

# **Gay Knights and Gay Rights:**

## **Same-Sex Desire in Late Medieval Europe and its Presence in Arthurian Literature**



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MA Thesis Philology

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Image description: Lancelot, Galehaut and Guinevere. Lancelot and Guinevere kiss for the first time while Galehaut watches in the middle. Image from a *Prose Lancelot* manuscript, Morgan Library, MS M.805, fol. 67r.

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## INTRODUCTION

Same-sex desire in medieval literature has been of interest to modern scholars for only several decades. Since the nineties, a popularity for rereading medieval literary works in order to uncover as of yet unfrequently-discussed same-sex elements has been growing steadily.<sup>1</sup> This form of rereading, commonly called “queering” historical literature, generally aims to highlight homosocial affection and explore its potentially homoromantic connotations within their historical contexts. In so doing, the field of queer studies tries to uncover instances of explicit or implicit same-sex affection in medieval literature and, in the process, gain a deeper understanding of the historical and literary context in which same-sex desire appeared.<sup>2</sup>

Queer studies are of importance to modern research because they illuminate a side of historical – and in this case, medieval – literature that may have been overlooked in the past. Since queer studies, as a field, has only been around for a short time, elements of same-sex desire in many stories have not yet received as much attention as other elements, such as desire between men and women. When queering medieval literature, however, one needs to be cautious not to enforce modern notions of sexuality onto medieval characters; specific sexual identities – such as homosexual or heterosexual – did not exist in the medieval period and should therefore not be applied to medieval same-sex discourse. Although it is tempting to discuss medieval love through modern ideas of sexuality, one needs to refrain from this tendency to prevent historical anachronism of same-sex desire.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, recognising same-sex desire in the medieval period from a modern standpoint can be difficult, because medieval same-sex attraction may not have been portrayed in the same way as modern same-sex attraction. An example of this difficulty lies, for instance, in strong male-male friendships: although the devotion found between two male friends or comrades-in-arms is supposedly rooted in platonic affection, this devotion could be regarded as excessive and a sign of homoromantic affection instead (perhaps especially to modern readers). Same-sex desire in these instances could be found, then, in similarities to confirmed romantic heterosexual relationships or deviations from the platonic norm that belongs to such an instance of a strong friendship.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Linkenen, *Same-Sex Sexuality in Later Medieval English Culture* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Gretchen Mieszkowski, “The ‘Prose’'s Lancelot, Malory’s Lavain and the Queering of Late Medieval Literature,” *Arthuriana* 5 (1995): 22.

<sup>3</sup> See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, introduction to *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

Another difficulty is that the appearance of same-sex desire in medieval texts may be present, but not overt. As will be shown in this thesis, there was little tolerance towards same-sex desire during most centuries of the Late Middle Ages; incorporating explicit same-sex relationships in medieval narratives therefore may have been risky. Instead writers may have included same-sex desire through the use of homoerotic subtext. Through such subtext, writers could incorporate elements of same-sex desire while shielding their narratives from censure and blame. Understanding the historical context surrounding same-sex desire in these centuries may help reinterpret male-male relationships in medieval texts and uncover their possible romantic implications.

Thus, this thesis participates in a broader scholarly movement of queering medieval works; it does so by outlining key theological and social developments surrounding same-sex desire in Western Europe from the eleventh until the fourteenth centuries and by drawing on this socio-historical context to analyse three Arthurian stories written during these centuries: the *Lai de Lanval*, the *Prose Lancelot* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For medieval writers, the predominantly-male society that is characteristic of the Arthurian court could serve as a powerful and generative backdrop for exploring male-male desire or romance, which is why the Arthurian legend is the main focus of this research. This thesis aims to analyse every potential site of same-sex desire in these Arthurian texts, such as hints, symbolism, or obvious displays of affection which can be interpreted ambiguously, in order to bring to light any possible homoromantic elements in these texts. These homoromantic elements will be analysed within their historical contexts – including the social and legal developments pertaining same-sex desire that took place during each period under consideration – in order to elucidate whether the stories under discussion reflect on, or participate in, these developments.

While research into medieval same-sex desire is, in many ways, still in its infancy, there have been some important studies on the subject. The most influential of these include John Boswell's ground-breaking *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* and Michael Goodich's *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period*. These works remain among the most extensive discussions of some of the figures, events and literary creations that reflected and shaped medieval responses to same-sex desire.

Since the nineties there has been an increase in scholarship on the representation of same-sex desire in Arthurian texts in particular. This scholarly movement includes articles like Gretchen Mieszkowski's "The 'Prose's Lancelot, Malory's Lavain and the Queering of Late

Medieval Literature”, and Carolyn Dinshaw’s “A Kiss is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*”, both of which focus on the presence of homosexuality in Arthurian literature. Yet, scholarship dealing with same-sex attraction in the Arthurian tradition is by no means abundant; no full article has yet been dedicated to exploring the depiction of homosexuality in the *Lai de Lanval*, for example. At present there are few scholarly works that analyse the Arthurian legend through a queer studies lens, and use the historical context to gain a better understanding of these stories. The area merits further investigation; since Arthurian legends were remarkably popular within the late medieval period, the way that they depict homosexuality offers a particularly valuable window unto medieval attitudes toward same-sex desire. These are two of the key goals of the present study.

This thesis is divided into six chapters, set out in an alternating pattern. Each of the odd-numbered chapters discusses the historical framework of same-sex desire within a given century (or centuries, in the case of the first chapter), while each of the even-numbered chapters explore an Arthurian text that was written in the century discussed in the previous chapter. Chapter 1 explores the eleventh and twelfth centuries, outlining the changing tolerance towards same-sex desire in Western Europe. The eleventh and the first half of the twelfth centuries are marked by a general acceptance of homosexuality; during this period, high-ranking clerical positions were occupied by men who openly expressed affection for fellow men, and homoromantic clerical literature was written relatively free of censure. Although it is as early as the eleventh century that we find, through voices like that of Peter Damian, the emergence of a wide-scale and systematic condemnation of homosexuality in Europe, there was little response to these voices at the time. This attitude of relative acceptance changed considerably in the twelfth century, when the regulations on the clergy became stricter and same-sex acts were more frequently described as “sodomy” – a sin against nature and against God. The Third Lateran Council of 1179 determined that clerics and laymen who engaged in same-sex intimacy should be stripped of their functions, and the council thereby represented Western Europe’s changed opinion on same-sex intimacy.

The *Lai de Lanval*, which is the focus of chapter 2, was written around the time of the Third Lateran Council. In Marie de France’s lai, the knight Lanval is accused of being gay because he rejects the advances of the queen. This chapter explores the possibility of underlying homoerotic subtext in Lanval’s characterisation, ostracization and relationship to the magical being who becomes his lover. The chapter shows that *Lanval* reflects, through its depiction of

the main character and his experiences, the emergence of an intolerant attitude toward same-sex desire explored in the previous chapter.

Picking up on the historical thread of previous chapters, chapter 3 explores the thirteenth century, a period in which accusations of same-sex intimacy gradually became more dangerous, since punishments for it were enacted in several places in Western Europe. Sodomy – as a distinct form of sexual sin – was discussed by a number of high clerics and scholars, which reflects an increasing concern over the topic. Most notably, the general status of same-sex desire declined throughout Europe.

The next chapter then explores the thirteenth-century *Prose Lancelot*, in which a strong knightly bond ambiguously crosses the fine line between homosocialism and homoromanticism. The knight Galehaut, on a quest to conquer thirty kingdoms, adores Lancelot from the moment he sees him and devotes his entire being to him. Their relationship contains elements of both heterosexual romance and of the relationship between knightly comrades-in-arms, and this raises the possibility that their bond is a romantic connection hidden beneath a mask of platonic knightly affection. This chapter analyses the *Prose Lancelot* as a homoromantic story written in a homophobic century.

Chapter 5 discusses the fourteenth century. While previous chapters were focused on Europe more generally, this chapter focuses primarily on Great Britain, firstly because it was home to the Arthurian text which will be discussed in chapter 6, the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and also because fourteenth-century Great Britain witnessed the emergence of events that are useful for a broader discussion of medieval same-sex desire. Some of these events include the persecution of the Knights Templar (which started in France) and the reigns and depositions of kings Edward II and Richard II, whose rumoured homosexual escapades cost them their lives. As this chapter shows, accusations of sodomy were used as weapons to get rid of generally disliked figures; the mere mention or suggestion of the sin of sodomy could plant the seeds of suspicion in the minds of others, and had the power to bring rulers or entire groups of people to their knees.

After this discussion of the fourteenth century, chapter 6 rounds off the discussion with an analysis of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a poem that was written sometime between the middle and end of the fourteenth century. The most obvious same-sex aspect of the story is the relationship between Sir Gawain and Lord Bertilak, who, because of their game, kiss each other several times and would have to copulate if Lady Bertilak had been successful in her



seduction of Gawain. Chapter 6 also aims to find out to what extent these kisses can be considered romantic, platonic, or whether they serve a more comedic purpose as they do in other works from the same period.

Before proceeding, the subject at hand necessitates a quick note on the terminology used in this thesis. While most modern scholars apply the word “sodomy” to medieval same-sex discourse, in the Middle Ages itself, the term had ambiguous and shifting connotations; it could encompass several different forms of non-procreative sexual sins (including forms of sexual intercourse between two people of different genders). This thesis will mostly use terms such as same-sex desire, same-sex intimacy and same-sex acts during the textual analyses, but will use “sodomy” when referencing scholars who used the word to refer to medieval discourse surrounding same-sex acts (unless stated otherwise). For the sake of stylistic variation, the term “homosexuality” will also be used to refer to medieval same-sex attraction, although it is worth noting that the term is a nineteenth-century invention.

## CHAPTER 1 – THE ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUEER EUROPE

### *Introduction*

This chapter discusses the social and legal developments surrounding same-sex desire in Europe during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Although scholars have shown that the years between 1050 and 1150 were relatively tolerant towards same-sex activities, this chapter shows that during this period some opposition to these activities emerged in the form of a selected few who raised their voices regarding homoerotic behaviour within monasteries. The term “sodomy” was heard more frequently, first encompassing several different sins, but later, in a more limited sense, signifying male-male intercourse. Scholars have argued that the clergy aimed to draw attention away from sodomy within the monastery by turning their attention towards the laity, and that this development led to kings also being subject to accusations of sodomy. After discussing topics such as tolerance of same-sex desire, the eleventh- and twelfth-century church reforms, the concept of sodomy and significant clerical and noble figures who either discussed or were accused of same-sex desire, this chapter will move on to the second half of the twelfth century, in which the Third Lateran Council of 1179 officially established penalties for acts of sodomy.

### *1050–1150: Homoromantic Literature*

John Boswell argues that between 1050 and 1150, same-sex desire was mostly accepted in Western Europe. Bill Burgwinkle even dubs Europe in these decades a “queer utopia”.<sup>4</sup> One of the reasons that this time period was tolerant, according to these two scholars, was an increase in urbanisation, a change which “developed an atmosphere of liberty and tolerance in which individual rights and personal freedom were of paramount importance”.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, the period saw a new appreciation for romantic literature emerged – in the sense of literature that depicts romantic love. This development is well documented, but it is worth noting that this literature also featured love between people of the same gender. Boswell claims that “statistically, the proportion of gay literature surviving from this period is astonishing”.<sup>6</sup> This “gay literature” was mostly written by clerics who wrote to close friends of

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Burgwinkle, “Queer Theory and the Middle Ages,” *French Studies* 60 (2006): 79.

<sup>5</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 208.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

the same gender, making rather explicit proclamations of love towards one another. Although clerics, in general, had more opportunities to record their feelings than members of the general public, Boswell states that same-sex intimacy was likely known to all classes of medieval society.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the clerical literature from this period dealt with passionate friendships that bordered on the romantic. Saint Anselm, prior of Bec and later archbishop of Canterbury (1093–1109), was, according to Boswell, one of the century’s most influential figures when it regarded the discussion of passionate friendships among monks.<sup>8</sup> Some of his letters were addressed to his (male) “dilectio dilectori” or “beloved lover”, after which followed extensive descriptions of his love for the addressee.<sup>9</sup> In a letter to one Dom Gilbert, Anselm laments the man’s absence and expresses his need to be reunited with him, for their separation made him realise how much he loved him. This letter could, for Boswell, “pass for a letter between lovers in any society”.<sup>10</sup> The agony of missing a loved one is echoed by two letters found in a twelfth-century manuscript from Bavaria, which was written by one religious woman to another. In one of these letters, the writer explicitly mentions the beauty of the addressee and the kisses and physical touches which they shared, and how much she wishes to be reunited with her beloved.<sup>11</sup>

Another important clerical figure who discussed passionate friendships with obvious homoromantic implications was Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167),<sup>12</sup> a Cistercian monk who, according to Boswell, “gave love between those of the same gender its most profound and lasting expression in a Christian context”.<sup>13</sup> In two works, the *De speculo caritatis* (*Mirror of Charity*) and *De spirituali amicitia* (*On Spiritual Friendship*), Aelred wrote about the significance of human affection and in what ways it could bring humankind closer to God. Aelred is not secretive; he describes how he had felt a special love for his (male) friends in his youth, and one particular friendship was, according to Aelred, “dulcis mihi super omnes dulcedines illius vitae meae” [sweeter to me than all the sweet things of my life].<sup>14</sup> Aelred wrote about the significance of affectionate male-male friendships in a time when the “traditions of

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<sup>7</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 56.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 219

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 220–21.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1979), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 221.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

monasticism” were convinced that passionate friendships “were a threat to monastic harmony and asceticism”.<sup>15</sup> As opposed to other abbots of his time, Aelred even allowed his monks to hold each other’s hands as a natural sign of affection.<sup>16</sup> He spread his word among his monks, and his works gained great popularity in the twelfth century.<sup>17</sup>

#### *1050–1150: Objections Against Monastic Same-Sex Intimacy*

Boswell gives a series of examples of cases in which eleventh-century clerics spoke up about homosexuality in the church and asked for stricter legislations on same-sex activities, but were either silenced or ignored by higher clerics, such as the pope. So when theologian Peter Damian (whose ideas will be discussed at greater length in a later section) expressed to Pope Leo IX (1048–1054) that priests and monks who had intercourse with fellow priests and monks should be stripped of their rank and punished, the pope’s reply was lukewarm, and the pope even implied that Damian had been indulging in the very same practices that Damian complained about.<sup>18</sup> Pope Leo, in the end, ignored Damian’s accusations and suggestions for punishments.

Another example is that of archbishop Ralph of Tours, who had prevailed upon the king of France to install his own lover John as bishop of Orléans. Yves of Chartres (ca. 1040–1116) strongly disapproved of this instalment and informed Pope Urban II of it, in the hope that the pope would prevent it. John had also had sexual relations with the king and with Ralph’s brother, and had even received a nickname from the people: Flora, “in reference to a celebrated courtesan of the day”.<sup>19</sup> Despite Yves’ pleas, the contemporary pope responded with little enthusiasm and did nothing to stop John from becoming consecrated in 1098.<sup>20</sup>

The cases of Peter Damian and Yves of Chartres suggest that in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the Church of Western Europe was not greatly concerned about those engaging in same-sex intercourse. Michael Goodich supports this hypothesis, stating that “there is no evidence whatsoever of widespread persecution of sexual deviants until the thirteenth century”, and that the clergy seemed more concerned with persecuting cases of clerical marriage, adultery and family relationships.<sup>21</sup> According to William Burgwinkle, Saint Anselm

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<sup>15</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 225.

<sup>16</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 225.

<sup>18</sup> William Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity and Law in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 54.

<sup>19</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 213.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>21</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 7.

even expressed reluctance about persecuting sodomy by arguing that it was practised so frequently that it would not be recognised as a sin by those engaging in it.<sup>22</sup> In short, despite some complaints, homoerotic literature was being written and the high clergy interfered little with homoerotic relations.

### *1050–1150: The Gregorian Reform*

Meanwhile, the desire for church reforms grew. Rapidly-urbanising Western Europe posed new threats to the Church's control over European society, and thus the Gregorian reformers aimed, as explained by David F. Greenberg, "to create a theocratic empire by tightening the organizational discipline of the Church so that priests' loyalties would be owed to the Church, undiluted by allegiances to secular authorities or by affection for wives or concubines".<sup>23</sup> There are two principal issues related to this attempt to regain control that are worth noting here: the introduction of punishments for simony (the purchase of ecclesiastical privileges),<sup>24</sup> and clerical marriage. Pope Leo IX was particularly in favour of these changes, the same pope who dismissed Peter Damian's complaints about clerical homosexuality. In 1049, Leo condemned the practices of simony and priestly marriage during councils in Germany, Italy and France, aiming to have the two practices universally acknowledged as punishable sins. His preaching was successful; simony was considered a sin by the end of the eleventh century,<sup>25</sup> and all priestly marriages were declared invalid during the First Lateran Council in 1123.<sup>26</sup> This decision was designed to bring to an end to all heterosexual relationships between members of the established Church, and to transform religious houses into all-male or all-female societies.

This transformation had its consequences, especially for the occurrence of same-sex intimacy within monasteries. Several scholars consider this separation between men and women as a potential cause for an increase of same-sex activity within the church. Greenberg summarises the process as follows:

The elimination of heterosexual outlets for priests as a result of the celibacy rule could only have fostered the development of homoerotic feelings. Sexual experience is not merely a form of tension release or a source of physical pleasure; it is also a way of establishing and maintaining emotional intimacy with others. In some people—the proportion is not known, but is probably substantial—and in

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<sup>22</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 200.

<sup>23</sup> David F. Greenberg, "Christian Intolerance of Homosexuality," *American Journal of Sociology* 88 (1982): 535.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Richard Sévère, "Bromance in the Middle Ages: The Impact of Sodomy on the Development of Male-Male Friendship in Medieval Literature" (PhD diss., Purdue University, 2010), 57.

<sup>26</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 216.

some circumstances, the psychological need for such relationships is stronger than the orientation toward partners of a particular sex. Thus when a group of people is deprived of the opportunity to satisfy the need for emotional intimacy heterosexually, some members of the group can be expected to seek the fulfillment of that need homosexually. This is especially likely to happen in single-sex milieus, where contact with members of the opposite sex is entirely cut off.<sup>27</sup>

Greenberg argues that the increase of homoromantic literature of the twelfth century discussed above was potentially a result of stricter rules about heterosexual relationships in monasteries.<sup>28</sup> If the Gregorian reform had not forcefully repressed the sexuality of members of the clergy, they might not have turned to each other for sexual relief.<sup>29</sup>

Frank Barlow agrees with this possibility, stating that “[m]edieval society, with its fostering of single-sex communities, especially the army and monastic order, and the Church with its insistence on celibacy and disgust at the ‘animality’ of women, produced conditions particularly favourable to homosexuality”.<sup>30</sup> Richard Sèvre, too, claims a lack of wives and concubines catalysed same-sex acts between men, and concludes that “the male body would become the target of reform as well as the catalyst for a sexual crisis”.<sup>31</sup> Ruth M. Karras even mentions that “[c]lerics complained that enforcement of priestly celibacy meant that priests had to have sex with men”.<sup>32</sup> Eventually, this development was going to lead to increasing accusations of sodomy within the church, as will be explained in the next section.

### *Same-Sex Desire as the Sin Against Nature*

In the Middle Ages, sexual orientations and terms referring to same-sex attraction did not exist. Instead, there existed a general word for acts which included sexual intercourse with a person of the same gender: sodomy. Yet the word was nebulous and its connotations shifted overtime. Prior to the twelfth century, the word was used to encompass a variety of different sexual sins, including same-sex intercourse. Burgwinkle calls it “a catch-all category for all that is evil and unclassifiable”. According to Burgwinkle, the word could be used in general terms to refer to an act which “disrupts established law, systems of classification, religious, ethnic, and gender

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<sup>27</sup> Greenberg, “Christian Intolerance,” 536.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 537.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 538.

<sup>30</sup> Frank Barlow, *William Rufus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 108.

<sup>31</sup> Sèvre, “Bromance,” 61.

<sup>32</sup> Ruth M. Karras, “Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity in Medieval Europe,” *Journal of Women’s History* 11 (1999): 167.

boundaries”,<sup>33</sup> and Greenberg explains that sodomy “represented a going beyond natural limits in the sexual sphere”.<sup>34</sup>

The related term “sodomite”, at the time, was a broad term used to describe those who performed specific actions that went against the norm. Burgwinkle describes the medieval sodomite as someone “whose actions are explicitly social, a danger to others as much as to himself”, a threat to the collective entities and ethnic communities in which they perform.<sup>35</sup> Karras explains that medieval homosexuality was not an identity, but rather a series of acts,<sup>36</sup> and Michael Rocke indeed confirms that the sodomite “was not a homosexual, but a person who committed the various acts defined as sodomy”.<sup>37</sup> From the twelfth century onwards, the word gradually started to be used in a more limited sense to refer to sexual intercourse between two people of the same gender. The first recorded person to use “sodomy” to refer solely to same-sex acts was Peter Cantor (who died in 1197).<sup>38</sup>

The word “sodomy” comes from a story in the Old Testament, “the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah”. In the story, two male angels visit the city of Sodom and are invited in by King Lot. Meanwhile, all the male citizens gather outside and demand Lot to bring them the angels because they want to have sex with them. Lot refuses and proposes to give his virgin daughters instead, but the men cannot be budged and pressure him to do as they say, trying to break down the door. The angels tell Lot that he and his family must leave the city, because they shall punish it when they are gone. When Lot and his family have left, the angels blind the Sodomites and destroy Sodom.

The four fathers of the Western Church, Jerome (347–420), Ambrose (340–397), Augustine (354–430) and Gregory the Great (540–604), commented on this Biblical story, each providing different ideas about what the true crime of the Sodomites was. Mark Jordan summarises their commentary: Jerome sees “brazen arrogance bred of opulence” and “a specific but instated sexual act” in the performed act of sodomy in the story, while for Ambrose it is “fleshly indulgence and lasciviousness”.<sup>39</sup> Augustine is the first to create “an explicit

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<sup>33</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Greenberg, “Christian Intolerance,” 540.

<sup>35</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 21–22.

<sup>36</sup> Karras, “Prostitution,” 159.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>38</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 277.

