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CHAPTER I

Intimacy and narrative closure in Christopher Marlowe’s Hero and Leander

HAPPILY EVER AFTER: NARRATIVE CLOSURE AND AFFECTIVE RELATIONS

To many readers of Renaissance texts, Christopher Marlowe’s name serves as a by-word for dissident sexuality in the period. Yet, as Stephen Orgel has recently suggested, though work on Marlowe has made sexual dissidence in the Renaissance visible for modern readers, the assumption that Marlowe himself was a sexual rebel rests on the testimony of his enemies and on a conflation of the author with his characters.¹ A narrow pursuit of the biographical relevance of his texts obscures questions about how those texts are situated within his culture; furthermore, such a dualistic view – either he (or his text) is or is not queer – effaces the complexities of both Marlowe’s writing and Renaissance attitudes toward sexuality. Though the intimate sphere was coalescing around long-term monogamy in the period, the modern outcome of this process was by no means inevitable, and neither marginality nor outsider status was a prerequisite for contesting it. Marlowe’s Hero and Leander, in its representation of short-term, situational intimacy, challenges the centrality of the long-term monogamous couple in terms that were also widely available to his culture and accessible to his readers.

Historical research into intimate life reveals that while texts from the period touted long-term coupledom, practices differed markedly from this ideal because of low life expectancies, the late age of marriage, and the frequency of remarriage in the period. Lawrence Stone argues that “the incessant preaching on the imminence of death must have been a constant reminder of the essential transience of all human relationships. In practice, the probability of a durable marriage was low, since it was likely to be broken before very long by the death of the husband or the wife.”² According to Stone, the average early modern English first marriage lasted about seventeen years and almost a quarter of all marriages performed
during the period were remarriages. While seventeen years is not short-
term, it stands to reason that individuals entertained the possibility that
for at least one partner, a marital relationship might be temporary and
succeeded by another. Stone, controversially, has concluded from this high
mortality rate that closeness, between parents and children and between
husband and wife, must have been unlikely and imprudent. In contrast,
Alan Macfarlane advises caution in deducing from these figures early mod-
ern attitudes toward marriage: “If marriages were relatively vulnerable and
partners often replaced, does this tell us anything of the depth of the
emotion involved? The problem is a complex one, for swift remarriage
can be interpreted in two ways: as evidence of lack of affection – or as
the opposite.” The “opposite” situation, according to Macfarlane, is one
wherein a widow or widower finds affection in marriage so plentiful and
pleasurable in spite of the possibility of losing a partner, that one is will-
ing to risk marriage again. Macfarlane exposes the equation of longevity
and intimacy that operates in Stone’s interpretation of these data, and he
suggests that relations in the Renaissance, including marriage itself, may
not all have been evaluated based on their longevity. Only when mar-
riage attempts to assert itself over the entire relational field does it elevate
longevity as a signifier of pleasure and value and, in turn, advance itself,
somewhat fantastically and fictitiously, as the definitive long-term relation.
One has to remain open to the possible significance of short-term rela-
tions in texts from the Renaissance, when this transition had not been
fully achieved.

Narrative, interpretive, and intimate practices intersect in *Hero and
Leander* in ways that can also help us understand the competing forms
of relationality represented in Renaissance literature more generally. The
poem is an erotic text preoccupied with the way erotic texts are read. Erotic
texts circulate everywhere within the poem: from Hero’s gown on whose
sleeves Venus and Adonis are portrayed, to portraits of “the gods in sundrie
shapes, / Committing headdie ryots, incest, rapes,” in the floor of Venus’s
temple. The poem’s commencement during Sestos’s annual solemn feast
of Adonis implies that a heteroerotic mythic text, incorporated into the
Sestian calendar, structures the day-to-day existence of Sestos’s citizens.
Even the title characters’ bodies are erotic texts. When Leander presses his
suit to Hero, “at everie word shee turn’d aside” (195) in seeming displeasure;
however, Hero’s love seems to be transparent to all who know how to read
her body’s signals. She trembles after Leander touches her hand, prompting
the narrator to remark “Love deeply grounded, hardly is dissembled” (184).
For Leander, as Gregory Woods observes, “only those who desire him can read him.” The narrator becomes one such reader when he remarks of Leander’s first verbal attempts at seduction, “Now begins Leander to display / Loves holy fire, with words, with sighs and tears” (192–193). Eventually, according to the narrator, “Even as an Index to a booke, / So to his mind was young Leanders looke” (613–614). His status as a lover is legible to anyone who can properly read his face.

