in a family with three sons, brought to Freud by a strict and puritanical father in the hopes that analysis might “cure” his

daughter of an infatuation with a lady of questionable social standing and loose sexual mores. In the course of the analysis Freud uncovers the girl's "exaggeratedly strong affection" in early puberty for a small boy, not quite three years old, an affection which gradually evolved into an interest in "mature, but still youthful women" (156) who are themselves mothers. The motivation for this curious shift in the girl from a "maternal attitude" (156) (wanting to *be* a mother) to a homosexual one (wanting to *have* a mother) Freud attributes to the unexpected pregnancy of the girl's own mother and the birth of her third brother. The girl is, in short, in love with her own mother and redirects this tabooed desire toward a series of mother-substitutes. Freud immediately disavows, however, this homosexual daughter-mother incest by reading it as a displacement of a preceding heterosexual daughter-father incest. The "origin" of the girl's (preoedipal) mother-love is a prior (oedipal) father-love; she turns away from her father and toward her mother out of disappointment and resentment that it is her "hated rival," her mother, and not herself who can give the father what it is assumed he most desires, a son. The daughter, in Freud's account, to diffuse the identificatory rivalry with her mother, falls back, "retires in favor of" her mother and renounces men, in effect removing the obstacle hitherto responsible for her mother's hatred by taking her mother instead of her father as love object (159). The daughter's desire for the mother is read by Freud as a ruse or a screen to protect the girl against her frustrated oedipal desire for the father. But why is it presumed from the outset that desire for the mother is a displaced articulation of unfulfilled desire for the father, and not the other way around? Why is the daughter's "disappointment" imagined to be provoked by her inability to have the father's baby and not her failure to give her mother one (a possibility Freud later allows for in "Femininity")? Why is the daughter's resentment and bitterness surmised to be directed toward the mother as competitor for the father's affections and not toward the father as interloper into the mother-daughter relation? Why, in short, is the daughter's "rivalry" assumed to be with the mother and not with the father?

Falling

Freud deploys a complicated rhetoric of "turns" in his work to explain these ambiguous shifts in sexual object choice, theorizing sexual identities and the sexual identifications which produce them in terms of returns, revivals, regressions, retirements, renunciations, and restora-

tions. In the present case history, the analysand's turn toward a same-sex love object is triggered in adolescence by a change in the family configuration (the mother's pregnancy and the birth of a new brother) and a coinciding "revival" of the girl's infantile Oedipus complex. For Freud a revival is a peculiar kind of return: every revival of the girl's unresolved Oedipus complex is a regression—a fall back into a preoedipal identification with the father and desire for the mother. In "Femininity," Freud explains the turn back towards the mother as a response to an "inevitable disappointment" from the father:

. . . female homosexuality is seldom or never a direct continuation of infantile masculinity. Even for a girl of this kind it seems necessary that she should take her father as an object for some time and enter the Oedipus situation. But afterwards, as a result of her inevitable disappointments from her father, she is driven to regress into her early masculinity complex.¹⁰

Freud was not, of course, the only psychoanalyst to understand female homosexuality as a backward motion, although his theory of regression remains one of the most elaborately developed. Hélène Deutsch, for example, also reads the female homosexual's apparent preoedipal attachment to the mother as a postoedipal regression—"not a question of a simple fixation on the mother as the first love object, but rather a complicated process of returning." And Otto Fenichel puts the case even more bluntly:

In women, the turning away from heterosexuality is a regression that revives memory traces of the early relations to the mother. Female homosexuality therefore has a more archaic imprint than male homosexuality. It brings back the behavior patterns, aims, pleasures, but also the fears and conflicts of the earliest years of life.¹¹

For the homosexual pre-subject, every "pre" contains the spectre of a "re": female homosexuality is posited as regressive and reactive, primitive and primal, undeveloped and archaic. Moreover, any gesture of "retirement" signals a form of renunciation, a refusal to compete and a retreat from conflict; inability to sustain psychical conflict and desire to ward off "open rivalry" (195) actuate the girl's return to the preoedipal. Turning back in this reading is always read as a turning away, a retrenchment rather than an advance, a retreat *from* the father rather than a move *toward* the mother.

But there is a second and equally important sense of "turning" in Freud's work on homosexuality, namely psychoanalysis's own attempts to effect a conversion in the homosexual patient, a turning of one genital organization into another through the actual work of analysis. In his discussion of the proper conditions for a successful analysis, Freud

admits that such conversions of sexual identifications in the subject are futile; the most psychoanalysis can do, he writes, is to “restore” the invert to his or her “full bisexual functions” (151). The earlier the inversion takes hold, the less likely a conversion can be effected: “It is only where the homosexual fixation has not yet become strong enough, or where there are considerable rudiments and vestiges of a heterosexual choice of object, i.e. in a still oscillating or in a definitely bisexual organization, that one may make a more favorable prognosis for psycho-analytic therapy” (151). Just as homosexuality is figured as a return, a fall back, so is its apparent psychoanalytic resolution, but whereas the one is posited as a regression, a retiring in favor of a rival, the other is presented as a restoration, a process of recuperation and reconsolidation. One can legitimately ask here why the return to a homosexual object choice is seen as “regressive” when the return proffered as the means to “cure” homosexuality is seen as “restorative.”¹² What marks the difference between these two types of returns? And how, exactly, is a turn from one sexual object to another produced in the subject?