<sup>39</sup> Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 33–4.

description of the sin of the Sodomites as the desire for same-sex copulation”, because it is clear that the male citizens wanted to rape the male angels and rejected the women offered by Lot.<sup>40</sup> For Augustine, “[t]he root sin of the Sodomites is not the desire for same-sex copulation” but “rather the violent eruption of disordered desire itself”.<sup>41</sup> For Gregory the Great, lastly, sodomy had to do with perverse desires of the flesh. Jordan mentions that by the end of the patristic period (around 800), the sins of the Sodomites had become mostly sexual ones.<sup>42</sup>

Scholars such as Jordan and Sévère regard Peter Damian (1007–1072) as one of the most influential figures concerning the use of the word “sodomy” to refer to same-sex acts. Damian was an Italian theologian and reformist who wrote the *Liber gomorrhianus*, in which he discussed his disapproval of the increased homosexual activity in the church of his time. In his preface, Damian strongly condemns the vice against nature, which he considers “shameful to speak of”.<sup>43</sup> Damian presents four manners of sinning against nature: “some sin with themselves alone; some commit mutual masturbation; some commit femoral fornication; and finally, others commit the complete act against nature”,<sup>44</sup> and he argues that clerics engaging in these practices should be removed from their positions.<sup>45</sup> Damian also claims that these clerics tried to hide their practices by confessing to each other, “to keep the knowledge of their guilt from becoming known to others”.<sup>46</sup> In one of his later chapters, Damian remarks that when “a male rushes to a male to commit impurity, this is not the natural impulse of the flesh, but only the goad of diabolical impulse”, as if those men were possessed by evil spirits.<sup>47</sup>

Damian presented his work to Pope Leo IX, but, as explained before, he did not receive much response. Leo IX disregarded his views (as mentioned above), and Boswell notes that during the Lateran synod in 1059, Damian received replies to each of his points on church reforms except those on homosexuality.<sup>48</sup> Boswell even retells the story of how Pope Alexander II “stole the *Liber gomorrhianus* from Peter and kept it locked up”.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, Peter’s

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<sup>40</sup> Jordan, *Invention*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Damian, *Book of Gomorrah: An Eleventh-Century Treatise Against Clerical Homosexual Practices*, trans. Pierre J. Payer (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 27.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>48</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 213.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*



opinions gained a following throughout the twelfth century, and sodomy became the topic of discussion more frequently.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, sodomy became associated with the “unnatural”, and was frequently called “the sin against nature”.<sup>51</sup> This association emerged because sodomy “did not lead to procreation”, which was “the sole ‘natural’ purpose of sex according to Catholic dogma”.<sup>52</sup> Other sexual activities that fell under the same category were masturbation, bestiality, and unprocreative sex between two people of the opposite sex.<sup>53</sup> Alan of Lille, who died in 1202, argued that sodomy “frustrated the conception of children”, which made it sinful, unnatural and obstructed happiness (which, according to him, meant fulfilling one’s natural purpose).<sup>54</sup> The definition of the sin against nature was, for Alan, “the expending of one’s seed outside its proper vessel”, which also included adultery, incest, rape, anal- or oral intercourse, sex with nuns, and the aforementioned masturbation and bestiality.<sup>55</sup> There were many different acts that were regarded as a sin against nature, and same-sex intercourse was one of them.

A side-note can be made about the connection between sodomy and misogyny. Many scholars have pointed out that men were often accused of sodomy because of its feminine – and thus negative – associations. Carol Pasternack, for instance, explains that “twelfth-century writers regarded sodomy as particularly abhorrent because men were believed to take on feminine sexual roles, in addition to giving in to an effeminizing desire”.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Henric Bagerius and Christine Ekholst mention how in the medieval period the penetrator was seen as male and the penetrated as female, which became an issue when these roles were applied to two men: “The man who allowed another man to penetrate him (...) challenged society’s patriarchal structure by accepting that another man could treat him as if he were a woman”.<sup>57</sup> According to Ulrike Wiethous, men were associated with “power, judgment, discipline, and reason” and women with “weakness, mercy, lust and unreason”,<sup>58</sup> which implies that if a man took on “the

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<sup>50</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 21 and Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 65.

<sup>51</sup> Henric Bagerius and Christine Ekholst, “Kings and Favourites: Politics and Sexuality in Late Medieval Europe,” *Journal of Medieval History* 43 (2017): 301.

<sup>52</sup> Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 33.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>56</sup> Carol Braun Pasternack, *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 166.

<sup>57</sup> Bagerius, “Kings and Favourites,” 302.

<sup>58</sup> Ulrike Wiethous, “Sexuality, Gender and the Body in Late Medieval Spirituality; Cases from Germany and the Netherlands,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 (1991): 35.

female role in sex”, he was seen as a woman and thus as lustful and weak. This is confirmed by Jo Ann McNamara, who states that men were encouraged to refrain from being effeminate.<sup>59</sup> She summarises that men who did not fit in received the same negative label as women.<sup>60</sup>

Burgwinkle explains another medieval link between sodomy and femininity: “Like sodomy, femininity, usually seen as a form of artifice, lurks just beneath the surface, ready to take hold of the thoughtless sinner”.<sup>61</sup> Karras notes that women were so closely associated with lustfulness that only women who were virgins or married but only had sex with their husbands to procreate, would not be placed in the category of whore. All other women, even those who only deviated the slightest from the two categories of virgin and procreating wife, would.<sup>62</sup> Jordan describes how Peter Damian saw a sodomite as “unmanned”, “womanish” and “seeking for completion in men”.<sup>63</sup> Pasternack explains that men were expected to devote themselves to women or to the lineage they would receive from marrying them, so “men who were devoted to each other could hardly be men”.<sup>64</sup> McNamara even states that men who refused to lay with women were ridiculed.<sup>65</sup> To desire a man, and thus to act on sodomy, was seen as leading to loss of one’s masculinity.<sup>66</sup> In summary, men who desired men were quickly associated with femininity, which was regarded a negative feature in these centuries.

#### *Accused Kings*

In the eleventh century, one of the people accused of sodomy because of femininity was King William Rufus (William II). He was the third son of William the Conqueror and ruled over England from 1087 until 1100. The chronicles of his time (or shortly after) imply that William’s court was known for its flamboyancy. His life has been recorded by at least three chroniclers: Eadmer of Canterbury, William of Malmesbury and Oderic Vitalis.<sup>67</sup> Of these three, only Eadmer wrote during the time of William’s life, with William and Oderic writing some decades later.<sup>68</sup> Eadmer, Saint Anselm’s biographer, recorded how Anselm visited William’s court in

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<sup>59</sup> Jo Ann McNamara, “The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150,” in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 22.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 70.

<sup>62</sup> Karras, “Prostitution,” 170.

<sup>63</sup> Jordan, *Invention*, 57.

<sup>64</sup> Pasternack, *Gender*, 165.

<sup>65</sup> McNamara, “*Herrenfrage*,” 11.

<sup>66</sup> Pasternack, *Gender*, 165.

<sup>67</sup> Sévère, “Bromance,” 69.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

1092 and addressed him with concern about his reputation, but to no avail. In February 1094, Anselm saw how “juventus ferme tota crines suos juvenularum more nutriebat; et quotidie pexa, ac irreligiosis nutibus circumspectans, delicatis vestigiis, tenero incessu, obambulare solita erat” [the young men grew their hair like girls, freshly combed, with roving eyes and irreligious gestures, and minced around with girlish steps].<sup>69</sup> During a sermon on Ash Wednesday, Anselm tried to force the men into cutting their hair, or they would neither receive the holy ashes, nor absolution for their sins.<sup>70</sup> When Anselm then tried in a private appeal to convince William to join the Church in its fight against sodomy, the king refused.<sup>71</sup>

Other chroniclers, too, witnessed the court’s flamboyancy. Burgwinkle quotes Hugh of Flavigny, who came to William’s court in 1096 and claimed that William Rufus was “addicted to worldliness and carnal pleasures”.<sup>72</sup> William of Malmesbury, writing around 1125 (25 years after the king’s death), wrote, as summarised by Frank Barlow, “a band of effeminates and a flock of harlots [*ganeae*] followed the court, so that the court of the King of England was more a brothel of catamites than a house of majesty”.<sup>73</sup> Orderic Vitalis condemned the activities at William’s court as well, referring to his men as male prostitutes,<sup>74</sup> but, according to Boswell, Orderic “seems to have been obsessed with homosexuality and imputed it to most prominent Normans”, which might devalue his opinion somewhat.<sup>75</sup> Because of the frivolity and femininity of William II’s men, others suspected the king of committing sodomy.

There may have been more reasons for these chroniclers’ strong focus on the effeminacy of William’s court and the presence of sodomy. Sévère mentions the possibility that the clergy who accused the king may have done so in order to direct accusations of sodomy towards the secular community and away from the Church.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, William Rufus remained a bachelor throughout his entire life and did not reproduce. This fact, combined with the flamboyancy of his court, did not work in his favour. Sévère states that “Rufus had aroused suspicion mainly because he continuously neglected one of his primary duties as a sovereign ruler – Rufus never married nor produced any heirs to his throne, instead spending most of his

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<sup>69</sup> Sévère, “Bromance,” 70.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 50.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Barlow, *William Rufus*, 104.

<sup>74</sup> Sévère, “Bromance,” 71.

<sup>75</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 230.

<sup>76</sup> Sévère, “Bromance,” 69.

time enjoying the frivolities of court”.<sup>77</sup> Due to the ban on clerical marriage, it had become the nobility’s responsibility to marry and reproduce.<sup>78</sup> All these facts combined – William’s refusal to get married, his disinterest in women, and the feminine men in his court – raised the suspicion of sodomy.

Another high-profile figure accused of sodomy was the twelfth-century king Richard Lionheart, also known as Richard I, who ruled over England from 1189 until 1199. Richard was accused less explicitly than William Rufus. Modern historians mainly suspect that Richard may have been interested in men because of his close relationship with Philippe Auguste of France, who the king had known since childhood.<sup>79</sup> Burgwinkle says that Richard’s feelings for Philippe “swing from love to hate”, but that according to chronicler Ralph of Coggeshall, “even [Richard’s] final hours on earth were marred by thoughts of [Philippe]”.<sup>80</sup> Next, Burgwinkle quotes an account of Benedict of Peterborough, who recorded a meeting between the two in 1187, implying that they even shared the same bed:

Philippe (...) held [Richard] in such high honor and for such a long time that they ate from the same dish and at night no bed kept them apart. The King of France cherished him as he did his own life; they loved each other with such a love that, confronted with the violence of their feelings for one another, the King of England was stupefied, wondering what to make of it.<sup>81</sup>

Historical sources strongly imply that Richard and Philippe were more than just childhood friends.

Aside from Richard’s connection to Philippe, his disregard for his expected duty of marrying and procreating aroused suspicion among his contemporaries. It is suggested that Richard was uninterested in having sex with his wife Berengaria, who he married mostly to please his mother.<sup>82</sup> In addition to this, however, Richard also seemed to care little about his lack of an heir,<sup>83</sup> and, combined with his lack of sexual desire for his wife, this attitude invited suspicion. As explained by Burgwinkle, an absence of public desire for women was often treated as an almost direct invitation for accusations of sodomy, because it suggested that a man disfavoured women and thus favoured men.<sup>84</sup> Such a lack of public desire and lack of an heir

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<sup>77</sup> Sévère, “Bromance,” 73.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 81–82.

were particularly problematic for kings, for whom marrying and procreating was held to be a duty. As Burgwinkle notes, Richard “became a target of such innuendo because he flaunted his disregard for cultural norms and expectations”.<sup>85</sup>

Roger of Howden’s account of a visiting hermit at Richard’s court further enhances the discussion of Richard’s sexual interests. This hermit tells Richard the following: “Be thou mindful of the destruction of Sodom, and abstain from what is unlawful; for if thou dost not, a vengeance worthy of God shall overtake thee”.<sup>86</sup> Richard ignores the hermit’s message until he falls gravely ill and he confesses to his sins. Roger notes that Richard “after receiving absolution, took back his wife, whom for a long time he had not known: and, putting away all illicit intercourse, he remained constant to his wife, and they two became one flesh, and the Lord gave him health both of body and soul”.<sup>87</sup> According to this account, Richard engaged in “what is lawful” and “illicit intercourse”, and the reference to Sodom suggests that this may have been same-sex intercourse, although the chronicle does not further specify this option. To Burgwinkle, however, it is clear that the acts he performed were “thought shameful by himself and by others and that sex with his wife was seen as an appropriate tonic”.<sup>88</sup> If these practices included same-sex acts, the reaction of the public indicates an intolerance towards these practices – an intolerance that had been rising during this part of the century.

#### *1150–1200: The Third Lateran Council and the Downfall of Queer Europe*

To summarise, until the first half of the twelfth century, same-sex love occurred and was discussed openly in Western Europe. Greenberg describes how “an urban-based male homosexual subculture apart from the knightly classes flourished in the towns of the 11th and 12th centuries, particularly, but not exclusively, among clergy and university students (who were often clerics)”,<sup>89</sup> while Boswell brings up a medieval manuscript in Leiden which mentions Chartres, Sens, Orléans and Paris as the cities with “a flourishing well-developed gay subculture of prostitution and highly specialized erotic interests” (although the manuscript describes these towns in a denigrating way).<sup>90</sup> But throughout the twelfth century, the situation for those deviating from the norm became gradually more complicated. Rebecca Slitt states

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<sup>85</sup> Sévère, “Bromance,” 81.

<sup>86</sup> Roger of Howden, *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden: Comprising the History of England, and of Other Countries of Europe from A.D. 732 to A.D. 1201*, trans. Henry T. Riley (London: H.G. Bohn, 1853), 356.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>88</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 80.

<sup>89</sup> Greenberg, “Christian Intolerance,” 532.

<sup>90</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 261.

how “[u]neasiness about blurred boundaries of gender and sexuality (...) resulted in increased accusations of sodomy – that is, cases in which masculine friendship went against social norms”.<sup>91</sup> Sévère elaborates on how “the fear of sodomy spread quickly throughout Western Europe”,<sup>92</sup> and that “accusations of sodomy were intensely commonplace” by the mid-twelfth century. They even “[penetrated] the storylines of popular literary texts”.<sup>93</sup> The cases of the accused kings showed that “public political figures were subject to censure by the officials of the Church, thus proving that concerns about same-sex acts had moved beyond the confines of the monastery, becoming an all-pervasive concern throughout society”.<sup>94</sup> Aside from the nobility, heretics and other outsiders, too, “were accused of practicing ‘sodomy,’ often (...) in the specific sense of homosexual intercourse”,<sup>95</sup> and heresy and sodomy received the same punishment.<sup>96</sup>

The fate of those committing the sodomy was officially established during the Third Lateran Council of 1179, a major influential council for Western Europe. The first two Lateran councils, in 1123 and 1139, focused more on clerical celibacy, but by the third, sodomy had become an active topic of discussion. Boswell calls the council “the first ecumenical (‘general’) council to rule on homosexual acts”, reacting to the Europe’s growing intolerance towards nonconformists and imposing penalties which had not been imposed before.<sup>97</sup> Among these nonconformists were those committing sodomy. The eleventh canon of the Third Lateran Council preached the following:

Quicumque in incontinentia illa quae contra naturam est, propter quam venit ira Dei in filios diffidentiae, et quinque civitates igne consumpsit, deprehensi fuerint laborare, si clerici fuerint, ejiciantur a clero, vel ad poenitentiam agendam in monasteriis detrudantur; si laici, excommunicati subdantur, et a coetu fidelium fiant prorsus alieni.

[Whoever shall be found to have committed that incontinence which is against nature, on account of which the wrath of God came upon the sons of perdition and consumed five cities with fire, shall, if a cleric, be deposed from office or confined to a monastery to do penance; if a layman, he shall suffer excommunication and be cast out from the company of the faithful.]<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Rebecca Slitt, “The Boundaries of Women’s Power: Gender and the Discourse of Political Friendship in Twelfth-Century England,” *Gender & History* 24 (2012): 2.

<sup>92</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 81.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>94</sup> Sévère, “Bromance,” 73.

<sup>95</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 283.

<sup>96</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 277.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 277–78.

The “incontinence which is against nature” and the wrath of God performed on the five cities all refer to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (which are two of the aforementioned five cities). Thus, the council established on a Church-wide scale that anyone engaging in that for which the Sodomites were punished, should be expelled (if they are clergy) or excommunicated (if they are laymen). Peter Damian’s notion that sodomy largely indicated same-sex practices had become significantly more popular by the second half of the twelfth century, and although the appearance of sodomy in the canon of the council could signify multiple sexual sins, Boswell admits that “its social context suggests strongly that it was aimed at homosexual practices”.<sup>99</sup> The general disapproval of same-sex acts increased greatly during these decades, and most scholars agree that by the start of the thirteenth century, same-sex intimacy was largely denounced and persecuted.<sup>100</sup>

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, the social and legal status of same-sex desire changed significantly from the first half of the eleventh until the end of the twelfth century. Although for a while Western Europe seemed rather tolerant to same-sexual practices (as, for instance, openly homosexual clergy held important clerical functions and literature written by seemingly homoromantic monks such as Aelred was, according to Boswell, popular), voices against these practices, such as that of theologian Peter Damian, became louder. At the same time, the Church’s desire clerical celibacy grew, which transformed monasteries into all-male or all-female communities. Scholars have argued that this fuelled same-sex activities within monasteries, since men or women only had each other to relieve their sexual urges.

From the second half of the twelfth century onwards, Peter Damian’s views became much more popular, and by the Third Lateran Council of 1179, acts of “sodomy” – an umbrella term for several sins but, by then, most often regarded intercourse between men – became punishable for both clergy and laymen. Gregorian reformers had an action plan to wipe out sodomy, as summarised by Goodich: “The first goal was the degradation and expulsion of sinful, sodomous clergy; the second aim, the extension of such restrictions to the laity”,<sup>101</sup> which happened to the eleventh-century king William Rufus and the twelfth-century king Richard Lionheart, who were accused of sodomy respectively because of a feminine court and a close relationship to another man. Furthermore, both kings had little desire for sexual relations with women and

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<sup>99</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 278.

<sup>100</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 52, Boswell, *Christianity*, 265 and Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 39.

neither produced an heir, which sparked suspicion. Knightly communities, also mostly all-male environments, were quickly charged with accusations of sodomy as well. By the end of the twelfth century, same-sex intercourse was generally unaccepted in Western Europe.



## CHAPTER 2 – “DES FEMMEZ N’AVEZ TALENT” [YOU HAVE NO INTEREST IN WOMEN]: SAME-SEX SUBTEXT IN MARIE DE FRANCE’S *LANVAL*

### *Introduction*

The *Lai de Lanval* is one of Marie de France’s twelve Anglo-Norman lais, written near the end of the twelfth century. The lai tells the story of Lanval, a knight at Arthur’s court. He is said to have come from far, born as “Fiz a rei...de haut parage” [the son of a king of high degree].<sup>102</sup> Lanval is ostracised by the other knights and left out during the king’s gift-giving, and he leaves court when he feels particularly alone. During his rest, he is approached by two beautiful ladies who bring him to their queen, who promises Lanval that she will love him as long as he does not tell others of her existence. When Lanval returns to Arthur’s court, with many riches provided by his new lady, Arthur’s queen (unnamed in the poem) approaches him and tries to seduce him, but Lanval refuses her, which angers her. She then accuses him of preferring men over women.

At this point, Lanval becomes defensive and in a rush of emotion breaks his promise to his lady that he would keep their relationship a secret. The queen’s accusation is the only explicit mention of same-sex desire in the lai, and yet there is reason to assume that the story contains more homoerotic subtext. After all, the Third Lateran Council was close to the time in which Marie de France wrote, and she may have been influenced by its edicts. As this chapter will show, several aspects of Lanval’s characterisation suggest that the narrative, despite being wholly heteronormative on the surface, contains homoerotic subtext when contextualised within its historical frame.

### *The Depiction of Lanval*

First of all, Lanval is characterised as an outcast. Within the first fifty lines, Marie informs her readers that Lanval is the only knight who does not receive “Femmes e tere” [wives and lands] from King Arthur, and that “Ne nul de[s] soens bien ne li tient” [none of his men favoured him either].<sup>103</sup> The other knights dislike Lanval, and “Tel li mustra semblant d’amur, / S’al chevalier mesavenist, / Ja une feiz ne l’en pleinsist” [some feigned the appearance of love / who, if

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<sup>102</sup> Marie de France, *Lanval*, trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (Grand Rapis: Baker Academic, 2009), 105. All translations of *Lanval* were taken from this edition. All Anglo-Norman textual examples are taken from Marie de France, *Lai de Lanval*, Arts & Sciences, Hommes & Dieux, accessed July 10, 2019. [http://jacques.prevost.free.fr/moyen\\_age/MariedeFrance\\_lai\\_lanval.htm](http://jacques.prevost.free.fr/moyen_age/MariedeFrance_lai_lanval.htm). Unless otherwise noted, all footnotes referencing Arthurian texts refer to translations.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

something unpleasant happened to him, / would not have been at all disturbed].<sup>104</sup> Moreover, Lanval is said to be far from home – “Mes luin ert de sun heritage” [but he was far from his heritage] – and poor, because he had spent all his riches while not receiving anything from Arthur (which enhances the negative image others have of him): “Tut sun aveir ad despendu; / Kar li reis rien ne li dona, / Ne Lanval mut entrepris” [but he had spent all his wealth, / for the king gave him nothing / nor did Lanval ask].<sup>105</sup> Marie describes him as “Hume esytrange descunseillez” [a strange man, without friends],<sup>106</sup> a knight who does not belong.

The story emphasises, however, that Lanval is a splendid knight. Arthur’s other men envy Lanval “Pur sa valor, pur sa largesce, / Pur sa beauté, pur sa prüesce” [For his valor, for his generosity, / his beauty and his bravery] and it is said that he “mut fu enseigniez” [was very well bred].<sup>107</sup> Moreover, he is completely loyal to his lord, despite not receiving much from him. He rejects the queen’s advances because he wants to remain faithful to Arthur: “Lungement ai servi le rei; / Ne lie voil pas mentir ma fei. / Ja pur vus ne pur vostre amur / Ne mesf[e]rai a mun seignur” [I’ve served the king a long time; / I don’t want to betray my faith to him. / Never, for you or for your love, / will I do anything to harm my lord].<sup>108</sup> Lanval seems to possess many qualities that belong to a loyal, chivalric knight, and yet he is disliked by the entire court.

Despite these heroic qualities, Lanval is unpopular; one might assume there could be another reason as of why the men do not engage with him, aside from that he comes from far. There is, for instance, no explicit reason given as to why Arthur deliberately refuses to give Lanval land or a wife (and indeed the last detail is suggestive in itself). Burgwinkle writes the following:

Signs of failure to maintain this veneer [of masculine control], through dress, performance, demeanor, or inappropriate sexual activity, leads inevitably to accusations of gender slippage, to humiliation, and often to the accusation of sodomy as well. Thus any knight or monk who shows less than complete regard for the established order, or who is led by personal ambition more than institutional allegiance, is liable to be *ostracized, excluded*, and, in many cases, sacrificed (emphasis added).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Marie de France, *Lanval*, 105.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>109</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 201.