This pervasive concern with the reading of erotic texts results from a sense that texts circulating within a culture act as scripts for intimate life, but the textual scripting of intimate life that Hero and Leander recognizes is not as straightforward as it might appear. The historical relationship, or lack thereof, of Renaissance narrative texts, including prose, poetry, and drama, to more recent narrative practices mandates a different approach to reading representations of intimacy insofar as current approaches are thoroughly bound up with novelistic teleology. Lorna Hutson has compellingly argued for the revision of the history of narrative forms that casts English Renaissance prose fiction as a precursor to the novel. In her words, “sixteenth-century developments in prose fiction are not part of a teleological evolution of historical consciousness.” Readers with “modern expectations of narrative coherence” may be disappointed by Renaissance prose, where “competing interpretations of the same set of narrative circumstances are offered to the reader without one being privileged or authorized over another.” I would expand Hutson’s argument beyond Elizabethan prose to suggest that many Renaissance poetic and dramatic narratives also resemble what Roland Barthes calls “texts of pleasure” that resist closure by being “outside any imaginable finality.” Renaissance writers employed a variety of narrative strategies, some of which bear no relation to the teleologies to which later narratological reading strategies are calibrated. Many Renaissance texts leave significant room for doubt about whether what is achieved in their moments of closure is what the texts endorse, and this space of doubt makes room for the potential valorization of intimacies not guaranteed futurity by narrative. What follows, then, is a critique of the dominance of closure-based reading strategies in the form of a demonstration of those practices’ impoverishing effects upon representations of intimate life and pleasure. Where these reading strategies are unable to index these possibilities in Renaissance narrative texts, the non-teleological approach that I shall advance by way of Hero and Leander can attend to the alternative forms of relationality that various Renaissance texts imagine, experiment with, and make available to their readers or audiences.
“LET IT SUFSSE”: NON-PENETRATIVE SEXUAL PRACTICES, NARRATIVE, AND SITUATIONAL INTIMACY IN HERO AND LEANDER

Implicit in Hero and Leander’s advocacy of non-teleological reading is the argument that a different way of reading an erotic text will result in changes in intimate life and sexual practice. From a teleological perspective, it does appear, as Bruce R. Smith argues, that the poem is entirely “about desire’s frustration” and that “we never get to see sexual activity.” Yet, unlike modern mainstream romantic comedies and some pornographic films, Marlowe’s poem undoes the equation of narrative and sexual consumption; here, sexual penetration neither signifies the sine qua non of sexual activity nor does it carry the privilege that “consummation” would potentially confer upon it. In Judith Haber’s words, the poem is characterized by a “disruption of end-directed sexuality.” The story of the title characters not only seems to be without a stable closural moment, but the text also calls into question the very desirability or possibility of stable closural moments in narratives. Seemingly setting up a typical structure of deferred consummation, both narrative and sexual, the poem makes clear that on his first visit to Hero’s tower, Leander does not sexually penetrate Hero. The narrator remarks of Leander, “dallying with Hero, nothing saw / That might delight him more, yet he suspected / Some amorous rites or others were neglected” (546–548). In a teleological reading of the scene, the humor of this episode is that Leander does not know what to do with Hero now that he has won her. Yet the poem makes a space for the pleasures of aimless “dallying” even if Leander’s suspicions of lack move the reader away from such pleasures. His attempt to perform these “amorous rites or others” mixes humor at Leander’s expense with non-penetrative pleasure:

Therefore unto his bodie, hirs he clung,
She, fearing on the rushes to be flung,
Striv’d with redoubled strength, the more she strived,
The more a gentle pleasing heat revived,
Which taught him all that elder lovers know,
And now that same gan so to scorch and glow,
As in plaine terms (yet cunningly) he crav’d it,
Love always makes those eloquent that have it.

(549–556)

As he rubs his body against Hero’s, Leander is met with terror as she thinks he is going to throw her down. Her struggle provides more non-penetrative stimulation for Leander’s body, but his arousal is recast teleologically, possibly through the reference to “all that elder lovers know,” such that Leander
figures out that penetration is the amorous rite he neglected. “Cunningly” is available as a pun on the female genitals, and thus he turns his energies toward the pursuit of genital intercourse. Leander’s eventually exclusive desire for Hero’s maidenhead through sexual penetration recasts all the pleasures of this encounter as foreplay, lack, and insignificance in a way that makes him seem even more ridiculous and oblivious.

This encounter is just part of the poem’s investigation of privileging both penetration in sex and outcomes in narrative when abstracting interpersonal relationships from sexual practice. These effects are further examined during the scene that holds the place of the consummation of the narrative: when Leander returns to Hero’s tower and they have sex. The narrative ends not with the lovers’ mutual afterglow, but in Hero’s post-coital shame as she trips out of bed:

So Heroes ruddie cheeke, Hero betrayd,
And her all naked to [Leander’s] sight displayd.
Whence his admiring eyes more pleasure tooke,
Than Dis, on heapes of gold fixing his looke.

(807–810)

Instead of “boy meets girl, boy gets girl,” we have something more like “boy meets girl, boy gets girl, boy trips girl when she runs out of bed trying to hide her nudity and shame the next morning.” Sexual consummation is associated with shame for Hero and, for Leander, a possessiveness that degrades the other.

The poem ends with profound ambivalence about this relationship, and there have been attempts in its textual history to correct for this ambivalence. For instance, the printer Edward Blunt in 1598 placed at the end of his edition of the poem “Desunt nonnulla” – some things are lacking – seeking to stabilize an unstable ending by recasting it as the middle of the narrative.12 Similarly, George Chapman organized the poem into sestiads and continued the story to its tragic end. Near the beginning, however, Marlowe differentiates his poem from the “tragedie divine Musaeus soong” (52), which follows the lovers to their deaths, and he thereby opens up the possibility that his way of ending the poem has other purposes, one of which, I contend, is to challenge the expectation that narrative and eroticism that may have guided Chapman and Blunt are part of a set of critical commonplaces wherein the focus on narrative outcomes in making meaning out of texts contributes to the normative sense that long-term,
monogamous relations are the only valuable forms of intimate contact and that penetration alone signifies meaningful sexual contact.\textsuperscript{13}