A third sense of “turning” in psychoanalysis speaks to these questions: the turn as fall. For Freud, a woman’s return to desire for the mother enacts a fall—not a prelapsarian fall which was, after all, a fall into heterosexuality, but a postlapsarian fall into homosexuality. The female subject passes through the Symbolic, through the process of oedipalization, but because of a series of “inevitable disappointments from her father” lapses back into the preoedipal. It is hardly insignificant to Freud that the event that immediately precedes the beginning of the analysis, and indeed the crisis that occasions it, is the girl’s attempted suicide. Strolling on the street one day in the company of the lady, the girl encounters her father, who passes the couple by with “an angry glance” (148) [*zornigen Blick*]; incurring the sudden wrath of both father and beloved, the infatuated girl throws herself over a wall and falls onto a suburban railway track. Freud reads the suicide attempt as the fulfillment of the girl’s unconscious wish—“the attainment of the very wish which, when frustrated, had driven her into homosexuality—namely, the wish to have a child by her father, for now she ‘fell’ through her father’s fault” (162). Freud here plays on the double signification of the German word for “fall,” *niederkommen*, which means both “to fall” and “to be delivered of a child” (162). The girl’s fall back into a homosexual desire for the mother actually constitutes a particular kind of maternity in Freud’s reading—a fall equivalent to a deliverance.

Cathy Caruth has suggested that “the history of philosophy after Newton could be thought of as a series of confrontations with the question of how to talk about falling,”¹³ a proposition which takes on

considerable force in light of Freud's own compulsive returns to the problem of the subject's "fall" into sexual difference. Scenes of falling in Freud's work frame sexuality as an injurious event. While working on "A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," Freud added a passage to *The Interpretation of Dreams* which recounts one of his earliest childhood memories of an accident which befell him between the ages of two and three years old:

I had climbed up on to a stool in the store-closet to get something nice that was lying on a cupboard or table. The stool had tipped over and its corner had struck me behind my lower jaw; I might easily, I reflected, have knocked out all my teeth.¹⁴

A lesson of the retribution inflicted upon young boys attempting to reach covertly into their mothers' cupboards, this remembrance of an early fall functions as a parable for the symbolic threat of permanent injury which precipitates Freud's own painful and sudden entry into oedipality. For the already castrated woman, however, falling symbolically registers another kind of injury. In "Dreams and Telepathy" (1922), published shortly after "A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," Freud recounts a woman patient's recurrent nightmare of falling out of bed, where falling is taken to represent specifically a "fresh representation of childbirth"¹⁵—for Freud, the very mark of female heterosexual desire. "If a woman dreams of falling," he explains in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, "it almost invariably has a sexual sense: she is imagining herself as a 'fallen woman'" (202). Or elsewhere, unable to resist summoning an old misogynistic proverb, Freud concludes that "when a girl falls she falls on her back."¹⁶ And in the case history presently under discussion, "A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," Freud notes with more than a physician's anecdotal detail that his homosexual patient "paid for this undoubtedly serious attempt at suicide with a considerable time on her back in bed" (148). Fear of falling for a woman apparently represents in this thinking both a fear of heterosexuality and a dread of one of its potential consequences, pregnancy, and yet it is precisely the motion of falling which Freud takes as constitutive of female homosexuality. The theoretical problem that insistently poses itself to any reader trying to make sense of Freud's often incoherent writings on female homosexuality is the question of what a woman's *homosexual* identity formation has to do with *maternity*, with "fresh representations of childbirth."

It cannot be a matter of indifference to feminist readers of Freud that "A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" begins with the word "homosexuality" and concludes with the word "motherhood"—perhaps the

most obvious staging of Freud's inability to think homosexuality outside the thematics of maternity. But how do we read the relation between these two poles of sexual identity formation: between homosexuality and motherhood, or between, in Freud's questionable theoretical alignment, same-sex desire and same-sex identification? Freud could be suggesting a symmetrical relation between the two, an irresolvable psychical tension in the young girl's life between wanting to *be* a mother and wanting to *have* her. Or he could be following a more conventional Victorian logic which posits motherhood as a possible antidote to homosexuality, the "answer" to the question which female homosexuality poses for the psychoanalysis which sees itself as a science of restoration. Still another possibility to explain the homosexuality-motherhood alliance in this particular case study could be Freud's attempt to formulate an evolutionary sexual continuum with homosexuality as the originary "before" and motherhood as the developmental "after." Then again, Freud could also be suggesting that homosexuality represents a regressive return *to* the mother—a desire to have the mother by figuratively becoming the mother—a return achieved through a literal fall enacting a symbolic delivery. Details of the case history rule out none of these possibilities; in fact, the analyst's contradictory twists and turns in logic appear to mimic the unfolding drama of the analyst's own infinitely reversible and reactive identifications. The more difficult question for interpreters of Freud is determining precisely how the agencies of identification and desire are invoked to fashion this particular structural relation of dependency between homosexuality and motherhood, and why the first term (homosexuality) must always be read in relation to, and must eventually give way to, the second term (motherhood).