In the beginning of the story is established that Lanval is ostracised and excluded from the knightly community; the knight Gawain even admits it himself at some point: “nus feimes mal / De nostre cumpainun Lanval, / (...) / Que od nus ne l’avum amené” [we wronged / our companion Lanval / (...) / when we didn’t bring him with us].<sup>110</sup> Moreover, upon accusing Lanval of same-sex desire, the queen’s choice of words is remarkable. She mentions that “Asiz le m’ad hum dit sovent” [people have often told me] that Lanval prefers boys, which strongly suggests she was not alone in her suspicions. Although Lanval is a foreign man, he is of high birth and a good and loyal knight; it would not be surprising if he was regarded highly by his peers. Yet Lanval is excluded from the group, and this fact, in combination with the queen’s words (which insinuate that Lanval was rumoured to have enjoyed the company of other men), suggest that there were other reasons as of why Lanval was an outcast; possibly because he may have behaved in a way that aroused suspicions of sodomy.

Another aspect of the narrative with hints at a same-sex subtext is Lanval’s panicked reaction upon hearing the queen’s accusation. When Lanval refuses the queen’s advances because he does not want to betray his king, the queen says the following: “‘Lanval,’ fete le, ‘bien le quit, / Vuz n’amez gueres cel delit; / Asiz le m’ad hum dit sovent / Que des femmez n’avez talent. / Vallez avez bien afeitiez, / Ensemble od eus vus deduiez” [‘Lanval,’ she said, ‘I am sure / you don’t care for such pleasure; / people have often told me / that you have no interest in women. / You have fine looking boys / with whom you enjoy yourself].<sup>111</sup> Although Lanval refused her calmly before, these words distress him. He is “mut...dolent” [quite disturbed] and he responds without thinking it through: “Del respundre ne fu pas lent. / Teu chose dist par maltalent / Dunt il se repenti sovent” [he was not slow to answer. He said something out of spite / that he would later regret].<sup>112</sup> Lanval replies the following: “‘Dame,’ dist il, ‘de cel mestier / Ne me sai jeo nient aidier; / Mes jo aim, [e] si sui amis / Cele ke deit aver le pris / Sur tutes celes que jeo sai” [‘Lady,’ he said, ‘of that activity / I know nothing, / but I love and am loved / by one who should have the prize / over all the women I know]. He then insults the queen by stating that each of his lady’s servants are more beautiful and better than her.<sup>113</sup> His reaction shows that he feels heavily attacked by the queen’s words; he tries so fervently to disprove the queen’s claim that he accidentally reveals the secret of his lady. Sévère

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<sup>110</sup> Marie de France, *Lanval*, 111.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

mentions that “accusations of sodomy were particular damaging to knightly characters because [they] attacked reputations that were purportedly rooted in a compulsory heterosexual identity”.<sup>114</sup> Thus, Lanval’s identity as heterosexual knight was on the line, which was apparently so precarious that it caused him to break his promise to his lady.

The queen accuses Lanval of homosexuality because of Lanval’s lack of sexual interest in her, and, as shown in the previous chapter, lack of sexual interest in women invited suspicions of sodomy. McNamara explains how men, from the first half of the twelfth century onwards, drew negative attention when they did not actively engage in sexual relationships with women.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, McNamara explains that “[e]ngaging in sex (...) was necessary to the construction of masculinity”,<sup>116</sup> so men who did not have sex with women were considered less masculine. By insinuating that Lanval prefers men, the queen verbally attacks his masculinity.<sup>117</sup>

Although the queen insults Lanval in multiple ways, the allegation that he prefers men appears to be the most significant for Lanval. The queen tells him, for instance, that her husband made a mistake in accepting him into his knighthood: “Mut est mi sires maubailiz / Que pres de lui vus ad suffer” [my lord made a bad mistake / when he let you stay with him].<sup>118</sup> Before breaking the promise to his lady, Lanval mostly addresses the queen’s allegation that he would rather lie with men, commenting that “de cel mestier / Ne me sai jeo niënt aidier” [of that activity / I know nothing].<sup>119</sup> The fact that he only responds to the queen’s accusation and not to the rest of her insults, implies that being accused of same-sex desire was worse for him than being told that he does not deserve to be one of Arthur’s knights. In order to defend his own masculine identity, Lanval not only feels forced to tell the queen that she is wrong, but also to inform her of his lady and insult her while he is at it.

It can be argued that Lanval’s panicked reaction is in keeping with the perceived severity of homosexuality in the twelfth century. After all, the Third Lateran Council authorised clergy and laymen to be excommunicated when they were charged with sodomy, which indicated the increasing intolerance towards same-sex desire of Western Europe. Thus it can be argued that Lanval’s reaction reflects the danger of being accused of same-sex desire in the twelfth century.

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<sup>114</sup> Sévère, “Bromance,” 84.

<sup>115</sup> McNamara, “Herrenfrage,” 11.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>117</sup> Cassidy Leventhal, “Finding Avalon: The Place and Meaning of the Otherworld in Marie de France’s *Lanval*,” *Neophilologus* 98 (2014): 195.

<sup>118</sup> Marie de France, *Lanval*, 113.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

The queen's accusation alone would be enough to damage his (already fragile) reputation, and if others at King Arthur's court were to believe her, Lanval might risk being driven away (and thus being excluded more than he already had been).

Lanval's meeting with his mystical lady and the lady herself form other aspects that hint at homoerotic subtext in the lai. First of all, when Lanval follows the two women towards the lady's tent, the narrator notes that he leaves his horse behind: "Le chevalers od eles vait; / De sun cheval ne tient nul plait, / Que devant lui pesseit al pre" [The knight went with them; / giving no thought to his horse / who was feeding before him in the meadow].<sup>120</sup> Andrew G. Miller explains that during the Late Middle Ages, "a man's status and reputation – his masculinity – are tied directly to his mount" and that "horses symbolized masculine dominance and control".<sup>121</sup> Within this framework, Lanval's decision to leave his horse behind operates as him leaving behind his masculinity. Medieval men who displayed interest in other men were often associated with effeminacy,<sup>122</sup> which would connect Lanval's abandoning his masculinity with the possibility of homosexual desire. When leaving with the women to find the fairy lady, Lanval gave no thought to his masculinity, abandoning it in the meadow as he left to explore the unknown (same-sex desire).

As mentioned earlier, during the time in which *Lanval* was written, same-sex love was increasingly disapproved of and condemned. Therefore, openly writing about same-sex desire may have had its risks, and – in order to avoid accusations of sodomy – same-sex narratives would have likely been included through subtext. One can argue that such homoromantic subtext can be found in the existence and portrayal of Lanval's magical lady. The lady tells Lanval that their relationship should remain a secret, which is in keeping with the secrecy that was more often necessary to uphold romantic same-sex relationships in the late twelfth century. After Lanval has accepted the lady's love, she says to him, "Si vus comant e si vus pri, / Ne vus descovrez a nul homme! / De ceo vus dirai ja la summe: / Aa tuz jurs m'avriez perdue, / Se ceste amur esteit seüe; / Jamés ne me purriez veeir / Ne de mun cors seisine aveir" [I command and beg you, / do not let any man know about this. / I shall tell you why: / you would lose me for good / if this love were known; / you would never see me again / or possess my body].<sup>123</sup> Lanval has to swear to keep their love a secret, otherwise they will not see each other again.

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<sup>120</sup> Marie de France, *Lanval*, 107.

<sup>121</sup> Andrew G. Miller, "'Tails' of Masculinity: Knights, Clerics, and the Mutilation of Horses in Medieval England," *Speculum* 88 (2013): 962.

<sup>122</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>123</sup> Marie de France, *Lanval*, 109.

“Se ceste amur esteit seüe” [if this love were known] indicates specifically that they should hide their love because it is considered wrong. The secrecy of this relationship presents a clear parallel with same-sex relationships of the late twelfth century which, as discussed in the previous chapter, were increasingly becoming dangerous.

Additionally, the fairy lady appears to be the only woman Lanval is able to show interest in, but she is no earthly woman. One could argue that his love for the fairy lady is symbolic for his love for men, because both men and the magical lady do not fall under the label of earthly women. It is telling that Lanval appears unable to find love among the women of Arthur’s court, and that his love is ultimately confined to someone who subverts social expectations. Even when the narrative reaches its supposedly happy heterosexual ending, Lanval has to leave Arthur’s court. Lanval is unable to acquire happiness within Arthur’s (heterosexual) society. Presenting Lanval’s love in this manner – he can only romantically connect with someone who does not fit in the normative world of Camelot – may have been the only possible and generally-accepted way to create a male character with queer desires; readers who could relate would be able to recognise the deviant, forbidden and dangerous side to Lanval’s love. The love story would not be criticised by the public – because it occurred between a man and a woman – and yet those who did not feel accepted by society could find themselves in Lanval and his unspeakable love.

### *Conclusion*

The possibility of same-sex desire is openly raised in Marie de France’s *Lanval*. Lanval is accused of desiring men and the queen’s choice of words suggests she is not alone in her suspicions. Lanval is ostracised, depicted as a man without a lack of interest in women or producing an heir, and he panics when the queen accuses him. His ostracization and his lack of sexual interest in women are in line with reasons as of why men were accused of sodomy in the twelfth century. Lanval’s panicked reaction upon being accused, too, reflects the atmosphere of increased danger surrounding same-sex desire that marked the latter half of this century. On a less overt but still notable scale, Lanval is depicted as abandoning his horse – a detail which, given how a knight’s horse symbolised his masculinity, is suggestive of Lanval’s loss of masculinity. This loss of masculinity, as already discussed with respect to William Rufus’ court, raises the potential of Lanval’s desire for men. Lastly, homoerotic subtext can be found hidden behind Lanval’s relationship with his magical lady; their love should remain a secret, because others would not understand it. Like a love between two people of the same gender in the twelfth century, Lanval’s love for his lady is considered forbidden and unspeakable. Once

contextualised within its historical frame, then, the lai appears to contain elements of same-sex desire, not just in the obvious case of the queen's attempted seduction of Lanval, but in other elements of the plot as well.

## CHAPTER 3 – THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY: THE INCREASE OF INTOLERANCE

### *Introduction*

This chapter sheds light on the development of clerical and secular opinions on same-sex acts in the thirteenth century. As this chapter shows, works written in this century indicate that the fate of sodomites took a turn for the worst; the punishments for people engaging in sexual relations with someone of the same gender became explicit and often rather harsh. The scholars mentioned in this chapter carefully elaborate on dates, councils and texts which, combined, show how society changed throughout the thirteenth century – and the consequences these changes exerted on nonconformists.

### *The Thirteenth Century: Situation and Development*

As explained previously, the Third Lateran Council of 1179 was the first council to institute Church-wide penalties on those who had committed sodomy, namely degradation for clergy and excommunication for laymen.<sup>124</sup> The growing control of the Church and the desire for reform lead to the persecution of those that did not fit the norm. Throughout the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is visible how clerical authorities went on a assiduous quest to create complete uniformity across Europe and thereby eradicate anyone who did not fit the standard.<sup>125</sup>

Due to rapid urbanisation in Europe, the Church's fear of sexual expression and its urge to oppress and regain control increased.<sup>126</sup> Greenberg summarises the situation as follows:

Intolerance toward homosexuality and other forms of sexual activity grew in late antiquity because of the strains of profound social change. After a period of comparative acceptance, repression began again in the 13th century as an unanticipated consequence of organizational reforms in the church and of class conflict associated with the commercialization of medieval society.<sup>127</sup>

While the eleventh and twelfth centuries are generally characterised by what Boswell describes as their adventurousness, tolerance and acceptance, the thirteenth (and fourteenth) century

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<sup>124</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>125</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 270.

<sup>126</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 16.

<sup>127</sup> Greenberg, *Christian Intolerance*, 542.



presented itself as “restraining, contracting, protecting, limiting and excluding”.<sup>128</sup> R.I. Moore notes that persecution in these centuries became habitual. He explains that

deliberate and socially sanctioned violence began to be directed, *through established governmental, judicial and social institutions*, against groups of people defined by general characteristics such as race, religion, or way of life; and that membership of such groups in itself became to be regarded as justifying these attacks (emphasis in original).<sup>129</sup>

Sodomites, as well as Jews, heretics and lepers, found themselves among these groups of persecuted people.<sup>130</sup> The quest for ultimate conformity had begun, and it went at the expense of many minorities.

In the thirteenth century, same-sex desire received more attention from clerical and legal authorities than before. First of all, European laws were created in order to supervise issues which posed a threat to the ultimate conformity of Europe,<sup>131</sup> and councils were held and statutes were drawn up which dealt with the crime of sodomy. The Council of Paris (1212) forbade nuns from sleeping together and required that a lamp should be burning in all dormitories during the night,<sup>132</sup> and the Council of Rouen (1214) issued a similar statute which focussed on clerics. These rules aimed to prevent two men or two women from secretly seeking each other’s physical company in the dark.<sup>133</sup> Burgwinkle writes that by the 1220s, those accused of sodomy were to leave the order and never return.<sup>134</sup> An example where this happened was the order of the Cistercians, where the general chapter expelled convicted sodomites in 1221.<sup>135</sup> Goodich sums up a collection of statutes that lists sodomy as a “reserved crime”, which meant crimes referring to “high ecclesiastical authority”: those of Paris at the end of the twelfth century (1196), Angers (1216–19), Fritzlar (1246), Liège (1287) and lastly Cambrai at the start of the fourteenth century (1300–10). Other crimes that got described using this term were homicide, incest, sacrilege, vow-breaking, injuring one’s parents and the deflowering of a virgin,<sup>136</sup> and to enforce these regulations, statutes issued by the Dominicans (1238), the Carthusians (1261) and the Cistercians (1279) ordered their abbeys to build prisons in which “sodomites, thieves, incendiaries, forgers, and murderers could be incarcerated at the

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<sup>128</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 269.

<sup>129</sup> R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 5.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 269.

<sup>132</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 39.

<sup>133</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 46.

<sup>134</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 39.

<sup>135</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 46.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

abbots' discretion".<sup>137</sup> Compared to the twelfth century, the thirteenth century's attitude towards sodomites became much more unfavourable, and official law codes were passed in order to legally persecute them.

Aside from the councils and statutes, targeted missions, investigations and organisations emerged which actively persecuted nonconformists. As early as 1203, for instance, Pope Innocent III commenced a formal investigation in the Macon region of France, which looked into the practice of sodomy among the clergy.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, during the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (a council which, according to Goodich, "brought to fruition many of the intellectual currents that had animated the church in the twelfth century"),<sup>139</sup> an organisation called the Inquisition was established.<sup>140</sup> The Inquisition was installed by the Dominican and Franciscan orders of France and was authorised mainly to persecute heretics, but soon the penalties for heresy began to be applied to other kinds of nonconformists as well, such as "sodomites, gamblers, prostitutes, pimps, incendiaries, drunkards, adulterers, and a host of other offenders against Catholic morality".<sup>141</sup> Greenberg notes that the influence of the Inquisition spread throughout Europe, and that in Spain, the organisation actively focused on punishing those engaging in same-sex intimacy.<sup>142</sup>

In thirteenth-century England, some bishops, including Alexander Stavensby of Coventry and Lichfield (1224–1237), Fulk Basset of London (1245–1259), and Peter Quinel of Exeter (ca. 1287), urged their priests to actively seek out sodomites and punish them.<sup>143</sup> As the increase in organisations and investigations seeking out sodomy in this century suggests, it was becoming increasingly hard to act upon one's sexual desire for people attracted to the same gender. It appeared that the danger of being punished for falling by the wayside grew.

#### *Sodomy in Thirteenth-Century Clerical Literature*

The general attitude towards sodomy had changed in the thirteenth century, and discussions of the sin appeared more and more frequently in scholarly and clerical literature:

While relying on the same essential sources already cited by the twelfth-century theologians, the scholastic philosophers of the thirteenth century attempted to base

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<sup>137</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 46.

<sup>138</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 31.

<sup>139</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 51.

<sup>140</sup> Greenberg, *Christian Intolerance*, 542.

<sup>141</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 54.

<sup>142</sup> Greenberg, *Christian Intolerance*, 542.

<sup>143</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 46.

their condemnation of sodomy on more rational grounds and attempted to fit their discussion into a systematic treatment of all the vices against nature.<sup>144</sup>

An example of the new emphasis on condemning sodomy can be found in Paul of Hungary's (d. 1242) *Liber poenitentia* (or *Summa of Penance*, 1220), written for his Dominican brothers of the St. Nicholas in Bologna.<sup>145</sup> In his *Liber*, the Dominican priest focusses on the sin of lust, or *luxuria*. While most forms of *luxuria*, such as incest, receive about three lines each, the sin of sodomy earns itself what Burgwinkle describes as “three hundred lines of virulent denunciation”.<sup>146</sup> The text is divided into four parts: a definition of the sin against nature (especially sodomy), its causes, reasons for its atrociousness and suitable punishments.<sup>147</sup> According to Paul, sodomy is “unmentionable”, “worse than incest” and in conflict with one's relationship with God.<sup>148</sup> The extensiveness of Paul's *Liber* reflects the growing interest in the sin of sodomy in the thirteenth century.

Other works from this century stress the heinousness of sodomy. One of these is the *Summa de poenitentia* by William of Auvergne (1180 – 1249), who was the bishop of Paris and professor at the University of Paris. According to William, a man who spills his semen outside its “proper vessel” offends nature through sodomy and homicide.<sup>149</sup> Dominican preacher William Peraldus (ca. 1190 – 1271) thinks of sodomy as the worst form of *luxuria*, and writes in his *Summa de virtutibus et vitiis* (ca. 1236) that by engaging in sodomy, one perverts their nature and separates themselves from God.<sup>150</sup> Some thirteenth-century writers even call the sodomy an “unmentionable” sin; these include William of Auvergne, who mentions that preachers “dare not name it”, but use the words “unmentionable vice” to describe it instead.<sup>151</sup> Dominican lector John of Freiburg-im-Breisgau (d. 1314), too, writes in his *Summa confessorum* (ca. 1280 – 1298) that the sin of sodomy is so awful that “the mere mention” of it “pollutes the lips and ears”, and that the punishment that was afflicted upon Sodom proves the sin's heinousness.<sup>152</sup> In the eyes of these scholars, sodomy was a grave sin, the name of which should not even be mentioned out loud.

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<sup>144</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 68.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>146</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 33.

<sup>147</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 60.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

The English Thomas of Chobham (ca. 1160–ca. 1240) addresses same-sex acts in his *Summa confessorum* (ca. 1216). Thomas was a master of arts and theology who held clerical positions at Salisbury and London and who studied under Peter Cantor in Paris. He also served as emissary of King John of England once. In his extensive work, Thomas discusses same-sex acts shortly in a chapter on sins against nature (“De peccato contra naturam”).<sup>153</sup> Thomas presents four ways of sinning against nature: sexual acts with women in places that are not meant for such acts (such as anal intercourse), masturbation, sex between two men or two women, and sex with animals.<sup>154</sup> Thomas regularly returns to his discussion of bestiality (“diabolicum si vir vel mulier exerceat cum bruto animali”),<sup>155</sup> and proposes several severe punishments for engaging in the sin.<sup>156</sup> The work may have been dedicated to rural preachers, according to Goodich, because they would encounter bestiality more frequently than urban preachers.<sup>157</sup> Still, Thomas also sternly addresses same-sex intercourse, and preaches that any form of sexual intercourse with any number of women is preferable to sex with another man: “Esset enim minus damnabile omnem mulierem et quantumcumque multitudinem tangere naturaliter quam naturam semel pervertere sive etiam in muliere sive alio modo”.<sup>158</sup> He substantiates his argument by reciting the story of Lot’s people, who wanted to have sex with the male angels.

In Robert of Flamborough’s (d. 1224) *Liber poenitentialis* (1208–1215), same-sex intercourse is discussed in possible interviews between a confessor and penitent – a form known as a “confessional dialogue”.<sup>159</sup> Robert was a confessor himself and a penitentiary of the abbey of St. Victor in Paris, and his *Liber* presented a manual for future confessors who had not yet acquired much experience.<sup>160</sup> The following passages contain examples of interviews about same-sex acts:

Sacerdos: Quondam luxuria pollutes est?  
 Poenitens: Nimis.  
 Sacerdos: Umquam contra naturam?

<sup>153</sup> Thomas of Chobham, *Summa Confessorum*, ed. F. Broomfield (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1968), 398. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the primary sources discussed in this chapter are my own.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*: “Quidam enim abutuntur mulieribus vel non in loco ad hoc concessio, vel ordine nature non observato. Quidam etiam propriis membris abutuntur ad libidinem. Quandoque etiam sicut ait Apostolus, masculi cum masculis, et mulieres cum mulieribus turpitudinem operantur. Quandoque etiam tam viri quam mulieres ad abusionem brutorum animalium accedere non formidant.”

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 402–3.

<sup>157</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 58.

<sup>158</sup> Thomas of Chobham, *Summa*, 399.

<sup>159</sup> Michael Cornett, “The Form of Confession: A Late Medieval Genre for Examining Conscience” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2011), *DAI A 73* (2012), 3477536, *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*.

<sup>160</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 56.

Poenitens: Nimis.  
Sacerdos: Umquam cum masculo?  
Poenitens: Nimis.  
Sacerdos: Cum clericis an cum laicis?  
Poenitens: Et cum clericis an cum laicis.

[Priest: Have you ever been corrupted by lust?  
Penitent: A lot.  
Priest: Ever against nature?  
Penitent: A lot.  
Priest: Ever with a man?  
Penitent: A lot.  
Priest: With clerics or with laymen?  
Penitent: Both with clerics and with laymen.]

Sacerdos: Cum masculo peccasti?  
Poenitens: Cum multis.  
Sacerdos: Umquam aliquem innocentem introduxisti ad hoc?  
Poenitens: Tres scholares et subdiaconum.

[Priest: Have you sinned with a man?  
Penitent: With many.  
Priest: Have you ever introduced innocents to this [sin]?  
Penitent: Three students and a subdeacon.]<sup>161</sup>

Goodich notes that “these mock confessions may not be entirely fictional”, because of the newly founded Parisian university and its many young students who possibly tended to “[satisfy] their lustful drives in less than traditional ways”.<sup>162</sup> The appearance of discussions about same-sex acts in the abovementioned works illustrate not only the growing interest in the topic, but also the growing intolerance towards it.