I do not wish to position Blunt and Chapman as the spokesmen for an Elizabethan culture against which Marlowe rebels, because I would not argue that what Marlowe does in \textit{Hero and Leander} was out of step with his own times, and, as I suggest at the end of this chapter, because more complexity than we currently appreciate governs Chapman’s continuation. It is to me more accurate to view Marlowe’s poem and its afterlife as a site of contention over erotic meanings in the Renaissance. In an essay that I discussed in the introduction, Henry Abelove hypothesized that a diverse array of non-reproductive sexual practices were recast as foreplay during the eighteenth century and lost their cultural value independent of penetrative and ejaculatory sexual practices.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, the narrative, familiar from Freud, of “the union of the genitals in the act known as copulation, which leads to a release of the sexual tension and a temporary extinction of the sexual instinct,” is a historical development rather than a transhistorical psychic phenomenon.\textsuperscript{15} In keeping with Michel Foucault’s refutation of the repressive hypothesis, we might say these practices were not so much repressed by society so much as their relative value was socially redistributed.\textsuperscript{16} Modern queers often find themselves demonized and criminalized by this sexual teleology because, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner point out, they have cultivated “relations and narratives only recognized as intimate in queer culture.”\textsuperscript{17} One form of queer politics, then, looks forward to the development and safeguarding of spaces in which what Berlant elsewhere calls “minor intimacies” might be practiced as a form of ongoing resistance to the historical reorganization of sexual activity.\textsuperscript{18} However, the shift that Abelove locates enables us to rethink the boundaries we have drawn around sexual activity when it comes to representations from pre- and early modernity; by doing so, we avoid marginalizing and misrecognizing relations and narratives that were considered erotic or intimate in the past but that may not be widely recognized as such currently.

Some voices in Renaissance culture did argue that either penetration or ejaculation were definitorily central to certain kinds of sexual activity, but this was part of a historical process whose outcome was contingent and whose impact was unevenly felt across Renaissance discourses. Discussing Henry VIII’s sodomy law from 1534, which was renewed under Elizabeth in 1563, Edward Coke argued that the law defined sodomy in terms of penetration: “the least penetration,” Coke writes, “maketh it carnall knowledge.”\textsuperscript{19} Even if there is ejaculation, without penetration, then, an act is not sodomy; ejaculation is at most “evidence in the case of
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buggery of penetration.” Thus, in 1631, when the Earl of Castlehaven was tried for assisting his servants in the rape of Lady Castlehaven and for committing buggery with his servants, Castlehaven and his servants testified that there was no penetration, hoping to make use of the penetration requirement as a loophole. The Lord High Steward, the King’s Counsel, however, argued that lack of penetration should not afford the “least mitigation to such abominable sins,” especially in light of Castlehaven’s other crimes, such as religious prevarication. The Lord Chief Justice agreed that “the Law of this Land makes no distinction of Buggery, if there be emissio seminis.” What Coke understood as supporting evidence, ejaculation, the Lord Chief Justice saw as proof positive, insisting on a teleological understanding of sodomy.

The Castlehaven trial record betrays a concern that sodomy itself is not coextensive with the range of sexual practices that we might, from a modern perspective, deem non-normative. Yet even in light of the Lord Chief Justice’s expansion of sodomy, the law is still inattentive to a variety of non-penetrative acts that may have been considered sexual, as Bruce Smith notes in his own discussion of interpretations of sodomy laws from the period. Just as, according to Abelove, non-penetrative sexual practices do not signify in straightforward ways in demography, non-penetrative and non-ejaculatory acts that escape censure are unlikely to be recorded in legal discourse. Their marginality in this discourse, however, does not mean that they were rarely practiced or culturally unimportant.

Literary discourse offers a different archive: because it is not primarily interested in keeping track of populations, literature can cast a wide imaginative net when representing non-reproductive sexual practices; because it is not always motivated by censure, literature can give voice to what an author believes are desirable, pleasurable, and valuable sexual practices when he or she constructs attendant narratives of intimacy in which they might flourish; and because of a greater flexibility with regard to narrative teleology in the Renaissance, an author can sustain such representations and a reader can identify with them even in narrative contexts whose outcomes appear unsupportive of these practices. In general, then, despite the existence of condemnations of non-penetrative and non-reproductive practices in religious and legal discourses, sexual activity was not always organized around penetration and ejaculation in other discourses, and a reader in the Renaissance might not have seen representations of kissing, fondling, and mutual masturbation as incomplete in relation to penetrative sex. Instead, these practices might have functioned representationally as part of a broad landscape of available sexual practices. By implication, readers might have
evaluated these practices and their intimate contexts, or the relationships in which they occur – whether long-term or situational, monogamous or not – independently of penetration. Thus, in our own reading, if we broaden “sex” as a category, we might expand the current canon of Renaissance sexual representations as well to include more forms of pleasure and different narratives of intimate life. Instead of taking the modern privileging of long-term monogamy and penetrative sexuality as a fait accompli in the Elizabethan period and assuming that Hero and Leander participates in a debate whose outcome was already decided, I seek to attend to the terms the poem establishes for itself that construct a reader’s experience of the poem’s erotic representations. Moreover, because the poem encourages its readers both to think of erotic texts as scripts and to think differently about their narrative structures, it makes itself available as an intimate script for its readers’ own erotic lives.