Identification and Desire

The return as fall, as deliverance, marks female homosexuality as not simply the subject's return *to* the mother but the subject's turn *as* mother. But this reading of the homosexual turn suggests that the daughter must *become* the mother in order to *have* her. It undermines one of the fundamental laws of psychoanalysis, preserved from Freud through Kristeva, which holds that desire and identification are structurally independent of one another, the possibility of one always presupposing the repression of the other. A subject's desire for one sex can only be secured through a corresponding identification with the other sex; a simultaneous desire for and identification with the same object

would be a logical impossibility for Freud.¹⁷ A year after publication of his “Homosexuality in a Woman” case study, Freud completed *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), where he first begins to systematize the complicated dialectical relation between identification and object-choice in the formation of the sexed subject:

It is easy to state in a formula the distinction between an identification with the father and the choice of the father as an object. In the first case one’s father is what one would like to *be*, and in the second he is what one would like to *have*. The distinction, that is, depends upon whether the tie attaches to the subject or to the object of the ego. The former kind of tie is therefore already possible before any sexual object-choice has been made.¹⁸

To identify with the father is to wish to be him, whereas to desire the father is to wish to have him. The very notion of identification appears to be gendered for Freud, modeled on a masculine oedipality even when Freud is most concerned with theorizing the child’s preoedipal (presexual) identification with the mother. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s shrewd observation that Freud “cannot help ‘identifying’ the figure of identification with the father figure”¹⁹ further strengthens the suspicion that it is a postoeidipal “secondary” identification that instantiates and organizes the preoedipal “primary” identification in the first place. A woman’s desire for a woman, Freud maintains throughout his work, can only be thought in terms of the subject’s fall back into a preoedipal identification with the father. But even Freud comes eventually to recognize, in *The New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1932–33), that the structural “independence” of identification and object-choice is never so neatly symmetrical as this “formula” would suggest, and is only ever precariously achieved. It is desire, for Freud, which continually risks turning (back) into identification:

Identification and object-choice are to a large extent independent of each other; it is however possible to identify oneself with someone whom, for instance, one has taken as a sexual object, and to alter one’s ego on his model.²⁰

This turn from object-choice to identification is no simple turn; it operates, in fact, as a *return* and more properly a *regression*; “object choice has regressed to identification,” Freud writes on thinking back to his first case study of homosexuality in a woman, the Dora case.²¹

But Freud still needs to account for what motivates these turns in sexual object choice, for what provokes the fall of desire into sexual identification. The answer to the problem of the turn in the “Homosexuality in a Woman” case study comes, as so many answers do in Freud, in a footnote:

It is by no means rare for a love-relation to be broken off through a process of identification on the part of the lover with the loved object, a process equivalent to a kind of regression to narcissism. After this has been accomplished, it is easy in making a fresh choice of object to direct the libido to a member of the sex opposite to that of the earlier choice (158).²²

Freud attributes the turn to an excess of desire, a surplus of love, or some other “overcompensation” (158). Why do some subjects have this “overness,” this essential inessential psychical component, and not others? Freud is unable to answer the question he himself implicitly poses, but what is perhaps even more significant is that in the very attempt to prove that identification and desire are counter-directional turns, Freud in fact demonstrates their necessary collusion and collapsability, the ever-present potential for the one to metamorphose into, or turn back onto, the other. The instability of sexual identity lies in the capacity of its psychical mechanisms *to desire and to identify with each other*.

Identification in Freud’s work is typically figured in terms of height: identification works as a displacement *upward*; the ego elevates itself through identification, imagines itself always in relation to a higher ideal.²³ Situated at the very bottom of Freud’s developmental scale, homosexuals are caught in the Sisyphean labor of pulling themselves up towards the ego-ideal only to be repeatedly disappointed by the object once attained. Sexuality in this scene of falling is neither given nor achieved but *lost*. Desire continually collapses back into identification under the weight of the subject’s “disappointment,” a disappointment prompted by the inadequacy of the object to fill the measure of its desire. This fall appears to be no different from the deflation any subject experiences when the fantasized object of desire is finally encountered. Slavoj Žižek rightly points out that the found object never coincides with the referent of desire; when faced with the object of desire, the desiring subject inevitably experiences a feeling of “this is not it.”²⁴ What makes this homosexual fall, this fall into homosexuality, more precipitous is the fact that the subject’s aspirations are more ambitious. This particular subject has overstepped its bounds and desired too much. Those who progress farthest in oedipalization apparently tumble hardest, with enough momentum and force to reenter the preoedipal stage, leaving desire, lack, and even injury behind. But what kind of fall, in this pseudo-scientific gravitational model, produces a homosexual subject? “We do not . . . mean to maintain,” Freud insists, “that every girl who experiences a disappointment such as this of the longing for love that springs from the Oedipus attitude at puberty will necessarily on that account *fall a victim to homosexuality*” (168, emphasis added). Do some subjects carry within them a kind of Icarus complex,²⁵

an inherent proclivity for falling? Or are certain unpredictable Newtonian forces at work to pull any subject at any moment back into the center of gravity Freud calls primary identification? If falling is the tropological model Freud selects to describe homosexual identity formations, then what can be said exactly to precipitate the fall?