### *Sodomy and Heresy*

As mentioned above, there was a close correspondence between the public opinion on sodomites and heretics. Goodich notes that heresy and sodomy were fundamentally linked in this period; he finds that as early as the eleventh century the two transgressions were assigned the same punishment.<sup>163</sup> As mentioned before, the papal Inquisition that was initially established to persecute heretics soon added sodomites to its list. Boswell explores why in the Middle Ages sodomy and heresy were closely linked. He describes heretics as “the most despised of all the minorities of the later Middle Ages”, and explains how the connection was regarded:

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<sup>161</sup> Robert of Flamborough, *Liber Poenitentialis*, ed. J. J. F. Firth (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1971), 195–96, 298.

<sup>162</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 58.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Numerous heretics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (...) were accused of practicing ‘sodomy,’ often (though not always) in the specific sense of homosexual intercourse. Civil and ecclesiastical records of trials dealing with heresy mention ‘sodomy’ and crimes ‘against nature’ with some regularity. It became a commonplace of official terminology to mention ‘traitors, heretics and sodomites’ as if they constituted a single association of some sort. ‘Bougre,’ a common French word for heretics, even came to refer to a person who practiced ‘sodomy’ or, more particularly, ‘a homosexual male.’<sup>164</sup>

However, he confesses that the documents mentioning sodomy and heresy as such may not have been entirely reliable, as they were all left by the clerical authorities who persecuted heretics.<sup>165</sup> Due to this fact, no other thirteenth-century opinions are available to modern scholars than those of people positioned against heretical sects. Furthermore, Boswell notes, the widespread similarities between texts dealing with heresy suggest a formulaic approach to the issue: “the frequency with which exactly the same accusations appear against different heretical movements in widely separated geographical areas suggests that specific charges against heretics may often have been standard formulae rather than actual observations”.<sup>166</sup> Due to these issues, it is not easy to find clear evidence of the exact reason why sodomy and heresy were so closely linked in this period.<sup>167</sup>

Despite this problem, Boswell suggests three possible reasons for the connection and explains them extensively. The first of these possible explanations, in his words, is that “many heretics actually were gay”. Because the Catholic Church was gradually turning against people with same-sex desires, perhaps especially those who were part of the Christian faith, some “could have sought spiritual satisfaction in unorthodox movements with more flexible sexual attitudes”, instead.<sup>168</sup> Boswell mentions how the heretics in southern France were often accused of homosexuality, and because the south of France had been particularly rich in its collection of “gay literature” in the previous centuries, this connection supports his suggestion.<sup>169</sup> In short, Boswell considers the possibility that because of the Church’s intolerant attitude towards homosexuals, those who did not feel welcomed in the church may have felt motivated to create an environment in which they felt accepted and could still obtain spiritual satisfaction, such as a heretical sect.

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<sup>164</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 283–84.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

Boswell's second suggestion is the following: "heretical movements may have been more sympathetic toward homosexuality than was orthodox Catholicism", meaning that heretics did not express same-sex desire themselves, but that they were more tolerant than the Church towards those who did. He describes how some sects may have even encouraged same-sex intercourse more than heterosexual intercourse, as "many heretical movements (...) disapproved of procreation, since it entrapped souls in evil matter".<sup>170</sup> The Albigensians, a heretical sect in the thirteenth century, seem to have been particularly focused on the idea "that homosexual relations were not only sinless but a desirable means of foiling the devil's efforts to ensnare souls in matter".<sup>171</sup> Again, however, it is difficult to prove whether sects engaged in homosexual relations consciously or merely received the label from contemporaries condemning their practices in their writing.

Boswell phrases his third suggestion as such: "some gay people may have been branded heretics for refusing to renounce their erotic preferences". It is possible that not all believers thought homosexuality was bad, either because they were familiar with a different tradition or just disagreed with the Church's views, and they may have spoken out against the treatment of sodomites. However, their opinions could get them into trouble: "Such people would have come under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition and been severely punished if they refused to alter their stance".<sup>172</sup> Although few cases in which this happened are known, Boswell notes the prosecution of Arnald de Vernhola in the fourteenth century, who believed that same-sex acts were not more serious than fornication, a belief, Boswell puts between parentheses, "which would have been completely orthodox only 200 years before".<sup>173</sup> Arnald was accused of heresy and pretended to be a priest; yet his opinion on same-sex intercourse seemed to attract most attention from the Church officials and "[occupied] a very large percentage of his trial record".<sup>174</sup> In short, heretical sects may have encouraged same-sex intercourse because of their beliefs, or orthodox Christians disagreed with the Church which earned them the stamp of heretic.

As mentioned before, the discussions of heresy in records and statutes from different places are so identical that they seem to have been written down from a ubiquitously known

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<sup>170</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 285.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

formula used for condemning heresy. Likely, these judgments and punishments were not actually put to practice, but may have served as “conscious fabrications for propaganda purposes”.<sup>175</sup> Boswell claims that “[t]here is (...) considerable reason to suspect ecclesiastical officials of wishing to portray heretics in the most damaging light possible”, and the unstable and ever-evolving society of the thirteenth century may have been a suitable environment to make this happen.<sup>176</sup> That heresy was seen as one of the greatest threats to Christian society and the association with homosexuality that came along with it “contributed greatly to the profoundly negative reaction against gay sexuality visible at many levels of European society during this period”.<sup>177</sup> Heresy appears to have played a significant role in the decaying situation for homosexuals during the thirteenth century.

### *Punishments*

Thirteenth-century European law codes against sodomites included a varying range of punishments, which were written down in detail and evolved over the decades. Between 1200 and 1250 the punishments were relatively mild. According to Boswell, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 focussed a little less on sodomy than its predecessor in 1179, but its injunctions did mention that clerics “especially” should avoid “sodomy”, and that married clergy mostly would receive severe punishments upon committing sexual sins, “because they could make use of legitimate matrimony” (“cum legitimo matrimonio uti possint”).<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, special provisions were issued for those providing shelter to priests who had committed “sexual irregularities”.<sup>179</sup> Another example is The *Liber extra*, promulgated by Gregory IX in 1234, in which the eleventh canon of the Third Lateran Council was inserted as a part of canon law. This canon, as explained before, stated that those committing the sin against nature should be deposed from office (clergy) or excommunicated (laymen).<sup>180</sup> These punishments were already serious, they were not yet the harsh sanctions they were going to become.

The pressures against nonconformists increased in the second half of the century,<sup>181</sup> and the punishments for committing the sin against nature became more severe; in several places, engaging in the sin could even result in the death penalty.<sup>182</sup> A Castilian royal edict (ca. 1250)

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<sup>175</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 286.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 43.

<sup>181</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 288.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.



contains an example of such severe punishments. Boswell presents the following translation of the edict:

Although we are reluctant to speak of something which is reckless to consider and reckless to perform, terrible sins are nevertheless sometimes committed, and it happens that one man desires to sin against nature with another. We therefore command that if any commit this sin, once it is proven, both be castrated before the whole populace and on the third day after be hung by the legs until dead, and that their bodies never be taken down.<sup>183</sup>

Another Spanish code, the *Las Siete Partidas* (*The Book of Laws*, 1256–63), prescribed castration and stoning to death for an act of sodomy.<sup>184</sup> The code, drawn up for King Alfonso X (Alfonso the Wise) states the following (in translation):

*Regarding Those Who Commit Sexual Sins against Nature*

‘Sodomy’ is the sin which men commit by having intercourse with each other, against nature and natural custom. And because from this sin arise many evils in the land where it is perpetrated, and it sorely offends God and gives a bad name not only to those who indulge in it but also to the nation where it occurs, (...) we wish here to speak of it in detail. (...) Anyone can accuse a man of having committed a crime against nature before the judge of the district in which the crime was committed. If it is proved, both of those involved should be put to death.<sup>185</sup>

The code presents a different penalty for someone who was either forced or under the age of fourteen, since “those who are forced are not guilty” and “minors do not understand how serious a crime they have committed”.<sup>186</sup> The text prescribes the same penalty for bestiality. Boswell mentions that the code was not put into action until the fourteenth century and “it is doubtful that any provisions of this sort were regularly enforced”, but it still forms an interesting testimony to the thirteenth-century opinion on sodomy.<sup>187</sup> Greenberg informs how the punishment for sodomy was changed into burning by “Catholic Monarchs” Queen Isabella I and King Ferdinand II in 1497. Thirteenth-century Spanish codes prescribed explicit, severe punishments for sodomites.

During the reign of King Louis IX (1226–1270), a code in Orléans, France was published, containing the contemporary Spanish laws. This code summed up three punishments for three consecutive offenses of sodomy. For men, the first offense would result in castration,

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<sup>183</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 288.

<sup>184</sup> Greenberg, *Christian Intolerance*, 534.

<sup>185</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 289.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

the second in dismemberment and the third in burning (or the in first in mutilation, the second in castration and the third in burning, according to Goodich). For women, the first two offenses would result in dismemberment and the third in burning.<sup>188</sup> Boswell notes that this code is one of the few cases that discusses punishments for same-sex acts between two women.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, the goods of everyone convicted were to be confiscated by the king, which “was an open invitation to monarchs in financial difficulties to eliminate nonconformity from their lands and relieve their fiscal embarrassment simultaneously”.<sup>190</sup> More codes from France state similar punishments: the *Les Coutumes de Beauvaisi*, written by Philippe de Baumanoir (1250–1296) in 1283, the *Coutumes de Touraine-Anjou*, which focussed on bishops, and the *Établissements* of St. Louis, noted with papal decretals, all prescribe burning and the confiscation of goods for those convicted.<sup>191</sup>

The two most important twelfth-century English lawcodes, *The Laws of Henry the First* (1115) and Glanvil’s *Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Kingdom of England* (1187–1189) do not mention homosexuality, but a code drawn up a century later, *Fleta* (finished near the end of the thirteenth century), which was “a manual of English law published at the court of Edward I”,<sup>192</sup> states that those who had intercourse with Jews, animals or people of their own gender should be buried alive. Goodich mentions that the punishment for sodomites who were caught in the act was death by fire.<sup>193</sup> Even though *Fleta* is in many aspects very similar to *The Laws of Henry the First*, the punishments for homosexuals seem to have been newly added.<sup>194</sup> This addition demonstrates that within a century, the intolerance towards same-sex desire increased. The *Mirror of Justices*, from around 1290 and attributed to Andrew Horn, prescribes the punishment of burying alive for sodomites as well. Like Spain and France, the penalty for sodomy in England was death.

Important to note is that, as with the legislation previously discussed, scholars are unsure to what extent these punishments were actually executed throughout the century. Boswell poses the question and concludes that medieval legal records existing today do not provide the answer: “Very little is actually known about infliction of the death penalty for any crimes, and what is

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<sup>188</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 289–90.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 290–91 and Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 77.

<sup>192</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 77.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 292–93.

known – e.g., in the case of heresy – is vehemently disputed”.<sup>195</sup> The only recorded penalties are rare instances of capital punishments for the crime of “sodomy”.<sup>196</sup> In England, Karras notes, while thirteenth-century law codes mention burning or burying as penalties for sodomy, no statute dictated the punishment until Henry VIII’s reign (1533), nor are there many records of actions taken against sodomites by secular or ecclesiastical courts.<sup>197</sup> About France, as noted by Burgwinkle, there were no convictions of sodomy during the reigns of Louis IX (1226–1270) or Philip IV (1285–1314), but one trial and execution were noted during Philip V’s reign (1316–1322).<sup>198</sup>

It appears that in Europe, legislation against sodomy was not enforced too strenuously, despite what the law codes suggest.<sup>199</sup> One of the few known cases of an execution for same-sex intimacy occurred in Ghent, in present-day Belgium. A man named Johannes was executed for performing an act against nature, detested by a God, “cum quodam viro” [with a certain man]. John was burned for his crime on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September of 1292, at the Saint Peter of Ghent.<sup>200</sup> This case aside, the legislations against sodomy and homosexuality seem to have served more as a warning than as something which would be enforced.<sup>201</sup> In short, although the law codes from the century suggest that sodomites were punished severely, few records from the time explicitly state that this was the case.

### *Conclusion*

To summarise, the thirteenth century represented a difficult time for those harbouring same-sex desires. Rapidly-urbanising Europe was in need of control, which resulted in the persecution of any form of nonconformity. Clerics from this century discussed the sin against nature to a great extent, and the general idea across Europe became that sodomy was a grave sin for which someone should be punished. These punishments transformed from fines and excommunications in the first half of the century to several forms of death penalties in the second. However, it is unclear whether these punishments were executed as frequently as the

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<sup>195</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 294.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Karras, “Prostitution,” 168.

<sup>198</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 32–33.

<sup>199</sup> Greenberg, *Christian Intolerance*, 534.

<sup>200</sup> Leopold A. Warnkönig, *Flandrische Staats- und Rechtsgeschichte bis zum Jahr 1305* (Tübingen, Bey Ludw. Fied. Fues, 1835–1842), 76: “Primo quidam faber cultellorum, de Wettre juxta Gandam natus, Johannes nomine, cum quodam viro nefandum ac deo destabilem contra naturam exercuit libidinem, qui in recenti flagitio comprehensus per scabios Scti Petri morti adjudicatus octavo Kal. Septemb. juxta patibulum Sancti Petri combustus est.”

<sup>201</sup> Goodich, *Unmentionable Vice*, 86.

regulations suggested, since few documents are found containing accounts performed penalties. Yet it can be affirmed that there was nevertheless a drastic change in circumstances between 1100 and 1300 for people with same-sex desires. Boswell summarises this change as follows:

Around 1100, the efforts of prominent churchmen liked and respected by the pope could not prevent the election and consecration as bishop of a person well known to be leading an actively gay life-style, and much of the popular literature of the day—often written by bishops and priests—dealt with gay love, gay life-styles, and a distinct gay subculture. By 1300, not only had overtly gay literature all but vanished from the face of Europe, but a single homosexual act was enough to prevent absolutely ordination to any clerical rank, to render one liable to prosecution by ecclesiastical courts, or—in many places—to merit the death penalty.<sup>202</sup>

Indeed, as Burgwinkle writes, “[b]y the late thirteenth century, homophobic discourse was institutionalized and sodomy had taken on mythic dimensions within the works of some theologians. Sodomites were now demons as well as sinners”.<sup>203</sup> By 1300, being openly sexually interested in someone of the same gender was no longer safe.

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<sup>202</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 295.

<sup>203</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy*, 13.

**CHAPTER 4 – “SE TOUT LI MONDES ESTOIT MIENS, SE LI OSEROIE JE TOUT  
DOUNER” [IF ALL THE WORLD WERE MINE, I WOULDN’T HESITATE TO  
GIVE IT TO HIM]: LANCELOT AND GALEHAUT: A SAME-SEX ROMANCE IN A  
HOMOPHOBIC CENTURY**

*Introduction*

The *Prose Lancelot* is one of the largest sections of the thirteenth-century Old French *Vulgate Cycle*, which was written around 1220. The section is focused on Lancelot’s life story and his relationship with Queen Guinevere. A significant part of the story, however, is dedicated to Lancelot’s bond with Galehaut, lord of the Distant Isles and one of the greatest knights, who is determined to defeat King Arthur at the beginning of their story. During his battle with Arthur, Galehaut witnesses Lancelot fighting and is struck by something which, according to Richard Kaeuper, “can only be termed love at first sight”.<sup>204</sup>

Indeed, Galehaut rides to Lancelot’s side and makes sure that, despite being his enemy, Lancelot survives the fight. After the battle is halted due to nightfall, Galehaut begs Lancelot to spend the night with him, in exchange for whatever Lancelot asks of him. After some confusion, Lancelot agrees and follows Galehaut to his tent. Galehaut’s immediate affection for Lancelot becomes visible as he secretly lies down next to the sleeping Lancelot and listens to his sounds. That morning, Lancelot asks Galehaut to surrender himself to Arthur, and, despite the great shame it brings upon him, Galehaut complies. From that moment onwards, Galehaut dedicates his entire life to Lancelot and desires nothing more than to be by his side. He gives up his dreams for him, regularly insists that he would die if Lancelot were to die before him, and faints at the idea of being separated from him.

It may not come as a surprise, then, that scholars approaching medieval literature through a queer studies lens have found reason to believe that the love between Galehaut and Lancelot is a romantic one, despite Lancelot’s relationship with Queen Guinevere. Similarities between Galehaut’s love for Lancelot and Lancelot’s love for the queen, resemblances to courtly love and deviations from a usual comrades-in-arms relationship, which can all be detected in the bond between the two knights, present decent arguments to support the idea that the two characters were written with more in mind than mere companionship.

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<sup>204</sup> Richard Kaeuper, “Love and Amenity, Men and Women,” in *Medieval Chivalry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 347.

At the same time, as this chapters shows, it can be argued that the *Prose* is not overt about the knights' relationship; it hides their excessive devotion behind the medieval tradition of comrades-in-arms, using said tradition as a diversion to distract from the deeper (romantic) affection hidden within their bond. This could be subtly designed to shield the work from critique; it would allow readers who recognised themselves in the knights' devotion to see the romantic implications, whereas those who did not wish to see same-sex love could attribute it to knightly (and thus properly homosocial) affection. This chapter first argues in favour of the idea that Galehaut indeed loved Lancelot as more than a comrade and then continues by linking the story of Lancelot and Galehaut to the cultural environment of the thirteenth century, ultimately concluding that the *Prose Lancelot* stands as a piece of homoerotic literature within a homophobic society.<sup>205</sup>

### *Galehaut's Love*

The *Prose Lancelot* makes it unquestionably clear that Galehaut loves Lancelot. Throughout the text, Galehaut uses many words to describe Lancelot, such as “la rien que je plus aim” [the person I love most],<sup>206</sup> “la riens el monde que je plus aim” [the person in the world that I love most],<sup>207</sup> “la flor des chevaliers de tot le monde et la riens que je plus amoie” [the flower of the whole world's knights and the person I most loved],<sup>208</sup> and “del meillor chevalier del monde” [(of) the finest knight in the world].<sup>209</sup> He does not hide how much he cares for Lancelot, not even to Lancelot himself. Entire declarations of love fill their conversations: “et sachiés que vous porrés bien avoir compagnie de plus riche homme que je ne sui, mais vous ne l'avrés jamais a homme qui tant vous aint” [I assure you, you can have the company of a more powerful man than I, but you'll never have that of a man who loves you as much],<sup>210</sup> “que ferai jou, qui tout ai mis en vous mon cuer et mon cors?” [what shall I do, who have completely devoted my heart and soul to you?],<sup>211</sup> “vos saves de voir que je ne porroie avoir rien chiere encontre vos” [you know for a truth that nothing matters to me more than you],<sup>212</sup> “ne je ne voldroie pas avoir

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<sup>205</sup> Several other spellings of Galehaut's name have been used by scholars, just as “Galehot” and “Galehout”, but this chapter will be using the spelling of “Galehaut” (except within quotations with other spellings).

<sup>206</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: The Old-French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation: Volume II*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 140. All translations of the cyclic *Prose Lancelot* were taken from this edition. Unless otherwise noted, all Old French textual examples are taken from *Lancelot: Roman en Prose du XIIIe siècle*, Volumes I, II or VIII, ed. Alexandre Micha (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1978-1982).

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

en baillie totes les terres qui sont sos ciel par covent que je perdisse vostre compaignie et vostre amor” [I would give up all the lands under heaven rather than lose your companionship and your love],<sup>213</sup> and “je vos aim tant que je ne vos porroie riens celer: si vos dis or la foi et sor l’amor que j’ai a vos que onques, puis que j’oi vostre compaignie premierement, ne vos celui nul privé conseil que vos autresi come je ne le seuissies” [I love you so much that I can’t hide anything from you, so I am telling you, on my word of honor and by my love for you, that I have never, in all the time I have had your friendship, kept you from knowing any inner thought of mine].<sup>214</sup>

Galehaut is also open about his love for Lancelot around others. To King Arthur, for instance, he mentions how “tout l’amor que j’ai a vous ai jou par lui” [all the love I bear comes from him],<sup>215</sup> and he tells one of Arthur’s wisemen that “j’ai en lui si durement mise m’amor que mes cuers ne se mist onques si parfitement en nul home estrange” [I have given him the deepest love; no other stranger have I ever so loved with all my heart].<sup>216</sup> The story, then, repeatedly stresses how deeply Galehaut loves Lancelot.

Galehaut’s love is not only reflected in his words, but also in his actions. After giving up his quest of conquering thirty kingdoms and surrendering to King Arthur for Lancelot, he becomes so infatuated with the knight that the mere idea of being separated from him makes him faint. When the danger of losing Lancelot to the queen and Arthur’s court grows, Galehaut tries everything in his power to keep Lancelot by his side, proposing that his companion will have a share of the kingdoms he conquered, that they will be crowned together and that Guinevere can come live with them as Lancelot’s queen. The lengths Galehaut is willing to go to to stay with Lancelot are unimaginable. He wants to spend the rest of his life with Lancelot, and the single thing he asks of him throughout the story is that they will stay together as each other’s companions.<sup>217</sup> Indeed, Galehaut’s story, according to Mieszkowski, “is not the story of a man intoxicated with power but one of a man who loves so much that only his love matters to him”.<sup>218</sup> Forgetting himself, he surrenders his entire life to loving Lancelot. In the end, Galehaut forfeits all reason to live when he receives the (untrue) message that Lancelot killed himself, and, after eleven days of neglecting himself, Galehaut dies of grief.

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<sup>213</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 249.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>217</sup> Mieszkowski, “The ‘Prose’’s Lancelot,” 43.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Other characters in the story display signs of being aware of Galehaut's affection for Lancelot, either by specifically mentioning it or by behaving in a suggestive manner. When Queen Guinevere is overwhelmed by Lancelot's love and expresses that she would not know how to be without him, she makes sure to say it "si bas que Galahos ne l'ot mie, car trop en fust dolans" [so softly that Galehaut did not hear it, for he would have been deeply saddened by it].<sup>219</sup> Mieszkowski finds that at the point at which Lancelot has to choose between Arthur's court and Galehaut, "other characters seem on the verge of recognizing the homoerotic dimension to Galehot's love of Lancelot".<sup>220</sup> Sir Gawain is one of these characters, and, fearing that Arthur will lose the battle for Lancelot's companionship, he warns Arthur with what Mieszkowski dubs "a sexual comparison":<sup>221</sup> "Sire, vous avéz perdu Lancelot, se vous n'en prendés garde, car Galahot l'enmenra au plus tost qu'il porra, car il est plus jalous de lui que nuls chevaliers de jouene dame" [My lord, you will lose Lancelot, if you don't take care, for Galehaut will take him away as soon as he can; he is more jealous of him than any knight is of a young lady].<sup>222</sup> "Jealous" in this sentence signifies possessiveness – Galehaut's possessiveness over Lancelot. Galehaut's "jealousy" here likely signifies a form of love similar to a love between medieval heterosexual couples, but this possibility will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

Guinevere knows of this "jealousy" too, which prompts her to warn Arthur to ask Galehaut's permission first: "Sire, (...), il est a Galahot et sez compains, si est boin que vous proiés a Galahot que il le sueffre" [My lord, (...) he is pledged to Galehaut and is his companion, so it would be well that you beg Galehaut to allow it].<sup>223</sup> Somewhat later in the story, when Galehaut discusses his prophetic dreams with one of Arthur's wisemen, the latter informs him that he knows of Galehaut's love: "je sai bien que vos l'amés de si grant amor com il puet avoir entre .II. compaignons loials: si volsissiés bien qu'il fust a vostre conseil" [I know that you love him with all the love that can exist between two true companions, and would have wanted him to share in this discussion].<sup>224</sup>

Galehaut's affection is even visible to outsiders. On some, his affection rubs off in the wrong way, such as Prince Meleagant: "Meleagans ne se puet saoler de Lancelot veoir por la

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<sup>219</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 228.