Consummation is problematic both in terms of Hero and Leander’s narrative structure and sexual economy, which makes it unusual from the perspective of modern erotic texts that often rely on sexual consummation to precipitate narrative closure. For instance, the narrative structure of many modern pornographic films – both heterosexual and male homosexual – involves penetration – whether oral, anal, vaginal, or some combination – followed by a concluding cumshot; such scenes combine the narrative and sexual sense of the term “climax” in all its phallocentric glory. Nevertheless, they frequently encounter logistical difficulties in making simultaneously visible penetration and ejaculation and the solutions to these difficulties – the removal of prophylactics if in use, masturbation, withdrawal and reinsertion, among others – often require interruption, disconnecting the climax from the narrative and physical movement that supposedly generates it. Though Ian Frederick Moulton has reminded us that the early modern texts are “before pornography,” and thus should be treated with a historical specificity, we assume early modern erotic texts conform to an idealized narrative structure that is problematic even in modern erotic texts. Furthermore, we use a sexual vocabulary that reinforces an unhistoricized view of erotic narrative. Consummation has inscribed within it a value judgment: according to the Oxford English Dictionary it derives directly from the Latin consummare, or “to finish” and indirectly from summus, or “highest.” Thus, our sexual vocabulary, insofar as consummation is equated with penetration, conveys a teleological sense that penetration is the highest form of sexual activity, and our narrative vocabulary conveys a teleological sense that narrative ends are a privileged location for a text’s meaning.
In *Hero and Leander*, Marlowe depends on the possibility that there are readers who would be willing to suspend a connection between consummation and the value of intimate relations. That is, in order to advance the pleasure and ethics of situational, non-monogamous affective relations, the poem offers a reading practice that, by avoiding a deterministic reliance on narrative outcomes, helps a reader ascribe value to representations of non-normative intimate contact, such as non-penetrative sexual acts. Even before we get to the final encounter between Hero and Leander, the digression recounting the story of Mercury and the country maid has already cued the reader to mistrust moments of closure that proclaim their own definitiveness for the sake of valorizing consummated affective relations. Clark Hulse situates the digression on Mercury as “just one of a series of false aetiology in the poem, explaining why Cupid is blind, why half the world is black, or why the moon is pale.” Etiologies, by definition, cast a retrospective meaning on previous events; thus, they structurally resemble traditional narratives in terms of closure. Emphasizing this commonality, Marlowe offers an etiology at the end of this narrative-within-a-narrative. The Mercury digression begins by attempting to explain an aspect of the narrative itself, specifically, the reason the Destinies refuse Cupid’s request that Hero and Leander “might enjoy each other, and be blest” (380). For the next 105 lines, the narrator recounts what happened when Mercury fell in love with a shepherdess who will only have sex with him if he steals some nectar from the gods for her, in consequence of which Jupiter banishes him from the heavens. The Destinies, after Cupid makes them fall in love with Mercury, dethrone Jupiter and restore the Golden Age. After he has no need of the Destinies, Mercury spurns them, and they restore Jupiter to his former power. However, the narrator does not end the digression with a comment on the pitfalls of sexual desire, as one might expect from the way sexual desire motivates so much of the digression’s plot. Such expectation was fostered in the reading practice suggested by Sir Thomas Elyot in *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), where he writes that if a reader “do rede wanton mater mixte with wisedome, he putteth the warst vnder foote and sorteth out the beste, or if his courage be stered or provoked, he remembreth the litel pleasure and gret detriment that shuld ensue of it, and withdrawynge his minde to some other studie or exercise shortly forgetteh it.” It could be possible that Marlowe is trying to help the reader “forget” what he or she has just read when he ends with the trite etiology, “to this day is everie scholler poore, / Grosse gold, from them runs headlong to the boore” (471–472). However, Marlowe’s use of *sententiae* makes a mockery of moralizing reading practices that involve heeding
“wisdom” or “forgetting” vice, such as those advocated by Elyot. Exceeding the digression’s originary purpose of explaining the fraught relationship of Cupid and the Destinies, the end of the digression connects the financial fate of scholars to their association with Mercury. Bringing the narrative to a screeching halt, the narrator’s sententiousness sharply contrasts with the digression’s riveting, fast-paced catalogue of various types of sexual intrigue. The digression’s ending is thoroughly inadequate as a sexual moral or as a closural moment, but this disappointment helps instruct the reader in how to interpret the digression. The poem insists that the reader look to other parts of the digression for its meaning and relevance and paves the way for a third way of reading “wanton mater,” beyond the two reactions Elyot lays out: identification with alternate scripts of intimacy.

Within the digression itself, a link is made between narrative structures and the erotic. A. R. Braunmuller reminds us that the Destinies were “sometimes themselves considered to embody origin, development, and telos” – principles of narrativity. Their inclusion in a digression that ultimately interrupts a narrative is therefore paradoxical in a way that signals the poem’s challenge to traditional understandings of narrativity. Furthermore, by having personifications of narrativity succumb to Cupid’s machinations, the poem insists on a connection between affective relations and narrative, but in this instance, the connection serves to call into question the rigidity of these narrative principles, for, as Gordon Braden notes, “what [the Destinies] are primarily observed doing is changing their minds.”