Freud's excesses make their reentry at this point, for falling is conceptualized as a response to a heavy burden: one falls under an excessive weight, the weight of desire—a desire which can only ultimately function in such a symbolics as synonymous with heterosexuality. For Freud, homosexual desire is oxymoronic; like women, homosexuals (male and female) lack lack,²⁶ or lack a certain mature relation to lack. By temporally positing homosexuality as antecedent to the lack that inaugurates desire, Freud in effect drops the sexuality out of homosexuality. It is not lack which defines a homo(sexual) subject but excess, the lack of lack: the surplus that precedes and delimits need, the unintelligible remainder that circumscribes the boundaries of the rational, the overness which must always come first to mark off the deviant from the normal. The excess associated with homosexuality, in Freud's inversive logic (his logic of inversion), holds the position of a "left-over" which comes "right-before," with homosexuality assigned to the place of the firstness of any supplement.

In its popular incarnations, the surfeit that marks off homosexuality from its normative Other, heterosexuality, is "gleaned" from the surface of the body: homosexuals are said to distinguish themselves by their extravagant dress, their exaggerated mannerisms, their hysterical intonations, their insatiable oral sex drives, and their absurd imitations of "feminine" and "masculine" behavior.²⁷ What we have in Freud's grammar of excess is a critical displacement of excess from the exterior to the interior; no longer a catalogue of enculturating signs such as clothes, language, or style, excess shifts from surface index to subterranean force. Freud writes that his own patient betrayed none of the outward signs a Viennese medical profession expected to find in a homosexual woman, showing "no obvious deviation from the physical type, nor any menstrual disturbance" (154). It is true, Freud confesses, that the "beautiful and well-made girl" had her father's tall figure and sharp facial features, as well as his intellectual acuity, but "these distinctions are conventional rather than scientific," he concludes (154). Moreover, unlike her famous predecessor Dora, Freud's latest homosexual patient "had never been neurotic, and came to the analysis without even one hysterical symptom" (155). In every superficial respect, his new patient strikes Freud as completely unexceptional. Yet it is the very absence of conventional hysterical symptoms (coughing, aphasia, weeping,

spasms, tics . . .) or other external signs of neurosis which draw Freud ultimately to the conclusion that this woman's very normality is most irregular, her lack of "even one hysterical symptom" an indicator of the most abnormal or peculiar of states for a woman. This particular woman is excessively normal, her deviancy secured through an apparent psychological refusal of abnormality. Mimicry is transposed from the surface of the body to its psychical infrastructure as excess comes to designate something more than a style or a performance; excess for Freud marks a certain internal relation that defines the very structure of an emotional identification.

Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, following Freud, explains the desire-identification dynamics this way: identification always *anticipates* desire—identification, rather than an object, "governs" (32), "orients" (34), "induces," and "predicts" desire (47). Identification, in effect, comes first, and the subject "dates" itself from this mimetic turn:

Desire (the desiring subject) does not come first, to be *followed* by an identification that would allow the desire to be fulfilled. What comes first is a tendency toward identification, a primordial tendency which then gives rise to a desire; and this desire is, from the outset, a (mimetic, rivalrous) desire to oust the incommensurable other from the place the pseudo-subject already occupies in fantasy. . . . Identification brings the desiring subject into being, and not the other way around.²⁸

This approach de-essentializes sexuality in a particularly useful way, for to show that desires are never originary is also to imply that there are no "natural" or "normal" libidinal impulses which may later get rerouted or "perverted" through an identification gone astray. However, what remains completely ungrounded in this explanation of desire and identification is the problematical notion of *identification* as a "primordial tendency." Freud leans heavily on a scientific model of entropy which posits the motor force of psychological change and sexual development as a drive toward sameness, a tendency towards mimesis: homophilic identification. While crucially naming the indispensability of homophilic identification to the production of sexual identity, Freud nonetheless sees mimeticism as a continual threat to the stability and the coherency of that identity. For Freud, I would suggest, the real danger posed by the desire/identification co-dependency is not the potential for an excess of desire to collapse back into an identification, but the possibility for new forms of identification to generate ever-proliferating and socially unmanageable forms of desire.

"A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" attributes the girl's sexual interest in young mothers to the eventual, perhaps even inevitable, collapse of her "strong desire to be a mother herself" (156), a change

in object choice brought about by the girl's oedipal disappointment at her failure to have her father's child—a failure made all the more visible by her own mother's mid-life pregnancy. The first objects of the girl's sexual desire after the birth of her youngest brother, Freud tells us, are therefore “really mothers, women between thirty and thirty-five whom she had met with their children,” and even though the girl eventually gives up actual motherhood as the “*sine qua non* in her love object,” analysis proves to Freud “beyond all shadow of doubt that the lady-love was a substitute for—her mother” (156). While Freud directs his theoretical remarks, and the reader's attention, to the problem of an excess of desire reverting (back) into an identification, the example proffered by the details of the case history itself demonstrates exactly the opposite phenomenon: the possibility for an overly-zealous identification (“the strong desire to be a mother”) to give way to an equally powerful desire (“motherhood as a *sine qua non* in her love-object”). Apparently Freud's patient assumes her role too well, her excessive desire to be a mother the very trigger for her sudden desire to sleep with one. Yet the lurking danger posed by a too successful oedipalization signals exactly the paradox Freud refuses to see in his own reading, for to recognize this possibility would involve also, at the very least, entertaining the idea of heterosexuality as an inessential supplement and originary excess, or, in an even more radical (and, for Freud, untenable) formulation, allowing for the possibility that it is “absolute” or “exclusive” heterosexuality which may be intolerable to the ego.²⁹ Moreover, Freud's tactical misreading of the actual workings of identification and desire in this particular case history permits him to deflect attention away from the enculturating and normative work of psychoanalysis: the attempt to effect “curative restorations” by carefully monitoring and limiting the range of a subject's identifications. The job of psychoanalysis, after all, is typically to reorient a culturally tabooed desire by first redirecting the identification that produced it—a task usually accomplished through the therapeutic use of transference.