<sup>220</sup> Mieszkowski, "The 'Prose's Lancelot," 37.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 236–37.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.



grant chierté que Galehout en fet, si en a tel merveille et tele envie que trop en est ses cuers a malaise” [Meleagant could not take his eyes off Lancelot because of the great affection that Galehaut showed him; he was jarred by it and made envious, and it set his heart on edge].<sup>225</sup> Galehaut’s men, on the other hand, are so aware of Galehaut’s feelings that they want to shield him from pain: “Quant cil qui estoient de la maisnie Galehout virent Lancelot blecié, si furent molt esfrée por lor seignor qui trop l’amoit” [When the men of Galehaut’s household saw Lancelot wounded, they were frightened for their lord, because they knew how much he loved him].<sup>226</sup> The love that Galehaut holds for Lancelot is not only reflected in the knight’s own behaviour and words, but also in the reactions from the characters around him. Galehaut’s declarations and actions do not clarify whether his love for Lancelot is platonic or romantic, but they prove that his love runs deep and is regarded as remarkable in the eyes of other characters. In order to uncover the meaning of Galehaut’s love, other elements of the text must be considered.

#### *Comparisons to Straight Romances*

One of these elements is the resemblance between Lancelot and Galehaut’s bond and other medieval romantic relationships. Scholars such as Reginald Hyatte have pointed out that Galehaut’s actions towards Lancelot are similar to those of male lovers in heterosexual romances. Hyatte uses Tristan’s love for Iseut in the Tristan and Iseut legend and Lancelot’s love for Guinevere in the *Prose* to analyse Galehaut’s affections. The romantic features found in Lancelot and Tristan’s “all-consuming passion” for Guinevere and Iseut (respectively), such as their willingness to suffer, sacrifice and be humiliated for love, are transferred to Galehaut as Lancelot’s passionate friend. While Lancelot and Tristan firstly fix their attention and affection on their ladies and then on their comrades, Galehaut “reverses that order in directing nearly all his affectionate attention to his comrade” and reserving the rest for his ladylove, the Lady of Malohaut.<sup>227</sup> Galehaut acts towards Lancelot as Lancelot and Tristan act towards their ladies: “that is, passively, in forsaking honor, ambition, and security and in dying of lovesickness”.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 260.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>227</sup> Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 103.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

During a scene in which Galehaut, Guinevere, Arthur and Gawain discuss what they would be willing to give for Lancelot to love them, Galehaut is “re-gendered as the fully masculine role of the loving knight”.<sup>229</sup> He states that he is willing to sacrifice all his honour for Lancelot, like a medieval knight courting a woman.<sup>230</sup> This portrayal of Galehaut’s affection, so similar to the traditional knights’ love for ladies, makes Lancelot and Galehaut’s “chivalric friendship perfectly ambiguous”.<sup>231</sup> Galehaut possesses qualities of a typical romance lover, such as, as summed up by Hyatte, “total submission, rapturous adoration, lovesickness, jealousy, and the extremes of joy and pain”, qualities which only come to light in his affection for Lancelot.<sup>232</sup>

While Galehaut shows characteristics of a typical romance knight chasing a woman, Lancelot is sometimes portrayed as a traditional romances’ lady responding to a knight’s advances. He is depicted as the object of Galehaut’s desire, and thus becomes “the reciprocator rather than the initiator”.<sup>233</sup> Hyatte explains how the heroines from, for instance, the romances by Chrétien de Troyes “typically demonstrate less emotional involvement (...) than their lovers”, exerting rational control over their lovers and their actions by distancing themselves.<sup>234</sup> In the *Prose*, Lancelot is significantly more distant from his emotional connection with Galehaut than Galehaut, whose entire life revolves around Lancelot’s actions and wellbeing. Although his attitude signifies that Lancelot expresses less (romantic) interest in Galehaut than the other way around, his emotional distance enhances the likeness between the knights’ relationship and those found in traditional medieval romances. Hyatte sums up that “[e]ven though Galehaut and Lancelot’s *amistié/amor* is mutual, the two reciprocate in degrees and manners that conform to the unequal roles of refined male-female lovers in romance”,<sup>235</sup> in which Lancelot takes on the role of the female lover. Despite that the two knights are equal in terms of status, honour and prowess, they are unequal on the model of romance.<sup>236</sup> Like

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<sup>229</sup> Jane Gilbert, “The Knight as Thing: Courtly Love in the Non-Cyclic Prose Lancelot,” in *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 101.

<sup>230</sup> William Calin, “The Prose Lancelot,” in *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 146.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 107.

<sup>233</sup> Gilbert, “Knight as Thing,” 62.

<sup>234</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 109.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

Guinevere and Iseut, Lancelot is “the superior party” who has full control over how their relationship will evolve.<sup>237</sup>

Another moment which corresponds with heterosexual romances occurs when Lancelot requests Galehaut to surrender himself to Arthur and thereby humiliate himself. Ladies from medieval romances, too, order their romantically interested knights to disgrace themselves in order to prove their love for them.<sup>238</sup> In romances such as the twelfth-century *Tristan* and *Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la Charrette*, women like Iseut and Guinevere “do not hesitate to make dishonouring demands for their knightly lovers, who do not or dare not hesitate to comply”.<sup>239</sup> In *Le Chevalier*, for instance, Guinevere orders Lancelot to fight badly, to test his love for her. Lancelot, in this scenario, desires nothing more than to please his lady.<sup>240</sup> Like these knightly lovers responding to their ladies’ humiliating requests, Galehaut is more than willing to comply with Lancelot’s demand: “Quidiés vous que je me bee a repentir? Se tout li mondes estoit miens, se li oseroie je tout donner” [Do you suppose I have any regrets? If all the world were mine, I wouldn’t hesitate to give it to him].<sup>241</sup> He even considers Lancelot’s request a brilliant one: “je pensoie au riche mot que il a dit, que onques mais hom ne dist si riche” [I was thinking of the splendid thing he said, for never did any man say anything finer].<sup>242</sup> The only difference compared to other romances is that in the *Prose*, “Lancelot, not an all-powerful ladylove, orders Galehaut to bring shame upon himself”. Since this form of shame was an established element of medieval depictions of heterosexual romance, its presence in the relationship between Galehaut and Lancelot powerfully aligns this relationship with medieval heterosexual romances.<sup>243</sup>

It is worth mentioning, however, that Lancelot clearly expresses guilt over bringing Galehaut to his knees. This distinguishes him from ladies in heterosexual romances, who hardly feel regret over humiliating their knights.<sup>244</sup> Lancelot laments how he is to blame for Galehaut’s downfall: “Ha, Diex, fet il a soi meismes, tant me devoit cist hom hair, que totes ces choses li ai je destornées a fere! Si ai fet del plus viguerous home del monde le plus pereços, et tot ce li

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<sup>237</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 108.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 178 and 184.

<sup>241</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 137.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 110.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

est venu par moi” [‘God!’ he thought to himself, ‘this man should really hate me, for all these things I’ve stopped him from doing! I have turned the most vigorous man into the most sluggish. That’s what I’ve done to him!’.]<sup>245</sup> While Lancelot’s initial request reflected the behaviour of female love interests in heterosexual romances, his grief over the result sets him apart and shows that he cares for Galehaut in return.

Furthermore, Guinevere and Galehaut receive similar “love advice” about Lancelot. Guinevere in *Lancelot of the Lake* and Galehaut in the *Lancelot-Grail* are both advised that they should make every effort not to verbally hurt the object of their affections. In both these cases, the object of affection appears to be Lancelot. In *Lancelot of the Lake*, the non-cyclic version of the *Prose Lancelot*, Guinevere is told by the Lady of the Lake that “an doit autresin bien garder de correcier ce que l’an aime comme soi meïsmes, , car il n’est mies amez vraiment qui sor totes riens terrienes n’est amez” [one should take as much care not to upset the person one loves as one does oneself, for a person is not truly loved unless he is loved above all earthly things].<sup>246</sup> Galehaut receives similar advice in the *Prose Lancelot*, when conversing with a wiseman who helps him interpret his dreams:

vos aprendrai ore un petit enseignement molt profitable: gardés que jamais devant home ne feme que vos amés de grant amor ne dies a vostre escient chose dont ses cuers soit a malaise, kar chascuns doit destorner a son pooir l’ire et le coros de celui que il aime.

[I’ll give you a very useful little lesson: take care, as far as you can, never to say in front of any man or woman with whom you are in love anything that would trouble his or her heart, for everyone should do his utmost to keep anger and distress away from the one he loves.]<sup>247</sup>

Galehaut follows the wiseman’s advice and hides the truth about the meaning of his dream from Lancelot (which is that Lancelot will be the cause of Galehaut’s death). Hyatte speaks of “*fine amor*’s code, which forbids the lover to reveal anything that might compromise his lady and, thus, hurt or anger her”.<sup>248</sup> Thus, this romantic code of *fine amor* (a term similar to courtly love) appears in Galehaut’s behaviour towards Lancelot. The fact that Guinevere and Galehaut both receive the advice of sparing their beloved’s feelings suggests that Galehaut’s

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<sup>245</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 243.

<sup>246</sup> *Lancelot of the Lake*, trans. Corin Corley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 394. All translations of the non-cyclic *Prose Lancelot* were taken from this edition. All Old French textual examples are taken from *Lancelot do Lac: The Non-Cyclic Old French Prose Romance, Volume I*, ed. Elspeth Kennedy (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980).

<sup>247</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 252.

<sup>248</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 110.

love for Lancelot is the same as Guinevere's. The traditional bond of companionship (*amicitia*) which supposedly runs between the two knights is altered by Galehaut's efforts to hide the truth from Lancelot, and turns more into a bond of *fine amor*.<sup>249</sup>

Lancelot, too, spares Galehaut's feelings several times. He does so, for instance, when he cries over the fact that Galehaut gave up all his dreams for him, but makes sure not to show his remorse because he knows it would upset him.<sup>250</sup> Another instance occurs when Lancelot is injured but orders his men not to tell Galehaut, "kar il seroit, (...), ja desvés, ce sai je bien [because I know, (...), that it would drive him out of his mind].<sup>251</sup> Hiding facts or lying in order to spare one's beloved are typical tropes in medieval romances; the presence of these tropes in the relationship of Galehaut and Lancelot forms another parallel between the knights' bond and heterosexual romances.

Lancelot and Guinevere express that they would rather lose their lives than live without each other. Similarly, Galehaut declares that he would not want to live without Lancelot. In the *Prose*, Lancelot "de ce est tos conseilliés que, se sa dame i muert, il i morra" [was determined that, if his lady died, he would die, too];<sup>252</sup> meanwhile, in *Lancelot of the Lake*, Guinevere "l'anama tant que ele ne voit mies comment ele se poïst consirrer de lui veoir" [became so much in love with him [Lancelot] that she did not see how she could do without seeing him] and "ele ne voit mies comment sa vie poïst durer sanz la soe, s'il s'an aloit ja mais de cort" [she did not see how she could go on living without him, if he ever went away from court again].<sup>253</sup>

However, neither of them claims that they are willing to die as frequently as Galehaut does. Thinking that they have lost Lancelot, Galehaut laments, "Je ne m'aït Diex quant je sans lui quier vivre ne quant je jamais avrai hiaume en teste, puis que je l'ai perdu" [May God never help me if I seek to live on without him or if I ever have a helmet on my head, since I have lost him],<sup>254</sup> and while begging Arthur not to take Lancelot away from him, Galehaut says, "ne si m'aït Diex jou ne saroie vivre sans lui, si me toltriés ma vie" [God help me, I couldn't live without him; you would take my life from me].<sup>255</sup> The narrator, too, mentions Galehaut's willingness to die: "Il li avoit si doné son cors qu'il amast miels a veoir sa mort que la Lancelot;

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<sup>249</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 110.

<sup>250</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 243.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>253</sup> *Lancelot of the Lake*, 395.

<sup>254</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 236.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

il li avoit si doné son cuer, la ou il ne pooit avoir joie san lui” [He had so given up his body to him that he would rather have seen himself die than Lancelot; he had so given him his heart that he could have no joy without him].<sup>256</sup>

Galehaut himself tells Lancelot that “g’i ai mise m’amor en tel maniere qu’emprés vostre mort ne me laist ja Diex vivre jor” [I have framed my love in such a way that if you died I would pray God to let me not live another day],<sup>257</sup> and that “se vos le m’otriés sans faillir, si me poés garir par tens de tos ennuis; et la ou je vos perdrai, si serai mors sans recovrier” [if I can count on your commitment, I can easily overcome any woes; but if I lose you, I can only die].<sup>258</sup> Lastly, upon hearing that Lancelot might cause Galehaut’s death, Galehaut states that “après sa mort ne cuit je pas que je vesquisse, kar il ne me remaindroit en cest siecle nule autre rien qui puist estre a mon plaisir, et par ce cuit je bien que je ne porroie après lui vivre” [after his death I don’t think that I could live, because I would have nothing left in this world that could bring me any pleasure. No, I am sure I couldn’t live on after him].<sup>259</sup> Since both Lancelot and Guinevere, two characters romantically interested in each other, do not want to live without each other, it can be argued that Galehaut’s feelings for Lancelot belong on the spectrum of romantic desire as well. Galehaut would not want to live without the person he loves the most, and the frequency of his declarations reflect the magnitude of his love.

#### *Unlike Comrades-in-Arms*

Furthermore, it appears that the bond between Galehaut and Lancelot surpasses a regular medieval comrades-in-arms relationship. To Hyatte, the knights’ relationship forms “an example of male bonding so intimate that it borders on the homoerotic”,<sup>260</sup> because of the extremity of Galehaut’s benevolence, sacrifices and affection for Lancelot. Because of Galehaut’s excessive devotion, he and Lancelot “transgress the ethical limits of the classical code of *amicitia*”, or companionship.<sup>261</sup> Mieszkowski notes that comrades-in-arms traditionally aid each other on the quest to find love and rejoice when the other succeeds,<sup>262</sup> but this tradition does not occur in the *Prose*. Galehaut is terrified to lose Lancelot to Queen Guinevere and Arthur’s court; due to his duty to his conquered kingdoms, he would be unable to remain by Lancelot’s side if Lancelot were to be persuaded to stay at the court of the king. It can be argued

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<sup>256</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 241.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>260</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 102.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>262</sup> Mieszkowski, “The ‘Prose’’s Lancelot,” 34.

that if Galehaut were a traditional comrade-in-arms, he would support the possibility that Lancelot would remain at the castle of his beloved. Instead, Galehaut begs King Arthur to keep their companionship in mind and refrain from taking Lancelot away from him.

Nevertheless, Arthur still persuades Lancelot to join his court by using Guinevere's pleas. Galehaut, then, is alarmed: "Sire, (...), ensi ne l'avroiz vos mie, j'aim mielx a estre povres et a aise que riches a malaise. Retenés moi avoec lui, se je onques fis chose qui vous pleust; et bien le devés vous pour moi et pour lui faire" [My lord, (...), you won't have him in this way! I prefer to be poor and happy instead of rich and miserable. Retain me with him, if ever I did anything that pleased you; you must do this for me and for him].<sup>263</sup> Galehaut's strong desire to stay by Lancelot's side and his fear for leaving Lancelot with the queen both exceed what was typical of a comrades-in-arms relationship. To Hyatte, the depiction of Galehaut and Lancelot "remodels romance *compagnonnage* according to an unconventional and ambiguous literary ideal of knightly companions as highly refined romance lovers".<sup>264</sup> The "overly-dedicated comrades-in-arms" could present an effective mask for knights romantically in love.

The excessiveness of their comrades-in-arms relationship can also be detected in Lancelot's behaviour towards Galehaut. A traditional comrade-in-arms, in the pursuit of his desired lady, would not need to care much for his companion's feelings because his companion is expected to support him. Lancelot, however, cares deeply for Galehaut's feelings and about the fact that he personally brought an end to Galehaut's dream of conquering thirty kingdoms. Jane Gilbert points out that Lancelot, like a proper platonic comrade, feels little remorse towards Arthur for desiring Guinevere. Towards Galehaut, on the other hand, he feels great remorse, for being unable to reciprocate Galehaut's love and for personally bringing Galehaut to his knees. Lancelot cares excessively for Galehaut's feelings, which, according to Gilbert, "[signals] the importance of this particular male-male relationship".<sup>265</sup> In one specific scene, Lancelot is so overwhelmed by all that Galehaut gave up for him that it breaks his heart:

'Et je vos em pri por Dieu avant et por li après qui tant vos a amé et por la grant amor que vos avés en moi mise qui tant vos costa en un jor que vos en deguerpistes l'onor de trente roiaumes que vos aviés autant se valoit conquis.' A cest mot s'escrieve a plorer que plus ne pot dire, si joint ses mains et se met devant Galehout a genols. Et quant Galehout le voit, si ne puet plus endurer, ançois l'en lieve entre ses bras et plore trop durement: si font tel duel ensamble qu'il chaient andui en une coche pasmé et jurent longuement en tel maniere.

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<sup>263</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 237.

<sup>264</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 108.

<sup>265</sup> Gilbert, "Knight as Thing," 94.

[‘And you, please help me, for His sake first and then for the sake of my lady, who has loved you so much, and in the name of the great love that you have devoted to me, that love so great that you let it cost you in one day the mastery of thirty kingdoms that you had as much as conquered.’ With these words, he broke into tears and could say no more; he clasped his hands and fell to his knees in front of Galehaut. Galehaut, who could not bear what he was seeing, put his arms around him and raised him as his own tears flowed; and the two were so wracked by their common pain that they fell onto a couch and lay there in a faint for a long while.]<sup>266</sup>

Hyatte notes that “the frequency and intensity of such scenes (...) indicate a depth of affection between the characters that goes beyond conventional representations of *compagnonnage*”.<sup>267</sup> Even the narrator of the story agrees that the knights’ relationship is exceptional: “et il avoit mis son cue ren lui outre ce que cuers d’ome pooit amer autre home estrange de loial compaignie” [and he [Galehaut] had given him [Lancelot] his heart with a love greater than loyal companionship alone could make a man feel for someone outside his family].<sup>268</sup> In short, the bond between the two knights seems significantly stronger than those of regular comrades-in-arms. Another event which puts emphasis on Lancelot and Galehaut’s strong emotional connection is the death of Galehaut, a moment which can even be used as an argument that Lancelot may have felt stronger for Galehaut than for the queen, but this event will be discussed later in this chapter.

Furthermore, Galehaut’s devotion to Lancelot strongly outshines his devotion towards his actual lady, the Lady of Malohaut. She and Galehaut merely get together because Queen Guinevere asks them to, with the idea that “Quant vous serés en estraignes teres entre vous et mon chevalier, si se complaindra li uns a l’autre et nous .II., dames, nous reconforterons” [When you and my knight are away in foreign lands, you will listen to each other’s laments, and we two ladies will console each other].<sup>269</sup> Mieszkowski explains how “this is the equivalent of an arranged marriage – arranged to suit the important people in the man’s life rather than the man himself”.<sup>270</sup> Both Galehaut and the Lady of Malohaut respectively consent to the relationship by verbally laying their lives in Guinevere’s hands: “vous poés faire vostre Plaisir de moi, de cuer et de cors” [you can do as you wish with me, both body and heart], and “Dame, (...), vous en poés faire a vostre volenté” [My lady, you can do with me what you will].<sup>271</sup> It appears that neither of them consent out of love for the other. In other words, their relationship only serves

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<sup>266</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 249.

<sup>267</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 108.

<sup>268</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 241.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>270</sup> Mieszkowski, “The ‘Prose’’s Lancelot,” 41.

<sup>271</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 148.



to “complement Lancelot’s loving of Guinevere”, so that the two men and two women can console each other when they are separated.<sup>272</sup> After bonding himself to the Lady of Malohaut, Galehaut’s feelings for the lady are hardly mentioned.<sup>273</sup> Indeed, as observed by Hyatte, “the writer gives not a hint on Galehaut’s side of an emotional intensity in erotic love comparable to his strong feelings for his *ami*”.<sup>274</sup> Galehaut’s characteristics of a romance lover, “total submission, rapturous adoration, lovesickness, jealousy, the extremes of joy and pain, etc.”, are fully reserved for his relationship with Lancelot.<sup>275</sup>

This difference between Galehaut’s devotion to the Lady of Malohaut and Lancelot’s devotion to Guinevere is depicted in a scene from the non-cyclic *Lancelot of the Lake*, when shortly after their meeting with the queen, the two knights travel to Sorelois, one of the lands which Galehaut conquered:<sup>276</sup>

Mais nus deduiz ne plaisoit a Lancelot, que il ne pooit veoir cele cui il estoit toz, n’a autre chose ne pansoit. Et Galehoz, qui mout estoit angoissos de sa messaise, lo conforte mout et disoit que il ne s’esmai[a]st mie, car par tens orroient aucunes nouvelles des assamblees.

[However, no sport pleased Lancelot, for he could not see her to whom he belonged completely, and he thought of nothing else. And Galehot, who was very anxious about his unhappiness, comforted him a good deal and said that he should not be dismayed, for they would soon hear some news of encounters.]<sup>277</sup>

While Lancelot can only think about the lady he just left behind, Galehaut only worries about Lancelot’s distress. The relationship between Galehaut and the Lady of Malohaut merely emphasises the strength of Galehaut’s feelings for Lancelot, because Galehaut thinks of her so little and of Lancelot so often.