The Destinies expect to consummate the love induced by Cupid’s arrows and translate it into a permanent arrangement, in keeping with their status as the embodiment of traditional principles of narrative structure – as those principles in general and telos in particular – which construct the value of a relationship according to the bond’s duration and consummation. The digression, then, allegorizes the catastrophic consequences of applying such a rubric to intimacy. When Mercury does not return their love, the Destinies take vengeance upon him by restoring Jupiter to power. Though it allows Jupiter to punish Mercury, the restoration also involves the return of “Murder, rape, warre, lust, and trecherie” (457) to the world. Therefore, these worldwide consequences of the Destinies’ vengeance – that is, the end of a restored Golden Age – can be traced to narrative’s role in a sexual ideology that valorizes long-term intimate relations.

The poem does not stop at situating itself against certain erotic and reading practices. Hero and Leander offers a poetics of non-consummation that places non-penetrative sexual acts and non-ejaculatory pleasures, especially same-sex ones, at the center of the poem’s sexual economy, the ethics
of which seem to be governed by the possibility of a sexual practice that is pleasurable but that does not seek to take possession of the other. To borrow the words of Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, Marlowe’s poem is relationally innovative insofar as it begins to imagine the intimate possibilities of not being “interested in penetrating – invading and possessing – anyone else’s desire.”

In the narrator’s well-known blazon of Leander, we first find cues for this alternate narrative and sexual ideology:

His bodie was as straight as Circes wand,
Jove might have sip out Nectar from his hand.
Even as delicious meat is to the tast,
So was his necke in touching, and surpast
The white of Pelops shoulder, I could tell ye,
How smooth his brest was, & how white his bellie,
And whose immortall fingers did imprint,
That heavenly path, with many a curious dint,
That runs along his backe, but my rude pen,
Can hardly blazon foorth the loves of men.
Much lesse of powerfull gods, let it suffise,
That my slacke muse, sings of Leanders eies.

(61–72)

Though he suggests his inability to blazon Leander, the narrator covers an extensive amount of corporeal territory as he turns Leander’s body into an erotic text by drawing on the language of printing. Tracing Leander’s body vertically, the narrator’s “backside” gaze follows curious dints along the heavenly path of Leander’s back, but the narrator stops, complaining of his “slacke muse.” Though it represents a figurative encounter, this blazon is itself an erotic narrative in miniature; its trajectory seems to be the penetration of Leander’s body, but it stops before reaching that culmination. The narrator’s indication that he has trouble blazoning forth “the loves of men” has suggested to readers an anatomical deficiency on the narrator’s part because masculine sexuality is frequently, if falsely, associated with penetrative teleology. Yet it may not be necessary or even historically accurate to look at the blazon as figuring a failed sexual encounter, for the narrator separates male pleasure from the ejaculatory blazoning forth and articulates, in the terminology of writing, a non-teleological narrative of pleasure that can “suffise” both him and the reader. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us, “suffise” or in the modern spelling “suffice” draws etymologically on the Latin prefix sub or under, which contrasts with the vertical position of consummation’s *summus* as “highest,” and *facere*, “to do.” By insisting on the pleasure of “underdoing,” the narrator
calls into question the hierarchy of consummation and its control over sexual meaning that would cast “to suffise” as a compromise covering over absence or lack. Furthermore, extending Abelove’s hypothesis about changes in sexual practices to same-sex relations might help explain why, despite the narrator’s invocation of the humility topos, his experience is ultimately not unpleasurable for stopping where it does. Readers might assume that the narrator is gearing up to anally penetrate Leander in the blazon, for the urge to resolve the indeterminacy the narrator leaves about his trajectory and cross the metonymic gap between Leander’s back and his anus is palpable, but that is exactly the kind of reading strategy – equating penetration, consummation, closure, and value – that the poem asks its readers to resist. Perhaps the anus does not arouse the narrator’s curiosity as much as Leander’s other “dints,” which he traces, but does not enter. The narrator focuses on the outside edges of orifices and concavities rather than the spaces inside the body to which they might lead. Although the narrator says he will discuss Leander’s eyes, which could metaphorically signify an interest in penetration – the eyes being the windows to the inner space of the soul – he quickly moves to Leander’s “orient cheekes and lippes” (73). By returning to more pleasurable surface terrain and not going beyond the lips into the mouth, the narrator resists thinking of Leander’s body in terms of what would later be called “erotogenic zones” – the genitals, the mouth, the anus – and “non-erotogenic zones.” This form of embodiment is necessary in order to organize sexual activity around penetration, but the narrator, to borrow a phrase from Freud, turns the skin into “the erotogenic zone par excellence.”

Marlowe depicts Neptune similarly cultivating the pleasures of the body’s surfaces when he seduces Leander. Indeed, Neptune and the narrator’s shared proclivity for surface pleasures suggests that the narrator’s sympathies, if not the text’s, may lie with the unconsummated relationship between the god and the fair young man. Leander’s encounter with Neptune begins as a case of mistaken identity, as Neptune thinks the naked Leander is Ganymede come down from the heavens. When Neptune “imbrast him, cald him love, / And swore he never should returne to Jove” (651–652), he has rivalry with Jove in mind along with whatever interest he may have in the naked youth. Neptune here not only fantasizes about possessing something because it is valued by another, but also about satisfying the “displeas’d” Ganymede in a way that Jove has not satisfied him (641). Much in the way Leander thinks possessively about Hero after they consummate their relationship, Neptune, in Marlowe’s depiction, is interested in possessing Ganymede in a power struggle with Jupiter, and since
Neptune imagines him never returning to Jupiter, he desires a long-term relationship.