Fallen Women

Freud's insistence upon the homosexual woman's “fall” into primary identification (preoedipal absorption with the mother) works effectively to exclude the woman who desires another woman from the very category of “sexuality,” and it does so by ensuring that any measure of sexual maturity will be designated as heterosexual object choice “achieved” through the act of secondary identification (oedipal incor-

poration of a parental ideal). Freud sustains the notion of female homosexuality's presexual status by assuming, first, that same-sex desire is principally and finally an act of primary identification and, second, that primary identification is completely uninflected by the cultural markers associated with secondary identification. When the girl leaves the Oedipus complex, which marked her original entry into history and culture, and falls into the shadowy nether world of primary identification, she drops out of sexual difference as well. But "primary" identification is itself a social process, already presupposing in the subject prior knowledge of the culturally weighted distinction between maternal and paternal roles, and assuming in advance at least an "intuition" of sexual difference.³⁰ Preoedipality is firmly entrenched in the social order and cannot be read as before, outside, or even after the Symbolic; the mother-daughter relation, no less than the father-daughter relation, is a Symbolic association completely inscribed in the field of representation, sociality, and culture. Freud explains his patient's homoerotic attachment to older women of child-bearing age as a rehearsal of the girl's early "mother-complex," a preoedipal, presexual state of nondifferentiation with the mother, while at the same time making this homosexual object choice entirely dependent upon a (preceding) paternal identification. This contradictory insistence upon homosexuality's post-oedipal return to a precultural fixation flatly contradicts the case history's repeated disclosures of the importance, in the formation of the girl's sexual identity, of specifically social ties between the girl, her family members, and the extra-familial objects of her affections. Whom exactly the girl identifies *with* in her homosexual attachment to the lady is never entirely clear. While Freud ostensibly concludes that a masculine, paternal identification permits the girl's homosexual object choice ("she changed into a man and took her mother in place of her father as the object of her love," [158]), his patient's suicidal plunge, which temporarily replaces the father's punitive anger with parental solicitude, suggests a feminine, maternal identification in which the girl continues to compete with her mother as rival for her father's love and attention (the mother "had herself suffered for some years from neurotic troubles and enjoyed a great deal of consideration from her husband," [149]). Equally indeterminate is the gendered identity of the love object, insofar as the lady corresponds as much to the girl's masculine as to her feminine ideal: "her lady's slender figure, severe beauty, and downright manner reminded her of the brother who was a little older than herself" (156).³¹ With what in the other does the subject identify if not a particular familial or social ideal? Put slightly differently, what does the subject

desire in the other if not a cultural reflection of what she herself aspires to be?

The scale of identification, in which the desiring subject rises and falls according to the strength of the pull and resistance of its elusive object, carries along with it a strong class connotation for Freud's patient. The girl, a member of the rising middle class, finds herself irresistibly attracted to "fallen women." Her current object of desire, a "demi-mondaine" (153) who has lost her reputation and fallen into "ignoble circumstances," inspires in the enamored young girl fantasies of chivalric rescue. The case history provides a strong suggestion that the "lady" is, in fact, a "lady-of-the-evening," a woman who maintains some semblance of her former class status by earning a living as a high-class prostitute: "she lived simply by giving her bodily favours." But even before her devotion to the lady, the girl's "first passions had been for women who were not celebrated for specially strict propriety" (161). These early infatuations include "a film actress at a summer resort" (who first incites the ire of the girl's father, [161]) and "a strict and unapproachable mistress" (who, Freud adds, is "obviously a substitute mother," [168]). For the girl, "bad reputation" in the love object is "positively a 'necessary condition for love'" (161). All three of these mother-substitutes—the prostitute, the actress, and the teacher—occupy a class below the girl, but they also represent collectively a class of women who earn their living independently, outside of marriage and the heterosexual contract. Could it be that the force of the attraction exerted on the girl by these figures of desire is, in part, the lure of the economic independence and social mobility which they represent? The real provocation of the girl's impassioned devotion to these working ladies may issue not simply from the sex of her love objects but from their "low" social standing as well. To a class-conscious Viennese society, the greatest threat posed by the girl's "homosexual enthusiasms" (168) is the ever-present possibility of what Freud diagnoses elsewhere as "the dangers of sexual relations with people of an inferior social class."³²