### *Romantic Visions*

At one specific moment, the narrative strongly suggests that Galehaut loves Lancelot romantically: when Galehaut has his dreams interpreted. The dreams and visions are discussed infrequently among scholars, and yet they offer some of the strongest evidence in favour of the idea that Galehaut is romantically in love. Galehaut’s heart is so troubled by the dreams that he

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<sup>272</sup> Mieszkowski, “The ‘Prose’’s Lancelot,” 41.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> Hyatte, *Arts of Friendship*, 107.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 149.

<sup>277</sup> *Lancelot of the Lake*, 334.

summons some of Arthur's wisest men to explain them to him. Before describing the dreams, Galehaut expresses his concern over the feeling in his heart:

J'ai une maladie ou nule richece ne me puet aidier. Ceste maladie est diverse sor totes autres maladies, kar je sui si grans et si fors com vos poés veoir, et sains et haitiés cuit je estre de tos membres, ne je ne fis onques plus delivrement chose qui a force de cors appartenist que je feroie ja. Mais el cuer m'est entree une maladie qui me destruit si que j'en ai perdu et le mengier et le boivre et le reposer el lit, ne je ne sai dont ele me puet estre venue fors tant que je cuit qu'ele me soit prise par une poor que j'ai novelement receue et si ne sai pas certainement li quels est venus li uns de l'autre, ou la poors del malage, ou li malages de la poor: kar tot m'est venu en un termine.

[I have a sickness that no wealth can help. This sickness is different from all others. As you can see, I am tall and strong, and my whole body, I'd say, is sound and healthy; and anything that takes bodily strength I can still do as easily as ever. Into my heart, however, a sickness has crept that is destroying me. I have lost all craving for food and drink, and can find no rest in bed. Nor do I know where this sickness has come from, though I think it came over me only lately, when a certain fear overtook me as well. Yet I don't know for sure which came from which, the fear from the sickness or the sickness from the fear; it all happened to me at once.]<sup>278</sup>

The wise Elias from Toulouse answers him, describing three forms of sickness that the heart could be poisoned with. The first is “une maladie ou nule mortels mecine ne puet avoir mestier” [a sickness that no manmade remedy can heal]; the second is “coros” [rancor], or the need for revenge; the third, which he calls the worst, is “mals d'amors” [love-sickness]:

Amors es tune chose qui vient par fine debonairté de cuer et par le porchas des ielx et des oreilles. Et quant li cuers est tant par ces .II. atisiés qu'il es ten l'amor entrés, si chace sa proie et s'il avient chose qu'i la tiegne, ou il garira del tot en tot, ou il morra; ne il n'est pas legiere chose del retourner, kar quant il a sa proie atainte, si li covient en ausi grant prison gesir com s'il eust del tot faille, fors tant quant cele prison li avient; si en a uns alegemens et unes joies come d'oïr dolces paroles et la bone compaignie et ce qu'il atent a avoir son desirrer; kar comment que li cuers se sente, li cors n'en a fors l'oïr et le veoir. Mais par mi totes les joies a il et mals et dolors qui l'acorent sovent, kar il a esmais de perdre ce qu'il aime plus et a poor de fausses acheisons, ce sont les dolors que li cuers sent par coi li cors ne puet venir a garrison.

[Love is a thing that comes from delicacy of heart and by way of the eyes and ears. When the heart is so charmed by these two that it enters into love, it chases after its quarry and, if it catches it, the heart will either be wholly cured or else die. Turning back is not an easy matter, for once it has caught its quarry, it is doomed to lie as tightly bound in prison as if the chase had failed, except insofar as imprisonment is welcome and brings with it such comforts and joys as sweet words and good company and the expectation of desire fulfilled. Whatever the feelings of the heart, the body can do no more than hear and see. But in the midst

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<sup>278</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 249.

of all these joys, the heart is often overcome by suffering and pain, for it dreads losing what it loves the most and is afraid of false accusations. Those are the sufferings of the heart that keep the body from healing.]<sup>279</sup>

The desire described in this passage corresponds closely with Galehaut's affection for Lancelot. Galehaut chased Lancelot from the moment they met, and is tied to him so strongly that he would suffer if they were to be separated. Galehaut is bound to Lancelot as if in prison, and yet being with Lancelot brings Galehaut merely "uns alegemens et unes joies" [comforts and joys]. Lastly, Galehaut's heart is suffering because it is afraid of losing Lancelot, either to death or to the queen. It is striking how the description of love-sickness fits the manner in which Galehaut's adoration for Lancelot is depicted.

The visions of the wisemen symbolically illustrate Galehaut and Lancelot's relationship and the fate which their relationship will face. Several wisemen recount visions of two lions and a leopard, which present Arthur, Galehaut and Lancelot respectively. The leopard is responsible for the peace between the two lions, but will also be responsible for one of the lions' (Galehaut's) death, as it visibly shortens a wooden bridge that symbolises Galehaut's life span. The eighth wiseman sees the following:

Il vos toli ja en une hore de jor le cuer et en une autre hore de jor honor et en une autre hore de jor vos toldra il la vie, se vos n'en estes gardés par le serpent qui la moitié de vos vos toloit. Et sachiés que li serpens est la roine ou dame ou damoisele qui entor la roine converse.

[In one moment of time he [the leopard] took your heart away and in another your honor; in still another he will take your life, unless you are guarded by the serpent who took half of you away. You may know that the serpent is the queen or else a lady or maiden in the queen's circle.]<sup>280</sup>

Although it is not specifically stated, one can assume that both the leopard taking away Galehaut's heart and the serpent taking away half of him are symbolic references to Galehaut loving Lancelot: Lancelot (the leopard) stole Galehaut's heart when they met, and from that moment on Galehaut regarded Lancelot as a part of him – a part which was taken away when Guinevere (the serpent) persuaded Lancelot to stay at Camelot.

Elias then recites a prophecy told by Merlin which also emphasises Galehaut and Lancelot's affection for each other. The prophecy is about a dragon with thirty golden heads (Galehaut) who has conquered almost the entire world when he reaches "el Regne Aventuros" [the Adventurous Kingdom] (Arthur's kingdom), but is stopped by a single leopard (Lancelot),

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<sup>279</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 250.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

who would “le boteroit arriere et le metroit en la merci de cels qu’il avroit si aprochiés de conquerre” [push him back and put him at the mercy of those he had just been so close to defeating].<sup>281</sup> The most striking part follows:

Après s’entrameroient tant entr’els deus qu’il se tendroient tot une meisme chose, ne ne porroit mie li uns estre sans l’autre, quant li serpens al chief d’or traitroit a li le lieupart et li toldroit sa compaignie por lui saoler. En ceste maniere, fet Merlins, vendra li grans dragons.

[Afterwards, the two would love each other to the point of considering themselves a single thing, each unable to live without the other; but the golden-headed serpent would come draw the leopard away and take him from his companion and besot his mind. Merlin says that this is how the great dragon will die.]<sup>282</sup>

That the dragon and the leopard, Galehaut and Lancelot respectively, come to love each other so strongly that they consider themselves one and become unable to live without each other, suggests that their relationship goes beyond that of two comrades-in-arms. Furthermore, the vision addresses the aforementioned romantic trope of refusing to live without a loved one and Galehaut’s love sickness, which makes separating himself from Lancelot impossible. The visions presented in the *Prose Lancelot* depict Galehaut and Lancelot as lovers, whose bond can only be broken by Queen Guinevere.

#### *Lancelot’s Love*

The arguments presented thus far have established the likelihood that Galehaut’s love for Lancelot was more than platonic, but it can also be argued that Lancelot loves Galehaut as more than a comrade-in-arms. Mieszkowski argues that “there is no question that Lancelot loves Galehot far more than would be required for simple fulfillment of his duties to him as his comrade-in-arms”.<sup>283</sup> Like Galehaut, Lancelot panics at the mere thought of losing his companion:

Quant il voit qu’il ne remue membre qu’il ait, si cria si haut com il puet plus: ‘Ha, Sainte Marie!’ Lors l’enbrace, et la grant dolor qu’il sent a son cuer por la grant poor de la mort le fet refroidir, si s’estent delés lui et chiet pasmés a terre.

[When he saw that not one limb was moving, he cried out in the loudest voice, ‘Holy Mary!’ Then he bent down to embrace him, and the stabbing pain he felt in his heart lest Galehaut be dead chilled him through; he fell to the ground in a faint and lay stretched out alongside his companion.]<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 253.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 253–54.

<sup>283</sup> Mieszkowski, “The ‘Prose’’s Lancelot,” 41.

<sup>284</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 242.

However, the depths of Lancelot's love for Galehaut can be found most clearly when comparing the difference between Lancelot's grief over the death of Guinevere and to his grief over the death of Galehaut. The poem contains lengthy descriptions of Lancelot's despair over losing Galehaut. When Lancelot reaches the church in which Galehaut's tomb resides, he reads the following words on the tombstone: "Ci gist Galehout li fiz a la Jaiande, li sires des Lointaignes Isles, qui por l'amor de Lancelot morut" [Here lies Galehaut the son of the Giantess, the Lord of the Distant Isles, who died for the love of Lancelot]. He breaks down completely:

Et quant il vit ce, si chiet pasmés et gist grant piece a terre sans mot dire; et li chevalier le corent relever, si se merveillent molt qu'il puet estre. Et quant il revint de pasmison, si s'escrie: 'Ha, las! Quel dolor et quel damage!' Et lors fiert l'un poing en l'autre et esgratine son viaire si qu'il en fet le sanc salir de totes pars, si se prent as chevels et se fiert grans cops del poing en mi le front et en mi le pis et crie si durement qu'il n'i a celui qui tote pities n'en preigne; si se laidenge et maldit l'ore qu'il fu nes et dit: 'Ha, Diex! Quel damage, quel perte del plus pseudome del monde qui mors est por le plus vil chevalier et por le plus malvés qui onques fust!' Tant fet Lancelos grant duel que tuit cil de laiens le vienent regarder a merveille; si li demandent qui il est et il ne puet mot dire, ains crie totes voies et se debat et descire. Quant il a son duel demené grant piece, si regarde les letres qui dient que por lui est mors Galehout; si dist que or seroit il trop malvés, s'il ausi ne moroit por lui: si saut maintenant jus des prones et pensa qu'il iroit querre s'espee et qu'il s'en ocirroit, kar ausi avoit ele esté Galehout.

[When Lancelot saw this, he fell down in a swoon and lay speechless for a long time on the ground. The knights ran over to help him up, and wondered very much who he could be. After recovering from his swoon, Lancelot cried to himself, 'Alas! What sorrow and shame!' And then he beat his fists together and scratched his face until the blood streamed from all over; he pulled his hair and beat his brow and chest with great blows and cried so loudly that not a soul did not feel compassion for him. He cursed himself and the hour he was born, crying, 'Oh, God! What shame, what loss of the most valiant knight in the world, who died of love for the basest and most wicked knight there ever was!' Lancelot lamented so bitterly that all the people there came to watch him in amazement. They asked him who he was, but he was unable to utter a word. Instead, he cried all the while and beat himself and tore his clothing. After he had mourned for a long time, he gazed at the inscription explaining that Galehaut had died for him. And so he told himself that now he would be too wicked if he did not in turn die for Galehaut. With that, he leapt beyond the screen and decided to seek his sword and kill himself with it, for his sword had also been Galehaut's.]<sup>285</sup>

Lancelot's desire to kill himself after realising Galehaut has died not only corresponds fully with the loss of Galehaut's *joie de vivre* when he received the false message that Lancelot was

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<sup>285</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: The Old-French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation: Volume III*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 59.

dead, but also with the prophecies saying that both Galehaut and Lancelot would be unable to live without each other. Apparently nothing ever hurt Lancelot more than Galehaut's death: "mes nule dolens qu'il eust onques ne monte rien a cele dolor qu'il ot, quant il vit le cors Galehout" [although no pain that he had ever experienced could compare to the sorrow he felt when he saw Galehaut's body].<sup>286</sup> Lancelot is prevented from killing himself by a messenger from the Lady of the Lake, but the desire to take his own life remains: "si trova s'espee delés lui qui mol estoit et bone et clere; et sans faille de l'espee meesmes se fust il ocis, se la damoisele ne li eust tolue erraument" [He found Galehaut's sword, so fine and brilliant, lying at his side. He would undoubtedly have killed himself with this very sword if the lady had not quickly snatched it away from him].<sup>287</sup>

The messenger orders Lancelot to bring Galehaut's body to the Dolorous Guard, where, the messenger tells him, Lancelot will join Galehaut after his death. He cries all the while during his travel, "plorant et regretant sa proesce et sa valor" [weeping and lamenting his companion's prowess and his valor], and that night he refuses to eat and drink, continuously crying instead.<sup>288</sup> When it is time to bury Galehaut, another account of his sadness is given: "Quant Lancelos i fu venus et il vit le cors Galehout, il ne fet pas a demander se il en fist duel, kar tuit cil qui le veoient cuidoient bien qu'il deust morir en la place" [When Lancelot entered and saw Galehaut's body there, one need not ask if he wept: all who witnessed his grief thought he would die on the spot].<sup>289</sup> His final goodbye is immensely sad:

le coucha Lancelos meismes dedens la tombe, et quant il l'ot couchié, si le baisa trois fois en la boche a si grant anguoise que par pou que li cuers ne li partoit el ventre; puis le covre d'un riche samit ovré a or et a pieres et mist la lame par desus.

[Lancelot himself lay his companion to rest inside the tomb. After he had laid Galehaut down, he kissed him three times on the mouth in such agony that his heart nearly leapt out of his chest. He then covered him with a rich silken cloth decorated with gold and precious stones and placed the tombstone on top.]<sup>290</sup>

After describing this scene, Mieszkowski comments that "[t]his is an exceedingly romantic story".<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume III*, 60.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 69–70.

<sup>291</sup> Mieszkowski, "The Prose's Lancelot," 41.

While Lancelot's grief over Galehaut is given so much attention, interestingly enough, the account of his grief over losing Guinevere is remarkably short. It is mentioned that "il estoit si corecies & si tristes que nus plus" [no one could have been more enraged and grief-stricken than he] and that "de sa mort fu lancelot dolans & corecies sor tos homes quant il en sot la verité [Lancelot was stricken with pain and grief when he learned of her death].<sup>292</sup> Immediately after this moment, however, is mentioned how he angrily travels to Winchester: "Lors c[h]eualcha vers wincestre tot ireement" [Then he spurred ferociously to Winchester].<sup>293</sup> More information on his feelings over losing Guinevere are not provided. It is remarkable that Lancelot's grief over losing Galehaut is given so much extensive attention and detail, while the description of his grief over losing the queen – the person he is supposedly romantically in love with – is so short; not to mention that Lancelot does not completely lose his *joie de vivre* after her death (like after Galehaut's), although he claimed that he would, earlier in the tale.

Upon Lancelot's death, he and Galehaut are reunited in Galehaut's tomb. Several years after Guinevere's death, Lancelot falls gravely ill and asks his friends to bury him in Galehaut's tomb: "quant il senti quil deuoit trespasser [del siècle], sip ria la larcheuesque & a blyobleris que si tost comme il seroit deuies quil portassent son cors a la ioieuse garde & le mesissent en la tomve ou li cors galehaut le seignor des lontaines illes fu mis" [when he felt that he was going to die, he asked the archbishop and Blioberis to convey his body to Joyous Guard immediately after his death and to place it in the tomb containing the body of Galehaut, the lord of the Distant Isles].<sup>294</sup> His companions comply, put him in Galehaut's tomb and change the description, so that it mentions both Galehaut and Lancelot, lying there together: "Ci gist li cors galehaut le signor des lointaignes illes & auoec lui repose lancelot del lac qui fu li mieudres cheualiers qui onques entrast el roialme de logres fors seulement galahad ses fils" [Here lies the body of Galehaut, the Lord of the Distant Isles, and with him rests Lancelot of the Lake, who, with the exception of his son Galahad, was the best knight who ever entered the kingdom of Logres].<sup>295</sup> Even after many years, Lancelot remembers Galehaut and their companionship, which is telling. Lancelot and Galehaut, then, are reunited in death, and their story reaches its conclusion.

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<sup>292</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: The Old-French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation: Volume IV*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 157. All Old French textual examples on this page are taken from *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, Volume VI: Les Aventures ou la Queste Del Saint Graal & La Mort le Roi Artus*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer (New York: AMS Press, 1979).

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

### *The Prose Lancelot and the Thirteenth Century*

As explained in the previous chapter, the *Prose Lancelot* was written at a time when minorities and sexual nonconformists were persecuted and ostracized, due the Church's declaration that sexual intercourse with someone of the same gender was an act "against nature" and thus against God. As summarised by Mieszkowski, homosexuality was "condemned by theology and the law and treated with scorn or derision by literature",<sup>296</sup> and anyone engaging in homosexual intercourse was labelled a sodomite, stripped of their functions depending on whether they were clergy or laity. It may be considered remarkable, then, that a male character who loves another man so openly like Galehaut has such a significant presence in a work as popular as the *Prose Lancelot*.<sup>297</sup>

The questions arise whether the depiction of Galehaut means to condemn same-sex attraction and whether his character may have been inspired by the legal, cultural and theological developments of the century. A thirteenth-century story including a homoromantic character could very well subtly condemn homosexuality by depicting it as wrong or excessive or making its homoromantic characters suffer. Yet, the depiction of Galehaut seems ambiguous: he gives up his honour for Lancelot and dies because of his love, but at the same time his affection is paid much attention to and is "richly and sensitively developed".<sup>298</sup>

It is because of this ambiguity, then, that scholars disagree on the overall message of Galehaut's portrayal. Mieszkowski argues that the *Prose* depicts Galehaut in a positive way because the story never "suggests that the feelings of these men for other men are shameful or even inappropriate".<sup>299</sup> However, this conclusion is not entirely true, or can at least not be made without some qualification. Reactions by several characters from the *Prose Lancelot* suggest that Galehaut's love, devotion and willingness to give up his dreams for Lancelot are considered shameful. After Galehaut is brought to Arthur's court, he, Gawain, Guinevere and Arthur find themselves discussing what they would be willing to offer in order to win Lancelot's love. Arthur states that he would give Lancelot everything except Guinevere, while Gawain would "voldroie orendroit estre la plus bele damoisele del mont saine et haitie, par covent que il m'amast sor toute rien toute sa vie et la moie" [immediately wish to be the most beautiful maiden in the world, happy and healthy, on condition that [Lancelot] would love me above all

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<sup>296</sup> Mieszkowski, "The Prose's Lancelot," 47.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.



others, all his life and mine], to which Queen Guinevere jokes that that is all a lady can give and she can thus offer nothing more. Galehaut, however, offers the following: “Et si m’ait Diex, j’en vaudroie avoir tournee ma grant honor a honte, par si que je fuisse a tous jors ausi seurs de lui comme je vaudroie que il fust de moi” [God help me, it would be worth having my great honor turned to shame, if I could be as sure of him as I would wish him to be of me]. Apparently Galehaut bids the most, as Gawain replies with “plus i avés offert gue nus de nous” [you have pledged more than any of us].<sup>300</sup> This scene reveals how esteemed reputation is for these knights; forfeiting one’s honour for the person he loves is apparently the highest form of sacrifice.

And forfeiting his honour is exactly what Galehaut does: he surrenders his dream of conquering thirty kingdoms and voluntarily succumbs to Arthur, all because Lancelot asked him to. As Gilbert comments, “Galehot’s love for the quintessential chevalier requires him to abandon the aggressive yet magnificent goals he has hitherto pursued, converting honour into humiliation”.<sup>301</sup> Throughout the story, Lancelot becomes gradually more aware of what Galehaut gave up for him, and he laments the loss of Galehaut’s dreams.<sup>302</sup> Two of Galehaut’s closest companions reproach Galehaut for his decision:

Mais de totes ces choses le traist Lancelos ariere et il li mostra bien, la ou il fist de sa grant honor sa grant honte, quant il estoit au desus le roi Artu et il li ala merci crier; et après ce grant tens, la ou li dui home de son lignage li plus prochain, quant il les ot fes rois coronés, li reprochierent a consiel la honteuse pes que il avoit fete por un sol home.

[But Lancelot held him back from these ambitions, as was clear when Galehaut turned his great honor into his great shame by begging King Arthur’s mercy at the very time he had the upper hand, and again, after that great moment, when the two men of his clan closest to him, once he had crowned them kings, rebuked him in private for the shameful peace he had made for the sake of a single man.]<sup>303</sup>

Galehaut himself, too, realises his loss of honour: “Il est voirs, et vos n’en dotes mie, que j’ai maintes choses fetes por vos que l’en m’a atornees plus a honte qu’a honor et plus a folie que a savoir” [It is true, and you know it, that I have done many things for you that people have seemed more shameful than honorable and more foolish than wise].<sup>304</sup> Multiple characters from

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<sup>300</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 140.

<sup>301</sup> Gilbert, “Knight as Thing,” 88.

<sup>302</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 243.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

the story express the view that, under the knightly code, Galehaut's decision to sacrifice everything for Lancelot is shameful.

The humiliation that Galehaut goes through for Lancelot and Galehaut's eventual death for his love could be used as arguments for the idea that the *Prose* denounces same-sex love, which would be in keeping with the cultural climate of the thirteenth century itself. Zrinka Stahuljak argues in favour of this idea. She remarks how, in the *Prose*, "[m]ale-male love becomes shameful because it makes this great knight commit acts that detract from his honour. Love changes honour into shame",<sup>305</sup> and that "love for another man no longer increases one's determination and prowess [like in the story of Achilles and Patroclus]. Instead, love brings Galehaut down".<sup>306</sup> To Stahuljak, Galehaut's story shows "that sodomitical love results by definition in ignominious acts of dishonour" and that it "leads inevitably to the idea that sodomitical love is incompatible with the status of warrior-knight".<sup>307</sup> Indeed, the narrative of the *Prose* seems to depict Galehaut's love for Lancelot as something shameful; therefore can be argued that the story condones this particular form of male-male affection. Stahuljak argues that this condonement is in line with the equally shameful accusations of sodomy that were so rampant in the thirteenth century.