The narrative shifts away from Neptune’s desire for abiding possession to something more ethical on Neptune’s part. This detour through mistaken identity serves to underscore how Neptune attempts to maximize the pleasure of the encounter, given how thoroughly eroticism is saturated by power relations in the culture and how tempting it is to substitute power for pleasure in sexual relations. Neptune is thus ethical in the way Foucault develops the ethics of the care of the self, which is not about abandoning power because power is not something that one has; instead it “is exercised . . . in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations.”

Care of the self, then, “enables one to occupy his rightful position” in those relations and thereby avoid “the risk of dominating others and exercising a tyrannical power over them.” Even though Neptune’s relation to Leander is age-graded and could fall prey to the power dynamic that allows the older to claim dominance over the younger, Neptune nurtures Leander without being domineering. Though he protects Leander out of self-interest – the advancement of his own pleasure – he does not lay a claim such that Leander cannot experience other kinds of pleasure. Upon recognizing his error in thinking Leander is Ganymede, Neptune treats Leander with protective care and gives him Helle’s bracelet, Helle being the drowned Theban princess for whom the Hellespont is named. With the bracelet to safeguard Leander against Helle’s tragic fate, they can enjoy their encounter. Yet the bracelet also enables Leander to swim to Hero more easily, for his cry, “O let me visite Hero ere I die” (662), prompts Neptune to give Leander the bracelet. With this gift, then, Neptune seeks his own pleasure but does not treat the sexual availability of his would-be lover as his exclusive possession.

Possession, penetration, and consummation eventually are linked in Hero and Leander’s encounter, and what differentiates Neptune’s seduction of Leander is its insistence on pleasure without possession, penetration, or even consummation. Neptune pursues the pleasures that the surfaces of Leander’s body can afford him:

He clapt his plume cheekes, with his tresses playd,
And smiling wantonly, his love bewrayd.
He watcht his armes, and as they opend wide,
At every stroke, betwixt them he would slide,
And steale a kisse, and then run out and daunce,
And as he turnd, cast many a lustfull glaunce,
And threw him gawdie toies to please his eie,
And dive into the water, and there prie
Upon his brest, his thighs, and everie lim,
And up againe, and close beside him swim.

(665–674)

Touching Leander’s cheeks, playing with his hair, and sliding between his arms, Neptune traces the erotic topography of Leander’s body much as the narrator does in the blazon. Elizabeth Harvey has argued that the skin functions as both border and interface in Renaissance anatomical and allegorical representations, thereby undermining any easy equation of the skin with surface over and against depth. In a reading of Edmund Spenser’s representation of the Castle of Alma in Book 11 of The Faerie Queene, Harvey argues “the skin or flesh is at once a figure of covering and protection and a sign of the body’s vulnerability to erotic or painful stimulation.”

Marlowe too describes the skin as a site of stimulation, but he avoids reducing eroticism to penetration and challenges the idea that stimulation is a form of corporeal vulnerability by refusing to locate such stimuli – and refusing to direct the reader’s gaze along with Neptune’s – anywhere but at the surface. The text does not indicate that Neptune is interested in penetrating Leander sexually at this moment. Neptune specifically does not “pry into” Leander’s breast, thighs, and limbs; he pries upon them. The phrase “pry into,” to mean to investigate the inner or true nature of something, would have been available to Marlowe, according to the OED. In contrast, Marlowe’s phrasing precisely indicates that Neptune pores over these body parts with a gaze that is attuned to surfaces. Both the narrator’s blazon and Abelove’s historicization of sexual acts should caution us against assuming that erotic pleasure for Neptune is reducible or equivalent to penetration.

At the level of the individual sexual act, Neptune imagines a way around the cultural nexus of eroticism and possession in a way that Leander cannot with Hero. More broadly, an affective practice of ethical, situational non-monogamy can be abstracted from the non-penetrative pleasures of Neptune’s seduction. Neptune tells Leander a tale about

How that a sheepheard sitting in a vale,
Played with a boy so faire and kind,
As for his love, both earth and heaven pyn’d;
That of the cooling river durst not drinke,
Least water-nymphs should pull him from the brinke.
And when hee sported in the fragrant lawnes,
Gote-footed Satyrs, and up-staring Fawnes,
Would steale him thence.

(678–685)
The critical assumption that the tale teaches Leander about homoerotic pleasure casts the relationship of the shepherd and the boy in the tale as expressive of Neptune’s desire to begin a similar kind of relationship with Leander. Though the homoerotic content of the tale cannot be denied, the pathways of identification the tale opens up may be more complicated. There is no mention of any reluctance on the boy’s part to play with the shepherd, as there is on Leander’s part to play with Neptune. Such absence would seem to interrupt Neptune’s project of aligning himself with the shepherd and Leander with the boy. On the other hand, the nymphs, satyrs, and fawns’ zealous and somewhat unintentionally life-threatening pursuit of the reluctant boy suggests a parallel between Neptune and these mythological figures. Indeed, the tale need not include these other figures if all Marlowe wants Neptune to do is introduce Leander to pastoral, age-graded homoeroticism. In Neptune’s tale, the shepherd’s ability to “play” with the boy remains unhampered by the boy’s occasional relations with “Gote-footed satyrs, and up-staring Fawnes” (684). Whenever the boy is in the satyrs and fawns’ vicinity, he can be erotically available to them too. Thus, with the story, Neptune invites Leander, whenever he happens to be in the Hellespont, even if he is on his way to visit Hero, to experience the pleasure of situational intimacy, like that between the boy and the satyrs and fawns. Granted, the satyrs and fawns “steal” him, emphasizing that the boy may be a reluctant participant in these pleasures, but this reluctance is a feature of the story that should encourage us to identify Leander with the boy and position Neptune in line with the aggressive mythological figures. Neptune’s story certainly relies on the nexus of eroticism and power pervasive in Marlowe’s England, but howsoever inescapable that nexus may be in such a hierarchical culture, the poem’s larger point is that Neptune and Leander’s relation of power need not be abusive and can yield alternate forms of pleasure and intimacy.