This figuration of identification as a problem of height and scale, a matter of the ego's striving to reach up to an elevated object, further recalls the image of the young Freud reaching for the unattainable goods in his mother's cupboard. That one of Freud's earliest memories should summon up a fall during the preoedipal stage, a fall which inflicted a wound whose scar he bears with him into adulthood, may suggest Freud's unconscious fear that he has already been castrated and placed on a homosexual continuum along with the mother. Indeed, what Freud

seems most anxious to disavow in his analysis of the young girl is his own identification with the feminine. Freud more or less admits directly to an identification with his patient's stern but loving father, "an earnest, worthy man, at bottom very tender-hearted" (149), and he seems convinced that his patient, as he tellingly puts it, "intended to deceive me just as she habitually deceived her father" (165). But this masculine identification masks a deeper, more disturbing feminine identification with the mother who "enjoyed her daughter's confidence concerning her passion" (149). The transferential role Freud frequently found himself playing in his therapeutic sessions was not exclusively nor even principally the familiar role of paternal prohibitor but more often the less comfortable role of maternal educator: substitute mother figure imparting sexual knowledge to adolescent girls. In fact, as a male doctor speaking candidly on sexual subjects to girls in his professional care, regularly opening himself to charges of social impropriety and sexual prurience, Freud could not entirely escape (despite his best attempts to seek refuge behind the mantle of scientific knowledge) the "taint" of a feminine identification with the mother whose proper role is to educate her daughter on matters of sexual and social conduct. This is not the first time Freud has disavowed a strong feminine identification. In addition to Freud's much-discussed identification with Dora's hysteria, Jim Swan has uncovered Freud's unconscious identification with a pregnant woman in the dream of Irma's injection and an equally strong identification with his childhood nurse in the dream of "a little sheep's head." Freud himself was unable to make these connections, even though, as Swan points out, the idea of the therapist as a nurse to his patients is not in the least an uncommon theme in psychoanalytic literature.³³

Fighting continually against the "low estimation" (149) in which psychoanalysis is held in Vienna, Freud perhaps more closely resembles the lady than any other stock figure in this extended family romance. Freud's own marginal social standing and his life-long economic anxieties, in addition to his frank discussion of sexuality, all situate him structurally in the position of the lady, the fallen woman. But unlike the lady, Freud is unable to achieve any stature or prominence in his patient's eyes:

Once when I expounded to her a specially important part of the theory, one touching her nearly, she replied in an inimitable tone, "How very interesting," as though she were a *grande dame* being taken over a museum and glancing through her lorgnon at objects to which she was completely indifferent. (163)

This overly-clever comparison of his patient to a *grande dame* glancing through her lorgnon betrays Freud's sensitivity to the girl's cutting pretenses to class superiority. When, in a psychodrama like this one, the look carries such potent and castrating powers, not even Freud is immune to the discomfiture provoked by his patient's class condescension—an irritation which ultimately leads Freud to terminate the girl's treatment and to counsel his patient to see a woman doctor instead (164). "Retiring in favor of someone else" (159),³⁴ Freud beats a fast retreat, acting out the very rhetorical move which he identifies in this case history as one of the "causes" of homosexuality (159). Fixed by his patient's arrogant glance, much like the girl is herself arrested on the street by her father's disapproving look, Freud "falls" through his patient's fault. In a case history where reversible and elastic identifications keep the family neurosis in motion, Freud interestingly gets to play all the principal parts: father, mother, beloved, *and* girl.

Conclusion

The subject, governed by a drive to consume and to possess the object of its desire, must resist the call of primary identification (homophilia) if it is to succeed in its climb toward maturity, defined as object-relatedness (heterophilia). Primary identification—something of a redundancy in Freud—operates as the gravitational pull that perpetually threatens to capsize the subject under the excessive weight of its own regressive desires. In short, identification both precedes desire and strives to exceed it, propelled by its insatiable oral drive to swallow desire whole. In Freud's reading of identification and desire, homosexual desire is not even, properly speaking, desire. Rather homosexuality represents an instance of identification gone awry—identification in overdrive (or, one might say, oral drive). This overdrive is also implicitly a death drive: *cadere* (Latin for "to fall") etymologically conjures cadavers. For Freud every fall into homosexuality is *inherently suicidal* since the "retreat" from oedipality entails not only the loss of desire but the loss of a fundamental relation to the world into which desire permits entry—the world of sociality, sexuality, and subjectivity.

While desire is the province and the privilege of heterosexuals, homosexuals are portrayed as hysterical identifiers and expert mimics.³⁵ By strategically aligning "homo" with identification and "hetero" with desire, Freud, in spectacularly circular fashion, resubmits homosexuality to its own alleged entropic "tendencies," so that "homo" subsumes

“sexuality” and identification incorporates desire. What Freud gives us in the end is a Newtonian explanation of sexual orientation in which falling bodies are homosexual bodies, weighted down by the heaviness of multiple identifications, and rising bodies are heterosexual bodies, buoyed up by the weightlessness of desires unmoored from their (lost) objects. This essay has attempted to demonstrate that such a mechanistic explanatory model is itself overburdened and constrained by the heaviness of its terms, terms which increasingly come to exceed the bounds and conditions of their founding logic. Precisely because desire and identification cannot be securely separated or easily prevented from turning back on one another, Freud’s persistent attempt to read sexual orientation according to the laws of gravity and motion ultimately falls apart, splintering under the pressure of its own rhetorical weight.