It can also be argued, however, that while the *Prose* seems aware that strong male-male (and potentially romantic) affection was considered shameful in this century, the story makes an effort to emphasise the valiant side to Galehaut's love. Although Galehaut's affection for Lancelot brings him shame and eventually causes Galehaut's death, the story treats Galehaut's love in a manner that does not present Galehaut – or his feelings – in a negative light. Galehaut's kingly companions are the only figures who openly reproach him for his decision, whereas others mostly comment on it neutrally or not at all. Some characters even react positively, and their words seem to hold stronger weight than those of the two kings. Among these characters is Lancelot himself, who appreciates Galehaut for all that he has done for him: "jous vous doi plus amer que tous lez hommes del monde et si fai jou" [I must love you more than any man in the world, and so I do],<sup>308</sup> and "la compaignie de nos deus ne partira ja, que vos avés tant fet

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<sup>305</sup> Zrinka Stahuljak, "Sexuality, Shame and the Genesis of Romance," in *The Cambridge History of French Literature*, ed. William Burgwinkle, Nicholas Hammond and Emma Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 63.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>308</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 237.

por moi que je n’oseroie riens fere qui encontre vos alast” [our bond will never be broken! You have done so much for me that I would never dare do anything against your will].<sup>309</sup>

Galehaut, for his own part, admits that he does not regard his feelings as shameful. After telling Lancelot that he knows others see his actions as dishonourable, he continues:

Mais por ce ne di je mie, que si voiremont m’ait Diex je ne fis onques rien por vos que je ne tiegne a honor et a gaaing, ne je ne voldroie pas avoir en baillie totes les terres qui sont sos ciel par covent que je perdisse vostre compaignie et vostre amor; et se vos le m’otriés sans faillir, si me poés garir par tens de tos ennuis.

[But there is nothing that I would undo, for, as God is my witness, I have never done anything for you that I don’t consider an honor and a gain, and I would give up all the lands under heaven rather than lose your companionship and your love. Indeed, if I can count on your commitment, I can easily overcome any woes.]<sup>310</sup>

To the two kings reprimanding him, Galehaut responds that submitting to Arthur for Lancelot brought him nothing but honour, because “il n’est pas, (...), richece de terre ne d’avoir, mais de preudome, ne les terres ne font mie les preudomes, mais li preudome font les terres et riches hom doit tos jors baer a avoir ce que nus n’a” [riches, (...), lie not in land or goods but in worthy men, and land does not produce good men, but good men make land productive; and a truly rich man must always strive to have what no one else has].<sup>311</sup> The narrator’s comment, which follows Galehaut’s answer, establishes that Galehaut’s love for Lancelot is more rewarding than unfruitful, and thus more positive than negative: “En ceste maniere torna Galehout a savoir et a gaaing ce que li autre tornoient a perte et a folie, ne nus n’osast avoir cuer de tant amer buens chevaliers com il faisoit” [In this way, Galehaut saw wisdom and gain where others saw loss and folly, and no one would have dared make bold to love good knights as much as he].<sup>312</sup>

Elias of Toulouse, too, seems to suggest that Galehaut should not be condemned for his love: “je cuit que vos soiés un des plus sages princes de notre aage de tot le monde; si sai bien, se vos avés folie fete, ce fu plus par debonaireté de cuer que par defaute de savoir” [I believe you are one of the wisest princes of our time in the whole world and I am sure that, if you have behaved foolishly, it was more out of goodness of heart than lack of intelligence].<sup>313</sup> The *Prose* does not portray Galehaut’s feelings as a disgrace, which becomes clear through Galehaut’s

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<sup>309</sup> *Lancelot-Grail: Volume II*, 244.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

reaction to his companions, the narrator's addition and Elias' words. If anything, the story informs that Galehaut's affection is beneficial and came forth out of the good of his heart.

One could argue that the writer of the *Prose* may have been aware of the sexual and theological restlessness of his time. He specifically lets his characters comment on the shamefulness of Galehaut's love and makes Galehaut himself conscious of it; yet he emphasises that Galehaut's affection makes him see the world differently from his peers and makes sure that Galehaut is still continuously depicted as and mentioned to be one of the greatest knights of his time. One could then argue, as Mieszkowski does, that the *Prose* does not present criticism on homosexuality, but aims to, as subtly as possible, place same-sex love in a positive light, since one of its main heroes is so openly devoted to the man he loves for such a large part of the story. Mieszkowski states that "[a]lthough Galehot's story ends tragically, it is full of richly expressed love".<sup>314</sup> Galehaut does lose his life because he loves a man so deeply, but his love is richly portrayed. Moreover, Galehaut's image is never slandered; he is honoured in death by receiving one of the most beautiful tombs, for which Lancelot himself is responsible. In short, it can be argued that the *Prose* shows awareness of the century's opinion that same-sex love is generally regarded as shameful, but criticises this opinion by presenting a powerful male character that loves a man so deeply that he disregards all denunciations and dedicates his life to his loved one. Despite his romantic affection for a man, Galehaut is respected and appreciated throughout the remainder of his life, and is honoured even in death.

In order to steer clear from the accusations of sodomy that were so frequently made in the century, the *Prose*, like *Lanval*, would incorporate a same-sex love in ways that would be accepted by the intolerant climate of its time. In the case of the *Prose*, the same-sex love of Galehaut and Lancelot would be portrayed in an ambiguous manner; their affection could be hidden behind their traditional bond of comrades-in-arms or their heterosexual relations with the ladies. The heterosexual romance would both serve as a diversion from the same-sex love, and an argument for those who would not wish to see it, that the men engage in relationships with women and can therefore not have been desiring each other (an argument which can be encountered in contemporary discourse of modern media, too). In the homophobic climate of the thirteenth century, authors would have to conceal homoerotic elements in order to avoid accusations of sodomy.<sup>315</sup> If same-sex desire is successfully camouflaged within a story – especially when there is heterosexual romance present to divert the attention from the same-sex

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<sup>314</sup> Mieszkowski, "The Prose's Lancelot," 47.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

romance – said love will only be visible to those looking for it and will be imperceptible for those who do not want to see it. This is likely the case in the *Prose*: Galehaut’s love for Lancelot is depicted in such a way that no medieval reader would have think of sodomy,<sup>316</sup> while those who looked deeper would be able to find what they were looking for.

In short, Galehaut’s love for Lancelot could be beautifully hidden behind their bond of comrades-in-arms, and accusations of sodomy could be avoided by blaming the affection they feel for each other on their close friendship. Mieszkowski points out that homoerotic literature from the thirteenth century “presents same-sex love in ways that do not call attention to themselves and do not insist upon being heard, but that will nevertheless be recognized by readers who know how to listen”.<sup>317</sup> Lancelot’s love and dedication towards Guinevere may have served as a powerful diversion, shielding Galehaut’s love from negative attention and censure, while Galehaut and Lancelot’s overly dedicated companionship, their relationship’s similarities to courtly love and subtle hints of their love for each other may have been enough for “readers who know how to listen”. To some, Galehaut and Lancelot’s relationship may have been explicit, whereas those who would be offended by their bond could choose to regard it as “friendship”, or “companionship” and turn a blind eye to the romantic implications.<sup>318</sup> The writer of the *Prose* may thus have subtly incorporated a gay romance in one of the Arthurian legend’s largest stories.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, the *Prose Lancelot* seems to depict a same-sex romance, or at least same-sex desire. Textual evidence shows that the relationship between Galehaut and Lancelot is depicted similarly to that of Lancelot and Guinevere, and in courting Lancelot, Galehaut behaves like a typical male romance lover, such as Tristan. Galehaut sacrifices his dreams and honour for Lancelot, cannot bear to be separated from him and dies when he believes Lancelot is dead. The idea that the two men felt more for each other than cordial love is further supported by the symbolic visions and their overly-dedicated friendship. Meanwhile, the description of Lancelot’s grief over Galehaut is significantly more extensive than the one of his grief over the queen, which suggests that Lancelot may have loved Galehaut romantically in return. Galehaut and Lancelot love each other greatly, whether this love is platonic or romantic.

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<sup>316</sup> Mieszkowski, “The Prose’s Lancelot,” 47.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

It remains an open question, however, remains whether Galehaut's love is depicted in a positive or negative light. Mieszkowski sees the *Prose* as "a rare and impressive instance of fully developed late medieval homoerotic characterization",<sup>319</sup> whereas Stahuljak argues that the depiction of Galehaut is shameful, like an accusation of sodomy. Although some characters view Galehaut's deeds and his sacrifices for Lancelot as shameful, other characters, such as Lancelot, Galehaut himself, and Elias of Toulouse, see it as valuable. The narrator, too, praises Galehaut's love and presents a contrast between the knight and those rebuking him: Galehaut sees wisdom and gain where others see loss and folly. In the end, it seems not unlikely that the writer of the *Prose* incorporated society's general opinion on homosexuality and criticised it by presenting Galehaut in a positive light, by making him one of the most powerful, loving knights of the story, who is honoured highly even in death.

It is therefore not impossible that Galehaut is depicted as a homoromantic man during a time in which homosexual people were threatened and ostracised. The tale carefully manages to steer clear of accusations of sodomy by cloaking its same-sex romantic narrative within the ambiguous rules and devotions of knightly friendship. Galehaut's love is depicted in an ambiguous manner that could be interpreted as both romantic and platonic. Those who do not want to see the romantic implications can argue that the knights were just friends, whereas those who wish to read deeper are provided with enough material to believe that Galehaut was indeed in love with Lancelot. By presenting Galehaut's love in an ambiguous manner that could both be interpreted as romantic and platonic, the *Prose* places "a 'gay' character centre-stage in a major medieval text",<sup>320</sup> and secures its figure from the dangers of its time. In the end, one can conclude that the story of Galehaut and Lancelot is a positive homoerotic story, written in a homophobic century.

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<sup>319</sup> Mieszkowski, "The Prose's Lancelot," 44.

<sup>320</sup> Gilbert, "Knight as Thing," 91.

## CHAPTER 5 – ENGLAND IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY: KNIGHTS, KINGS, AND THE POWER OF ACCUSATION

### *Introduction*

As explained in chapter 3, the climate of the end of the thirteenth century was not favourable to those engaging in same-sex activities. While accusations of sodomy became so dangerous that they could result in death, open discussions regarding same-sex desire both in everyday conversations and in literature occurred less frequently. Over the course of a century, the sin against nature had become unmentionable and inexcusable. In the fourteenth century, this situation did not improve much: as the “sedulous quest for intellectual and institutional uniformity and corporatism” continued, fear of the unknown endangered minorities, who were often vulnerable and little-understood.<sup>321</sup>

Some events in the fourteenth century reflect the intolerance of same-sex desire. Among these events was the abolishment of the order of the Knights Templar, which had by then existed for almost 200 years. Its members were persecuted, tortured and executed on grounds of, among many other things, sexual deviance and sodomy. In England, kings Edward II and Richard II were deposed because of their excessive love for their male favourites. As will be shown, accusations of same-sex desire aided at the depositions of these men, which illustrates the negative status of same-sex attraction. To Matthew Kuefler, the dissolution of the Knights Templar and the depositions of the kings form “examples of the new intolerance” towards same-sex love that had been rising throughout the past decades.<sup>322</sup> Tom Linkinen explains that by the fourteenth century, sodomy “had become one of the most serious crimes”, which is why suspicions of it could hold such destructive power towards those accused.<sup>323</sup>

Fourteenth-century England is particularly noteworthy because it was home to figures, opinions and literature involved with same-sex desire that were unique in Europe, such as the depositions of Edward II and Richard II. Remarkably, English law codes from this century stay silent on issues of same-sex love; yet accusations of sodomy were used as a weapon to dispose of people who were disliked by the general public. Aside from the discussion on the Knights

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<sup>321</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 270 and 272.

<sup>322</sup> Mathew Kuefler, “Homosexuality in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Acts, Identities, Cultures: *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, by John Boswell,” *The American Historical Review* 123 (2018): 1262.

<sup>323</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 138.

Templar, the focus of this chapter mainly lies with fourteenth-century England and the two kings accused of sodomy.

### *The Downfall of the Knights Templar*

The general tenor of responses to homosexuality in the fourteenth century is reflected in fourteenth-century responses to the Knights Templar and their consecutive dismantlement. The Templars were a religious order founded shortly after the first crusade at the end of the eleventh century. The order had grown considerably rich and powerful throughout the years.<sup>324</sup> According to Boswell, the Templars distinguished their lifestyle from other orders by combining sectarian Christianity and knightly valour, two popular passions of the time.<sup>325</sup> At the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, the Templars were accused of many wrongdoings, such as sacrilege, heresy, sodomy, treason against the Catholic Church, blasphemy, sorcery and more.<sup>326</sup> Boswell also notes how the Templars “were said to be in league with the devil, to worship Muhammed, to parody the Mass, to sodomize new recruits regularly, to indulge in homosexual acts during their sacred ceremonies”.<sup>327</sup>

The persecution of the Templars began in France. In October of 1307, King Philip IV ordered all 2,000 Templars to be arrested.<sup>328</sup> The Templars were questioned and tortured into confessing their crimes. Scholars Boswell and Linkinen mention that many of the Templars, despite confessing to the sins of sacrilege and heresy, refused to confess to having committed sodomy. This refusal could signify that they either did not commit sodomy (but did commit sacrilege and heresy), or that they feared the charge of sodomy more than the charge of sacrilege and heresy.<sup>329</sup> Although the Council of Vienne still voted “overwhelmingly” against the dissolution of the Templars in 1311,<sup>330</sup> the accusations were too powerful and the pope dismantled the order in March of 1312.<sup>331</sup>

Linkinen provides detailed information on the charges against the Templars. He explains how the Templars “were accused of kissing each other ‘sometimes on the mouth, on the navel, or on the bare stomach, and on the buttocks or the base of the spine,’ and ‘sometimes

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<sup>324</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 137.

<sup>325</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 296.

<sup>326</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 296 and Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 137.

<sup>327</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 297.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>329</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 138.

<sup>330</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 297.

<sup>331</sup> Bagerius, “Kings and Favourites,” 302.



on the penis””.<sup>332</sup> In Paris, out of the 138 questioned Templars, two confessed to having committed sodomy and 107 admitted that some of abovementioned activities were permitted by the order, although the men claimed that they had not engaged in those activities themselves.<sup>333</sup> Be that as it may, the authorities need only a few testimonies to successfully attack and disband the order of the Templars, even if same-sex activities within the order did not go much further than “kisses addressed to dubious places”.<sup>334</sup> The persecutions spread through all of Europe and reached England as well, where the Templars denied all charges of sexual relations or indecent kisses. Still, confessions from the continent and testimonies by men claiming they were nearly raped by Templars served as sufficient evidence, and the order was dismantled in England, too.<sup>335</sup> As will be elaborated on later, accusations of sodomy appeared to have been successful weapons in order to allow opponents of the Templars to destroy them.

### *Silence and the Power of Accusation*

In fourteenth-century England, actual law codes on sodomy and same-sex activities hardly existed and moral texts did not discuss the issue of sodomy either.<sup>336</sup> Although other sexual sins were frequently mentioned and listed, “same-sex sexual activity was completely excluded from the officially approved scheme of sexual matters” and “same-sex sexuality fell to the end of the long list of sexual sins of *luxuria* read about and heard in sermons”.<sup>337</sup> Karras concludes that there are no cases of sodomy to be found in English church courts outside of London, which seems to point to a “complete lack of court cases on the subject”. The only case that has been found is that of the crossdresser John Rykener, although this case does not reference any written law codes and could not refer to any written law, either.<sup>338</sup> Linkinen states that “the English were not too keen on criminalising same-sex acts, and were confused regarding possible concepts referring to them”.<sup>339</sup> It appears that in England, at least legally, actual explicit

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<sup>332</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 139.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>336</sup> Kuefler, “Homoeroticism,” 1264.

<sup>337</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 50.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 80. Perhaps also interesting to note is that Rykener’s main crime appears to have been “[t]he crossing of gender expectations, especially those concerning normal masculine behaviour, together with the sexual offences, which, as embodied acts, manifesting his offence against gender norms” and not necessarily solely sex with men. By dressing as a woman and having sex with men – or by not behaving in a manner expected of his gender – Rykener “severely violated social cultural and cultural norms”, but his actions were difficult to legally categorise (see Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 62 and 235).

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

condemnations of same-sex intimacy did not appear until the sixteenth century.<sup>340</sup> Instead, there appeared to be what could be considered an atmosphere of silence in which innuendos and hints were used to refer to same-sex sexuality. After all, sodomy was still called the sin that must not be mentioned, and readers of moral texts or sermons were advised not to talk about it.<sup>341</sup> When it concerned same-sex intercourse, “[m]uch of the later medieval English approaches (...) consisted not in staring at the matter directly, but in catching glimpses, which revealed few details, if any, and then turning away”.<sup>342</sup>

However, voices against same-sex activities became loud when it concerned the removal of political or religious enemies.<sup>343</sup> It appeared that the power of an accusation of sodomy alone was enough to destroy someone’s reputation. To quote Bagerius and Ekholst, “[t]hat someone had engaged in sodomy was difficult to prove, but it could be even harder to refute”.<sup>344</sup> The accusation of sodomy was a powerful weapon; it could be used to bring down groups such as the aforementioned the Knights Templar. Bagerius and Ekholst describe how hints and innuendos of sodomy worked in the Middle Ages:

sodomy rarely was spelt out in contemporary chronicles or annals, but it was present as a subtext of hints, possibilities and suggestions. Innuendo would suffice to lead people’s thoughts in a certain direction and it was not necessary to mention sodomy explicitly for it to have an impact.<sup>345</sup>

Linkinen claims that accusing someone of sodomy “became one of the central ways of stigmatising one’s enemies in later medieval England”.<sup>346</sup> Two of the greatest political examples in which this stigmatisation happened were Kings Edward II and Richard II, who will be discussed in the sections that follow.

### *King Edward II and His Favourites*

In the same year that the persecution of the Templars commenced, King Edward II ascended the throne in England, which he held for twenty years until he was deposed and murdered in 1327.<sup>347</sup> During his lifetime, King Edward was in intimate relationships with two men, Piers

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<sup>340</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 235.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 97, 98 and 106.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>344</sup> Bagerius, “Kings and Favourites,” 302.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>346</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 114.

<sup>347</sup> Sylvia Federico, “Queer Times: Richard II in the Poems and Chronicles of Late Fourteenth-Century England,” *Medium Aevum* 79 (2010): 31.

Gaveston, a nobleman from Gascony who was executed in June 1312,<sup>348</sup> and Hugh Despenser the Younger, a man in service of the king who died in the same year as Edward (1327).<sup>349</sup> During Edward's reign, many chroniclers commented on and judged his relationships in their annals.

The strong affection between Edward and Gaveston began before Edward was crowned king; Gaveston had held the position Edward II's chamber officer when Edward II was still Prince of Wales.<sup>350</sup> As told by an anonymous chronicler, Edward felt so much affection for Gaveston when they met, that he "cum eo firmitatis fedus iniit" [entered into a pact of stability with him], and tied himself to Gaveston with an "indissolubile dileccionis vinculum" [indissoluble bond of love].<sup>351</sup> Chronicler Johannis of Trokelowe, too, noted that Edward loved Gaveston above all the men in the world, from a young age onwards: "Petrum de Gavestone, quem a primæva æstate præ omnibus hominibus mundi Rex dilexerat ultra modum".<sup>352</sup> Edward's father, Edward I, sent Gaveston into exile when he noticed his son's affection, but as soon as Edward II ascended the throne in July 1307, he called Gaveston back to his court, "renewing the flame of love in his heart".<sup>353</sup> Boswell states that their relationship was "steadfast and faithful" for thirteen years, until Gaveston's death in 1312.<sup>354</sup>

Edward's favouritism towards Gaveston was overt. After recalling Gaveston from exile in 1307, Edward provided him with the title of Earl of Cornwall, and, because of the king's "continuum amorem erga eum" [unswerving love for him], a public edict was issued that everyone should call Gaveston by his new title and not his own name.<sup>355</sup> When the king returned from France after marrying Princess Isabella in 1308, he ran to Gaveston and embraced and kissed him upon their reunion: "Inter quos Petrum occurrentem, datis osculis et ingeminatis

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<sup>348</sup> Bagerius, "Kings and Favourites." 304 and 311.

<sup>349</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 299.

<sup>350</sup> Wendy R. Childs and Noel Denholm-Young, *Vita Edwardi Secundi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4–5: "Fuerat autem dictus Petrus, uiuente rege E(dwardo) sene, iuuenis Edwardi, tunc principis Wallie, camerarius familiarissimus et ualde dilectus". All translations of the *Vita Edwardi* were taken from this chapter.

<sup>351</sup> "British Museum, *MS. Cotton Cleopatra D. IX*, fols. 83<sup>r</sup>–85<sup>r</sup>," in George L. Haskins, "A Chronicle of the Civil Wars of Edward II," *Speculum* 14 (1939): 75: "Quem filius regis intuens in eum / tantum protinus amorem iniecit quod cum eo firmitatis fedus iniit, et pre ceteris morta- / -libus indissolubile dileccionis vinculum secum elegit et firmiter disposuit innodare." Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the primary sources discussed in this chapter are my own.

<sup>352</sup> "Johannis de Trokelowe Annales (MS. Cotton. Claudius D. vi.)," in *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneforde Chronica et Annales*, ed. Henry T. Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 64.

<sup>353</sup> "British Museum," 75: "qui non prius nomen regis adeptus est quam ipsum Petrum reuocauit ab exilio et in / statum pristinum restituit solitique flaminam amoris in frunita mente renouauit."

<sup>354</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 299.

<sup>355</sup> Childs, *Vita Edwardi*, 8–9.

amplexibus, familiaritate venerabatur singulari”.<sup>356</sup> Johannis of Trokelowe notes that their “special friendship” sparked jealousy among their onlookers.<sup>357</sup> Afterwards, during the joined coronation of Edward and Isabella, Gaveston supposedly received the special honour of carrying the crown to Edward, which he did, according to the *Annales Paulini*, “with dirty hands”.<sup>358</sup> Edward also sent the wedding gifts he received from Isabella’s father, King Philippe IV of France, to Gaveston. Among these was a beautiful bed, likely meant for the newlyweds,<sup>359</sup> which implied that Edward would rather spend his wedding night with Gaveston than with his new wife.<sup>360</sup>

Meanwhile, the hostility of the nobility towards Gaveston increased steadily. The *Vita Edwardi Secundi* notes that Gaveston was disliked by the entirety of England in 1307.<sup>361</sup> Yet, this animosity seemed to only strengthen Edward’s love for Gaveston: “uin eciam quanto plura audiret rex que gratiam eius conarentur extinguere, tanto magis inualescebat amor et crescebat affectio regis erga Petrum” [the more the king heard as they tried to destroy his friendship, the more the king’s love increased and his tenderness towards Piers grew].<sup>362</sup> To secure Piers’ position, the king married him to his niece, the daughter of the late Earl of Gloucester, at the end of 1307.<sup>363</sup> This union, as argued by Bagerius and Ekholst, may have also served to secure the men of a life-long and close-tied bond, which would explain their intimacy and perhaps keep accusations of sodomy at bay for a while.<sup>364</sup>

There are clear accounts of the guests’ disgust during Edward and Isabella’s coronation banquet of 1308. The *Annales Paulini* notes that the queen’s uncles, Charles and Louis, angrily returned to France when they saw how Edward preferred Gaveston over his new queen.<sup>365</sup> From then onwards, a rumour started circulating that the king loved a sorcerer more than his own

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<sup>356</sup> “Johannis de Trokelowe,” 65.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*: “Quae familiaritas specialis, a magnatibus praeconcepta, invidiae fomitem ministravit.”