I contend, then, that Marlowe indicates that Neptune is not telling his story to make Leander love him instead of Hero. Neptune’s attempted dalliance with Leander need not affect Leander’s relationship with her at all. His offer is governed by a “what happens in the Hellespont stays in the Hellespont” logic. Leander does not seem to agree, for he interrupts Neptune’s tale not because it is unappealing, but because he worries about his “tardie armes” (689) making him late to reach Hero’s tower. However, Leander’s previous encounter with Hero did not end with a specific promise that he would come back in the evening; she does not even expect his second visit when it occurs. Before Leander’s first visit to her tower, Hero had prepared her abode, but, the second time, she is first
delightfully surprised to hear him knocking and then terrified because he has shown up without any clothes on. Thus, the proposed dalliance with Neptune does not threaten to make Leander late to meet Hero. In his offer of situational intimacy, Neptune substitutes pleasure for possession to indicate that homo- and heteroerotic relations need not be mutually exclusive.

Although Leander is unreceptive to the situational possibilities in the Hellespont and refuses to be cast as the boy to Neptune’s satyr, this poem is decidedly not about outcomes, and Neptune’s alternate way of thinking about relationality, embodiment, possession, and pleasure is nevertheless made available to the poem’s readers. Even when Neptune injures himself, the narrator attempts to shape the reader’s attitude to the erotic alternative voiced in the encounter:

In gentle brests,  
Relenting thoughts, remorse and pittie rests.  
And who have hard hearts, and obdurat minds,  
But vicious, harebraind, and illit’rat hinds? 

(699–702)

The narrator’s question refers to the refinement and sensitivity that Leander demonstrates by reacting sympathetically to Neptune’s injuries, but the question extends to the reader’s response to the poem. The narrator compels the reader to react, as Leander has, with pity, as opposed to the derision he often solicits from the reader in his representations of Hero and Leander. In fact, he calls into question the reader’s very literacy if he or she does not sympathize with Neptune. Although Neptune misinterprets Leander’s pity as love and leaves him to scour the ocean for gifts, the text has trained the reader not to equate consummation with narrative endorsement. Leander’s pity, then, is evidence of only a partial literacy, as the text extends literacy to include sensitivity to the opportunities of situational intimacy that Leander fails to fully apprehend. Neptune offers Leander an alternate way to think about relationality, embodiment, pleasure, and narrative, and, historically, this and other alternatives come under increasing pressure during the early modern period. Marlowe inscribes within his poem cues for reading it in a way not predetermined by moments of closure, for the ethics of Neptune’s offer are only fully locatable by following the cues the text provides for the reader to cast doubt on closure as a means of endorsing a relationship. This reading practice does not efface, ignore, or otherwise subordinate those intimacies whose representation runs contrary to a narrative’s trajectory.
“GRAVE SUCCEEDING CONSEQUENCE”: READING INTIMACY AGAINST THE GRAIN

The absence of penetration, ejaculation, and/or consummation of this relationship is not figured at all as a lack in the poem; instead, Neptune’s approach to sexual pleasure opens up the additional possibility of non-monogamous intimacy. There are both textual and historical details that support a reading wherein this unconsummated homoerotic seduction, with its detachment of eroticism from a tyrannical form of possession, is placed at the ethical center of the erotic economy of the poem. That is, the poem instructs its readers that by not assessing erotic representations in terms of penetration and consummation, it is possible to derive an alternate, more ethical approach to intimate life. Judith Haber is correct that the poem questions "the equation of conventional masculinity and coherence" by being so insistently non-teleological, but I would not position Marlowe’s poem in the margins of his culture fighting against an already-dominant ideology. Instead, I would argue that such questions sought to inhibit the ascendance of teleological thinking about intimacy, the dominance of which was not a given in Marlowe’s time. A glance at George Chapman’s continuation of Marlowe’s poem can help to illustrate the difficulty one encounters when assuming a monolithic Renaissance understanding of relationality, or even of narrative, which Marlowe stands fully outside in his oppositionality. Chapman’s extension seems partly to privilege narrative teleology and the affective relations that conform to it, thereby offering itself as a corrective to the non-teleological elements within Marlowe’s poem. On the other hand, Chapman, cued by the resistance to teleology in Marlowe’s poem, may have crafted his part of Hero and Leander to be relentlessly teleological in order to offer an ironic commentary on such a narrative technique.