Notes

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- 1 Sigmund Freud, “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,” in vol. 18 of James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–1974), 145–72, hereafter abbreviated as *SE*. The original text, “Über die Psychogenese eines Falles von weiblicher Homosexualität,” can be found in vol. 12 of *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1968), 271–302.
- 2 The phrase is Jacques Lacan’s, from Seminar I on *Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953–1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. John Forrester (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 198. In its interest in the inverted, disorientating logic of the “pre” and the “post,” this essay addresses, albeit from a different direction, many of the same theoretical problems discussed in Lee Edelman’s analysis of the Wolf-Man. In “Seeing Things: Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex,” Edelman returns to the question of “sexual suppositions” in the psychoanalytic constitution of male subjectivity, while my own reading of female homosexuality anticipates the problem of sexual presuppositions. A comparative reading might also conclude that Edelman’s (be)hindsight finds an epistemological counterpart in my own focus upon a circumscribed (be)foresight. While the cultural representations of lesbian sexuality as “foreplay” and gay male sexuality as “behindplay” (see Edelman, 104) may well overdetermine the staging of these particular theoretical “scenes,” it strikes me that such investigations of the before and the behind (my own confrontation with the before post-dating Edelman’s entry into the behind) might more profitably be read back-to-back. See Lee Edelman’s contribution to *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).
- 3 Catherine Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 60.

- 4 See Sigmund Freud, *Dora: Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905), SE vol. 7, 125–243; Jacques Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* suivi de *Premiers écrits sur la paranoïa* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975); and Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1977).
- 5 Judith Butler's work is especially adept at relentlessly interrogating the specious logic of a before and an after, exposing how every before (what ostensibly comes first) is really an effect of the after (what it was thought to precede): for example, the preoedipal an effect of the oedipal, the prediscursive an effect of the discursive, the prejudicial an effect of the juridical, and so on. *Performatives* are read as *performatives* in Butler's deconstruction of false foundationalisms. See *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
- 6 I am grateful to Patricia Williams for her suggestion of this particular term and for her invitation to think more about the figure of inessentiality at the annual meeting of the American Association of Law Schools (January 1991); some of the following remarks were formulated for that occasion on a panel devoted to the problem of "inessentially speaking."
- 7 Although unable to resist speculating on etiological foundations throughout his work on sexual inversion, Freud nonetheless seems peculiarly aware of the futility of doing so. He writes in the present case history: "So long as we trace the development from its final outcome backwards, the chain of events appears continuous, and we feel we have gained an insight which is completely satisfactory or even exhaustive. But if we proceed the reverse way, if we start from the premises inferred from the analysis and try to follow these up to the final result, then we no longer get the impression of an inevitable sequence of events which could not have been otherwise determined" (167).
- 8 "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" may well be Freud's most overlooked case study; certainly compared to the volume of criticism generated by the Dora case history, the "Psychogenesis" paper has received surprisingly little attention. For some important exceptions to this critical silence, see Luce Irigaray, "Commodities Among Themselves" in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985); Mandy Merck, "The Train of Thought in Freud's 'Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,'" *m/f* 11/12 (1986): 35–46; Judith A. Roof, "Freud Reads Lesbians: The Male Homosexual Imperative," *Arizona Quarterly* 46.1 (Spring 1990): 17–26; Diane Hamer, "Significant Others: Lesbians and Psychoanalytic Theory," *Feminist Review* 34 (Spring 1990): 134–51; and Mary Jacobus, "Russian Tactics: Freud's 'Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,'" forthcoming.
- 9 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) SE vol. 7, 136–37.
- 10 Sigmund Freud, "Femininity" (1933), in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, SE vol. 22, 130.
- 11 Hélène Deutsch, "On Female Homosexuality," in *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, ed. Hendrik Ruitenbeek (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1966), 125. Deutsch's essay was originally published in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 14 (1933), the same year Freud's *New Introductory Lectures* appeared in print. See also Deutsch's *The Psychology of Women*, vol. 1 (New York: Bantam, 1973), 332–361. The Fenichel citation is taken from his *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1945), 340.
- 12 For an interesting inversion of the regression/restoration binary, see John Fletcher's "Freud and His Uses: Psychoanalysis and Gay Theory," in *Coming on Strong: Gay Politics and Culture*, eds. Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 90–118. Fletcher sees lesbianism, and not its proposed psychoanalytic "cure," as the true restoration. To the degree that lesbianism *contests* castration, it can be read as "a restorative strategy which seeks to repair the losses, denigrations, thwartings