Chapman’s continuation concerns itself with two alternative possible endings, the nuptials that Leander plans and the deaths of the lovers that the Destinies plan. Thus, Chapman attempts to give the poem a clearer tone predicated on its outcome – first by establishing the possible outcomes as either comic or tragic and then by following Musaeus in choosing the tragic. Chapman’s narrator feels compelled to finish the story:

O sweet Leander, thy large worth I hide
In a short grave; ill-favoured storms must chide
Thy sacred favour: I in floods of ink
Must drown thy graces, which white papers drink,
Even as thy beauties did the foul black seas.
This compulsion reveals a narrator who may have internalized the value placed on moments of closure in narratives, and, in describing his compulsion, the narrator foreshadows the liquid form of Leander’s death. Even when another storyteller enters and briefly takes over the narrative, this subordination to moments of closure through foreshadowing does not cease. When Hero attends a wedding feast, Teras, a nymph, tells the tale of Hymen’s joyful nuptials. “Teras” means “portent” and her narrative style fits her teleological name. Chapman writes of her: “never slight tale flew / From her charmed lips without important sense, / Shown in some grave succeeding consequence” (5.74–76). Chapman’s poem is relentlessly sententious as the narrator attempts to interpret and condense events into after-the-fact aphorisms. Some of these maxims even have temporality as their subject. The first one in Chapman’s continuation moralizes about Leander’s deflowering of Hero: “Joy graven in sense, like snow in water, wastes; / Without the preserve of virtue nothing lasts” (3.35–36). Here, the preservation of virtue through marriage promises pleasures in perpetuity, in contrast to the always already decaying premarital bodily pleasures that Hero and Leander have experienced. The maxim also, then, foreshadows the end of the lovers’ pleasure because they have not been careful to preserve their virtue.

On the other hand, Chapman so persistently foreshadows the deaths of the lovers that suspense is not much of a factor in the narrative. The narrator’s constant sententiousness mocks his own gnostic narrative strategy, for, even as the sententiae comment on what has happened just prior, they connect the morality they propound with the fate of the lovers. The poem’s early and repeated blatantness about the events at its ending undermines teleological progression. These foreshadowings consistently cast the Destinies as the enemies of Hero and Leander’s love:

The gods, the Graces, and the Muses came  
Down to the Destinies, to stay the frame  
Of the true lovers’ deaths, and all world’s tears:  
But Death before had stopped their cruel ears.  

(5.21–24)

The Destinies are a mythological embodiment of teleological narrativity applied to an individual’s life story, but this story even subverts their role in effecting the fate the reader has been expecting for Leander. After all, the Destinies do not cut the thread of Leander’s life; Neptune does in his attempt to save Leander:
And (burst with ruth) [Neptune] hurled his marble mace
At the stern Fates; it wounded Lachesis
That drew Leander’s thread, and could not miss
The thread itself, as it her hand did hit,
But smote it full and quite did sunder it. (6.225–229)

That Neptune cuts the thread testifies to his role, as god of the sea, in Leander’s drowning; thus, he could be understood as a tool employed by the Destinies to further their goal of ending Leander’s life. However, we might read the episode as subverting the control of the Destinies. As Lachesis is wounded too, Chapman may intend to show the Destinies as unready for Leander’s death when Neptune hurled his mace at them. Indeed, the Destiny in charge of cutting the thread, Atropos, is not even mentioned here. Lachesis, whose role is to determine the length of the thread before her sister cuts it, has only just drawn the thread.

Chapman’s continuation may operate according to a teleological narrative strategy, or it may be resisting it. By implication, Chapman’s narrative may embody the increasingly standard view that intimacy is predicated on futurity, or Chapman’s extension may resist, along with Marlowe’s poem, the increased dominance of that view. Chapman does attempt to iconicize Hero and Leander as lovers, a process that equates the cultural value of their relationship to the lessons that their relationship can teach future generations. At the same time, their story culminates in an ornithological etiology. Neptune turns Hero and Leander into goldfinches after their deaths, and the narrator, rather anticlimactically, explains how various aspects of their story or character attributes translate into different colors observable on a goldfinch’s body. Their iconicity, then, may be more relevant to birdwatchers than to lovers. The couple’s bawdy appearance in the puppet show in Ben Jonson’s Bartholomew Fair at the very least indicates that they were not universally sentimentalized, not that one would expect such sentimentality in Jonsonian comedy. We can assert, however, that Marlowe and Chapman’s texts provide for their Renaissance and modern readers a way into understanding the complex relationship among the kinds of stories we tell, the methods we use to read them, and the availability of knowledge about non-standard forms of intimacy.

In the chapters that follow, I will extend this discussion to a generically diverse set of Renaissance texts for which a non-teleological reading strategy, such as the one suggested by Marlowe’s Hero and Leander, can both expose the ways that these texts may have functioned as scripts for alternative forms of intimacy for Renaissance readers and audiences and make
those alternatives intelligible to modern readers and audiences. Current approaches to these texts tend to privilege representations of long-term heterosexual monogamy abstracted from penetrative sexual practices. Sev-
ering the link between intimacy and futurity, a non-teleological reading practice can attend to the variety of affective relations that are represented as satisfying and pleasurable in Renaissance texts. While these texts are situated in a historical moment when heterogeneity is giving way to the centralization of intimate life around the long-term, monogamous couple, they also challenge the culture in which they were produced to maintain a more inclusive understanding of affective relations.