- that a patriarchal culture inflicts on the girl in her primary relation to the mother" (105).
- 13 Cathy Caruth, "The Claims of Reference," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 4.1 (Fall 1990): 194.
 - 14 S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) *SE* vol. 5, 560. See also "Dreams and Telepathy" (1922) *SE* vol. 18, 198.
 - 15 S. Freud, "Dreams and Telepathy," 213.
 - 16 Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, *SE* vol. 6, 175.
 - 17 I have discussed the implications of Freud's persistent attempts to dichotomize desire and identification in "Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer 1992): 713–737. For a similar critique of Freud's insistence on the mutual exclusivity of subject and object, which focusses by contrast on Freud's theorization of male sexuality, see Michael Warner's "Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality," in *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, eds. Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 190–206. Warner points out that the argument Freud offers to explain why a subject might choose one secondary identification over another is based entirely on recourse to the suspect notion of congenital predispositions: "only the child's 'sexual disposition'—i.e., its 'masculine' or 'feminine' bent—will determine the relative *weight* of these identification axes" (196, emphasis mine).
 - 18 Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, *SE* vol. 18, 106.
 - 19 See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 114. Lacoue-Labarthe is also one of the most astute readers of identification's inscription in the social field. His analysis of originary mimesis as imitation concludes with a challenge to those critics of psychoanalysis who seek to divest its key concepts of their critical politicality: "Why would the problem of identification not be, in general, the essential problem of the political?" (300).
 - 20 S. Freud, *The New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 63.
 - 21 S. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 107.
 - 22 A simpler way to put this problem of desire slipping over and into identification is to say that it is possible to love someone so excessively and exclusively that one gradually becomes that person.
 - 23 Kaja Silverman, "White Skin, Brown Masks: The Double Mimesis, or With Lawrence in Arabia," in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1.3 (Fall 1989): 25. Silverman helpfully suggests that we think of identification "not so much as the 'resolution' of desire as its perpetuation within another regime" (24).
 - 24 Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 92.
 - 25 I am indebted to Alan Stoekl's identification of the Icarian complex, an "unconscious and pathological desire to fall," in the work of Georges Bataille. See Stoekl's introduction to Bataille's *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), xv.
 - 26 Michèle Montreley, "Inquiry into Femininity," *m/f* 1 (1978): 83–102.
 - 27 There can perhaps be no better, more playful, more mimetic response to such excessive parodies than more excess—a politics of mimesis. As recent work on camp, butch-femme, hermaphroditism, transvestism, and transsexualism has powerfully and performatively demonstrated, to be excessively excessive, to flaunt one's performance as performance, is to unmask all identity as drag. Central to each of these studies is Irigaray's slippery distinction between "masquerade" (the unconscious assumption of femininity) and "mimicry" (the deliberate and playful performance of femininity). The critical difference between masquerade and mimicry—between the "straight" imitation of a role and a parodic hyperbolisation of that role—depends on the degree and readability of its excess. Mimicry works to undo masquerade by overdoing it, subverting the dominant system of sexual representation by intentionally ironizing

- it. But without the tell-tale signs of excess, encoded in the mimic's walk, speech, or dress, mimicry would be indistinguishable from masquerade and the political utility of mimesis would be negligible. Excess, in other words, is all that holds the two apart, for to fail in mimesis is usually to fail in being *excessive enough*. Currently, three of the most important works that attempt to theorize the problematics of excess in the politics of mimesis are Carole-Anne Tyler's *Female Impersonators* (forthcoming), Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), and Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (New York and London: Routledge, forthcoming).
- 28 Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 47.
- 29 Sandor Ferenczi's 1909 "More About Homosexuality" contains one of the earliest suggestions in psychoanalysis that homosexuality may be the effect of an "excessively powerful heterosexuality." See Ferenczi's *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Michael Balint and trans. Eric Mosbacher (New York: Basic Books, 1955). Cited in Kenneth Lewes, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Male Homosexuality* (New York: New American Library, 1988), 146.
- 30 For an excellent discussion of the differences between primary and secondary identification, see Mary Ann Doane's "Misrecognition and Identity" in *Explorations in Film Theory: Selected Essays from Ciné-Tracts*, ed. Ron Burnett (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 15–25. Regarding the problem of primary identification, Doane reasonably wonders: "does it really define a moment which is neuter, which pre-dates the establishment of sexual difference?" (21).
- 31 Lines like these, which suggest (on the part of the girl) a masculine object choice in addition to a masculine identification, lead Judith Roof to conclude that Freud's theory of lesbianism amounts in the end to little more than a displaced analysis of *male* homosexuality. See Roof's "Freud Reads Lesbians."
- 32 S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 305. One of Freud's most interesting readings of class conflict can be found in this analysis of a male patient's "sapphic dream" where "above" and "below" refer not only to sexual parts but to social positions as well. His patient's dream of laborious climbing reminds Freud of Alphonse Daudet's *Sappho*, a book which Freud understands as a powerful "warning to young men not to allow their affections to be seriously engaged by girls of humble origin and a dubious past" (286).
- 33 Jim Swan, "Mater and Nannie: Freud's Two Mothers and the Discovery of the Oedipus Complex," *American Imago* 31.1 (Spring 1974): 39. Swan hypothesizes, reasonably enough, that Freud's resistance to acknowledging publically his fear of a feminine identification has everything to do with his anxieties over homosexuality (27). Swan's essay remains one of the best and most suggestive readings of why Freud waited until shortly after the death of his mother in 1930 to "discover" the critical importance of preoedipality and the infant's primary erotic identification with the mother.
- 34 Mandy Merck asks: "In insisting upon a woman analyst isn't Freud acting precisely as he accuses his homosexual patient of doing?" (44). In her forthcoming essay entitled "Russian Tactics," Mary Jacobus also provides a fascinating reading of Freud's feminine identifications, arguing that "even more than the woman doctor in whose favour Freud 'retires,' the lady turns out to be a rival authority on lesbian and bisexual matters." Both Merck and Jacobus provide particularly useful accounts of the case history's opening rhetoric of courtly love and its closing allusion to surgical sex-change. I would like to thank Mary Jacobus for generously sharing with me her work in progress.
- 35 I am indebted to Marcia Ian for seeing the implications of my reading of Freud here better than I did.