<sup>358</sup> “Annales Paulini,” in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II, Volume 1: Annales Londonienses and Annales Paulini*, ed. William Stubbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 261: “coronam Sancti Edwardi tradidit Petro ad portandum manibus inquinatis.” The person who placed the crown on the king’s head, according to the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, was the bishop of Winchester. See Childs, *Vita Edwardi*, 8–9.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 258: “Rex Franciae dedit regi Angliae genero suo anulum regni sui, cubile suum quam pulcrum oculis non vidit aliud, destrarios electos et alia donaria multa nimis. Quae omnia rex Angliae concito Petro misit.”

<sup>360</sup> Bagerius, “Kings and Favourites,” 313.

<sup>361</sup> Childs, *Vita Edwardi*, 4–5: “Inuidebat eciam illi quasi tota terra, maior et minor et senex, et mala de eo predicabant; unde et nomen eius ualde diffamatum est”

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–7.

<sup>364</sup> Bagerius, “Kings and Favourites,” 312.

<sup>365</sup> “Annales Paulini,” 262: “Karolus et Lodowicus patrum reginae, cernentes quod rex plus exercebat Petri triclinium quam reginae, cum indignatione ad Franciam remigarunt.”

bride.<sup>366</sup> Aside from the queen's uncles, there were others who were outraged, as mentioned in a continuation of the *Flores historiarum*: "Angliae et caeteros similiter habuit in abominationem et totaliter in despectum, quia praedictus novus rex eum ultra modum et rationem amavit" [The English, and other men similarly, considered it an abomination and completely contemptible that the new king loved him [Gaveston] beyond measure and reason].<sup>367</sup> The hostility which the nobility felt towards Gaveston grew to such an extent that, in order to prevent civil wars, the king was forced to send Gaveston into exile twice: once in 1308 and once more in 1311.<sup>368</sup> Gaveston returned in 1312, but, separated from his king, he was put to death by English earls.<sup>369</sup>

The writer of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* explains why the aristocracy disliked Gaveston so intensely. First of all, Gaveston's attitude irked them; because he had risen from the low rank of esquire to the high rank of earl, he looked down on others. The second reason was the king's favouritism. The *Vita* tells the following:

Erat enim causa odii secundaria hec, quod cum ab antiquo omnibus desiderabile exstiterit habere gratiam in oculis regum, solus Petrus gratiam et uultum hillarem regis habuit et fauorem, in tantum ut, si comes uel baro colloquium habiturus cum rege cameram regis intraret, in presencia Petri nulli rex uerba dirigebat, nulli faciem hillarem ostendebat, nisi soli Petro. Et reuera ex talibus frequenter oriri solet inuidia. Sane non memini me audisse unum alterum ita dilexisse. Ionathas dilexit Daud, Achilles Patroclum amauit; set illi modum excessisse non leguntur. Modum autem dileccionis rex noster habere non potuit, et propter eum sui oblitus esse diceretur, et ob hoc Petrus malificus putaretur esse.

[But there was a secondary cause of their hatred, namely that, though of old it has been desirable for all men to find favour in the eyes of kings, Piers alone received the king's favour, welcome, and goodwill, to such an extent that, if an earl or baron entered the king's chamber to speak with the king, while Piers was there the king addressed no one, and showed a friendly countenance to no one except Piers alone. And in truth envy is accustomed frequently to spring from such behaviour. Certainly I do not remember having heard that one man so loved another. Jonathan cherished David, Achilles loved Patroclus; but we do not read that they went beyond what was usual. Our king, however, was incapable of moderate affection, and on account of Piers was said to forget himself, and so Piers was regarded as a sorcerer.]<sup>370</sup>

<sup>366</sup> "Annales Paulini," 262: "In omnem igitur terram exiit rumor iste, quod rex plus amaret hominem magum et maleficum quam sponsam suam elegantissimam dominam et pulcherrimam mulierem."

<sup>367</sup> "Passages from the Eton and Other MSS. not Contained in the Text of the *Flores Historiarum*," in *Flores Historiarum, Volume 3: AD 1265–AD 1326*, ed. Henry R. Luard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 331. Translation by Bagerius, "Kings and Favourites," 305.

<sup>368</sup> "Johannis de Trokelowe," 67–68. For descriptions of the threat of civil war, see Childs, *Vita Edwardi*, pp. 10–13 and 32–33.

<sup>369</sup> Childs, *Vita Edwardi*, 40–49.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–29.

Apparently, Edward II's affection for Gaveston was unusual and angered those who did not understand it. In the same chronicle, Gaveston is also described in terms that suggest a platonic bond of affection between the king and his favourite: "enim magnum comitem quem rex adoptauerat in fratrem, quem rex dilexit ut filium, quem rex habuit in socium et amicum" [a great earl, whom the king had adopted as a brother, whom the king cherished as son, whom the king regarded as a companion and friend],<sup>371</sup> but the king's love for Gaveston was nevertheless seen as unconventional and a cause for uproar.

Hugh Despenser the Younger, Edward's other favourite, was appointed as the king's chamberlain after Gaveston's death. Although the king was not very fond of him at first, Edward soon became more friendly towards him.<sup>372</sup> Not long after, both Hugh Despenser the Younger and his father were hated by the nobility for similar reasons as Gaveston: "not only because the king loved them more than all the others but because, being driven on by their proud, ambitious spirits, they were pauperising high-born knights".<sup>373</sup> According to Geoffrey le Baker, "[t]here were those among them who had said that Hugh was a second king, or worse, the ruler of the king, and that, like Piers Gaveston, he had bewitched the king's mind. He had so far presumed on his friendship with the king that he had often prevented some of the nobles from speaking with him".<sup>374</sup> In short, Despenser, too, was loved exceptionally by the king and actively blocked access to him, thereby infuriating others. When the English barons, in 1320, rose against Hugh Despenser and his father, Edward was forced to send the men into exile to, again, prevent a civil war.<sup>375</sup>

The manners in which Edward and Despenser died, point at their rumoured sexual relations. Boswell notes that the French chronicle of Jean Froissart states that Despenser had his genitals cut off before his death, because he was a heretic and a sodomite, guilty of unnatural practices even with the king.<sup>376</sup> Apparently, the cutting of genitals was a common French punishment for sodomy.<sup>377</sup> Although the account may not be entirely accurate (the chronicle by

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<sup>371</sup> Childs, *Vita Edwardi*, 50–51.

<sup>372</sup> *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker*, trans. David Preest, ed. Richard Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>376</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 300: "Quand il fut ainsi lié, on lui coupa tout premier le...et les...pour ce qui'il étoit hérite et sodomite, ainsi que on disoit mêmement du roi, et pour ce avoit le roi déchassé la reine de lui et par son ennort."

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*

Geoffrey le Baker does not mention such a death for Despenser),<sup>378</sup> it still serves as a relevant source regarding the medieval discussion of Edward and Despenser's intimacy: "Whether or not the description of le Despenser's end is accurate, however, is not crucial; what is significant is that Froissart represents a common view of the time about his and Edward's erotic preferences and the fate deserved by those who engaged in such practices".<sup>379</sup> Meanwhile, Queen Isabella and members of Parliament plotted against Edward II,<sup>380</sup> and he supposedly died by the insertion of a red-hot poker into his anus.<sup>381</sup> For Boswell, "the reported manner of the deaths of Edward and le Despenser makes pellucidly clear the nature and origin of the animosity directed against them": they were murdered because of their rumoured sexual relations.<sup>382</sup>

Edward II's accessor, Edward III, tried fervently to improve his predecessor's reputation, but thereby unintentionally kept the memory of Edward II's rumoured erotic interests alive. Likely, Edward III feared that his father's reputation would stain his own, and he "attempted in the early years of his reign to re-establish Edward II as properly heterosexual", by, for instance, claiming that Edward II's wife was the sole cause of their marital problems.<sup>383</sup> He hoped to de-emphasise the stories of Edward II's erotic interests, but by trying to damp them down, he kept calling the charge of sodomy forth.<sup>384</sup> Especially the story of the manner of Edward II's murder was retold frequently in the decade after the king's death, which was regarded as "an act of mimicked sodomy".<sup>385</sup>

Federico notes that Edward II was not officially called a "sodomite" in any written texts until Edward III's reign.<sup>386</sup> Furthermore, she claims that Edward III's influence was so strong that he "brought the word 'sodomite' into the later fourteenth-century narrative of failed kings" and that Edward II's reputation and murder were still widely known by the time that Geoffrey Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales*, nearing the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>387</sup> Edward III's intervention, then, was about to affect even his accessor: "having tried to quell the rumours

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<sup>378</sup> *Geoffrey le Baker*, 24.

<sup>379</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 300.

<sup>380</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 113.

<sup>381</sup> *Geoffrey le Baker*, 32.

<sup>382</sup> Boswell, *Christianity*, 300.

<sup>383</sup> Federico, "Queer Times," 32.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 and 32.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 and 37.

about his father, he nevertheless presided over a period of their growing intensity and thus, however unwittingly, set the stage for similar rumours about Richard II”, his grandson.<sup>388</sup>

### *King Richard II: History Repeats Itself*

Richard II succeeded Edward III in 1377; the new king was only ten when he took the throne and he remained on it until 1399.<sup>389</sup> Like Edward II, he was judged by his contemporaries because of his close relationship to his favourites, who, like Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser the Younger, exerted a lot of influence over him. Richard’s favourites consisted of five men, who were dubbed “the five abominable seducers of the king” by the *Knighton’s Chronicle*.<sup>390</sup> Three of these men had made the king swear loyalty to them, to provide them with support and live and die with them, which was seen as a “role-reversal” in which “the men had enslaved the king and robbed him of all royal dignity”.<sup>391</sup> Similar to Edward II’s situation, the anger of the English aristocracy grew until the so-called “Merciless Parliament”, dominated by men opposed to Richard’s favourites,<sup>392</sup> managed to convict four of Richard’s favourites of high treason and sentence them to death in 1388.<sup>393</sup>

Richard II was closest to his favourite Robert de Vere, the Earl of Oxford. Like Edward II did for Gaveston, Richard II provided his favourite with status and a title: he made De Vere Marquis of Dublin and Duke of Ireland.<sup>394</sup> According to the *Historia vitae et regni Ricardi Secundi*, the king did so because he wanted to honour De Vere, because he loved him intimately.<sup>395</sup> The other members of the nobility were angered because De Vere seemed hardly more qualified than them.<sup>396</sup> The *Chronica maiora* by Thomas Walsingham mentions that it was rumoured that the king’s “closeness to Lord Robert and his deep love and affection for him was not without some taint of an obscene relationship”,<sup>397</sup> and that Richard “was unable to make any resistance to [Robert’s] wishes, seeing that he was held fast by the magic spells of a friar in Robert’s service, and so completely unable to discern or follow the good and the

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<sup>388</sup> Federico, “Queer Times,” 31.

<sup>389</sup> Bagerius, “Kings and Favourites,” 306.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 307: “quinque nephandi seductores regis”.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>392</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 122.

<sup>393</sup> Bagerius, “Kings and Favourites,” 307.

<sup>394</sup> *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi*, ed. George B. Stow, Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 92 and 98.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 92: “Nam dominus rex, cupiens dominum comitem Oxon, dominum Robertum de Veer, quem intime diligit, honorare”.

<sup>396</sup> Thomas Walsingham, “The Reign of King Richard II,” in James G. Clark, *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, trans. David Preest (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 236.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.



right”.<sup>398</sup> Like Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser the Younger, Robert de Vere was accused of bewitching his king.

The king’s affection for De Vere reached beyond the grave; after De Vere’s death, the king ordered De Vere’s body to be brought back and organised a funeral for him, which he attended himself. In the *Regum Anglicae* is described how the king looked at De Vere’s face and touched his fingers, publicly showing him the same affection he had shown De Vere when he was still alive.<sup>399</sup> It is noted that there were hardly any other nobles who attended the funeral, because they detested De Vere.<sup>400</sup> According to Federico, Walsingham’s description was part of a “campaign of innuendo” in which the chronicler “singles out for particular criticism the relationship between the king and Robert de Vere, dropping hints about the inappropriately familiar status enjoyed by the duke”.<sup>401</sup> The grand ceremony which Richard organised for De Vere and the king’s stroking of De Vere’s fingers are, according to Bagerius and Ekholst, examples of “excessive generosity” with “distinctly erotic undertones”.<sup>402</sup> Richard’s five seducers and his public love and support for Robert de Vere tempted others to attack Richard for the same reasons as Edward had been attacked for seventy years prior: “Richard II, like his great-grandfather Edward II, ended up being accused of sexual desires and acts towards men”.<sup>403</sup>

Federico and Linkinen argue that Richard II was not necessarily accused of “sodomy” itself, although the scholars have different reasons for making that claim. Federico argues that the term sodomy was only connected to Richard because of the similarities between his situation and that of Edward II, and might otherwise not have been associated with the former:

No one in this period actually charged Richard with sodomy. But no one needed to; the cultural discourse of sexual misrule from the 1330s onward was so profound as to serve as a kind of code with which to speak about unnatural politics, and its punishment, while preserving the status of sodomy as the ‘unmentionable’ sin.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Thomas Walsingham, “Richard II,” 251.

<sup>399</sup> “Annales Ricardi Secundi et Henrici Quarti, Regum Angliæ (MS. Coll. Corp. Christi, Cant. No. vii.),” in *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneforde Chronica et Annales*, ed. Henry T. Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 185: “curavitque thecam cypressinam, in qua corpus, balsamo delibutum, jacuit, aperire, faciem considerare, digitos contrectare; qui, ut fertur, ditati fuerunt annulis aureis pretiosis, cum corpore terræ tradendis. Demonstravitque dilectionem defuncto publice, quam impenderat prius vivo.”

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*: “Sed pauci interfuerunt proceres; quia nondum digestum fuerat odium quod conceperant contra illum.”

<sup>401</sup> Federico, “Queer Times,” 34.

<sup>402</sup> Bagerius, “Kings and Favourites,” 313.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>404</sup> Federico, “Queer Times,” 33.

Linkinen, on the other hand, claims that although some attempted to brand Richard as a sodomite, the term was never attached to him as strongly as to Edward II:

Despite the fate of his great-grandfather Edward II, the name of Richard II appears to be relatively “clean” from sodomitical accusations; his name never became associated with the designation “sodomitical king” in the minds of later generations as Edward’s did. In his own time and shortly after his deposition, however, there were repeated attempts to make him carry such a reputation.<sup>405</sup>

Instead, Linkinen argues, the accusation of sodomy was mostly used as a weapon to get Richard II deposed. In the Middle Ages, litanies like repeated accusations of sodomy were often effective and therefore rewarding; they greatly aided the removal of disliked figures.<sup>406</sup> In 1399, chronicler Adam of Usk created a list of reasons as to why Richard II should be disposed: “perjuries, sacrileges, sodomitical acts, disposessions of his subjects, the reduction of his people to servitude, lack of reason, and incapacity to rule”.<sup>407</sup> It appears that the accusation of sodomitical acts was mostly used for strengthening the image of Richard’s deviance, and was not the sole reason behind Richard’s impeachment.<sup>408</sup> The enormous list of accusations led to the king’s deposition in 1399 and his murder in 1400, probably by the hands of Henry IV.<sup>409</sup> At that moment, according to Federico, “Edward II was on everyone’s mind”, since the fourteenth century had now witnessed its second deposition, based on similar grounds.<sup>410</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In sum, the century witnessed not only the dissolution of one of Europe’s greatest religious organisations, but also the deposition of two kings, one at the beginning and one at the end of the century. The Templars and the kings were brought to their knees for a great part because of rumours of same-sex desire and intimacy. Sodomy and queer desire were not actually condemned in English law codes, but condemnation toward them became visible through indirect denunciations. Hints and suggestions at sexual intimacy between men were enough to spark suspicion in the minds of the people and create uproar. Accusations of sodomy turned into effective weapons, and they were found in the war against the Knights Templar and quests to depose kings Edward II and Richard II. Although one cannot say for certain whether the Knights Templar, Edward II or Richard II truly engaged in same-sex practices, the fact that

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<sup>405</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 122.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>410</sup> Federico, “Queer Times,” 35.

these men were accused of doing so and that their opponents considered this a way of defaming them is suggestive of the changed status of homosexuality in the fourteenth century.

**CHAPTER 6 – “HE HENT ÐE HAPEL ABOUT ÐE HALSE, AND HENDELY HYM KYSSSES” [HE CATCHES HIM BY THE NECK AND COURTEOUSLY KISSES HIM]: DESIRE IN *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT***

*Introduction*

The anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (hereafter *Sir Gawain*), was written sometime in the second half of the fourteenth century. In this alliterative poem, Arthur’s nephew Gawain makes a pact in with a mysterious Green Knight who enters Arthur’s court unexpectedly: he decapitates the Green Knight, and in a year, Gawain shall receive the same blow from the knight in return. On his journey to the Green Knight’s abode, Gawain stumbles upon a castle, which is inhabited by Lord Bertilak de Hautdesert and his wife. Lord Bertilak and Gawain agree to play a game: whatever Lord Bertilak wins during his hunts he shall give to Gawain, and whatever Gawain wins during the lord’s absence he shall give to Bertilak. While Lord Bertilak is out hunting, Lady Bertilak approaches Gawain and attempts to seduce him. She succeeds to a certain extent: Gawain and the lady kiss several times, and each time, Gawain has to kiss Lord Bertilak as well.

Given the high profile accusations of homosexuality discussed in the previous chapter, it is reasonable to assume that the *Gawain*-poet likely knew of these events, but whether he drew on them in *Sir Gawain* remains an open question. This chapter continues with an analysis of the presence of same-sex desire in *Sir Gawain* and attempts to place the story in its historical timeframe, when accusations of sodomy held the power to destroy lives and reputations.

*The Kisses*

The game which the two men play occurs in fitt III. Lord Bertilak proposes the exchange: “Quat-so-euer I wynne in þe wod hit worþez to yourez, / And quat chek so 3e acheue change me perforne” [what I win in the woods will be yours, / and what you gain while I’m gone you will give to me].<sup>411</sup> They play the game for three consecutive days: Bertilak hunts down animals – deer, a boar and a fox – and Gawain is challenged by the advances of Lady Bertilak. Each day, her attempts become more forceful: the two kiss once on the first day, twice on the second, and thrice on the third. As long as Sir Gawain passes the kisses along to Lord Bertilak, he

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<sup>411</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. Simon Armitage (London, New York: W. W. Norton, 2012), 209. All translations of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* were taken from this edition. All Middle English textual examples are taken from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*, accessed July 10, 2019. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/me/Gawain/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>.

remains true to their pact – and he does so. The kisses that Gawain gives Bertilak merit some scrutiny as potential sites of homoerotic desire.

The first night that Gawain is approached by the lady, he is torn between his chivalrous duty to do whatever she asks of him, and his knightly duty not to betray his lord. Although the lady presses him and tells him he can do whatever he wants with her, Gawain manages to abstain from touching her. When the lady is about to leave, she mutters that it is impossible that the man she has met is Gawain:

So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden, / And cortaysye is closed so clene in  
hymself, / Couth not lytly haf lenged so long wyth a lady, / Bot he had craued  
a cosse, bi his courtaysye, / Bi sum towch of summe tryfle at sum talez ende.

[A good man like Gawain, so greatly regarded, / the embodiment of courtliness to  
the bones of his being, / could never have lingered so long with a lady / without  
craving a kiss, as politeness requires, / or coaxing a kiss with his closing words.]<sup>412</sup>

Since she now openly questions Gawain's courtesy – and, through it, his knightly identity – Gawain agrees to one kiss: “Ho comes nerre with þat, and cachez hym in armez, / Loutez luflych adoun and þe leude kyssez” [The lady comes close, cradles him in her arms, / leans neared and nearer, then kisses the knight].<sup>413</sup> When Lord Bertilak returns and presents his booty of deer to Gawain, Gawain upholds his end of the bargain and kisses the lord: “He haspez his fayre hals his armez wythinne, / And kysses hym as comlyly as he coupe awyse” [So he held out his arms and hugged the lord / and kissed him in the comeliest way he could].<sup>414</sup> Gawain makes sure to hold Bertilak in his arms like the lady held him. Afterwards, the two men laugh and bond during supper and near the fire, where they decide to play the same game the next day.

During their second encounter, Gawain and the lady exchange two kisses and hold a lengthy conversation about love. The two praise each other and laugh together, their bond visibly improved. The same can be said about Gawain and Bertilak:

þe lorde ful lowde with lote and laȝter myry, / When he seȝe Sir Gawayn, with  
solace he spekez (...). / Þat oþer knyȝt ful comly comended his dedez, / And  
praysed hit as gret prys þat he proued hade, / For suche a brawne of a best, þe  
bolde burne sayde, / Ne such sydes of a swyn segh he neuer are. / Þenne hondeled  
þay þe hoge hed, þe hende mon hit praysed, / And let lodly þerat þe lorde for to  
here.

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<sup>412</sup> *Sir Gawain*, 213.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

[Now the lord is loud with words and laughter / and speaks excitedly when he sees Sir Gawain (...). / And Gawain is quick to compliment the conquest, / praising it as proof of the lord's prowess, / for such prime pieces of perfect pork / and such sides of swine were a sight to be seen. / Then admiringly he handles the boar's huge head, / feigning fear to flatter the master's feelings.]<sup>415</sup>

The lord is excited for Gawain's gain, and Gawain is excited to hand it to him: "He hent þe hapel aboute þe halse, and hendely hym kysses, / And eftersones of þe same he serued hym þere" [He catches him by the neck and courteously kisses him, / then a second time kisses him in a similar style].<sup>416</sup>

During his third meeting with the lady, it is much more difficult for Gawain to contain himself. She is "so glorious and gayly atyred, / So faultles of hir fetures and of so fyne hewes" [so lovely and alluringly dressed, / every feature so faultless, her complexion so fine], that "Wizt wallande joye warmed his hert" [a passionate heat takes hold in his heart].<sup>417</sup> Gawain still manages to hold her off and they kiss three times, although the lady also provides him with her girdle, which Gawain accepts because it is said to protect its wearer and Gawain dreads his upcoming meeting with the Green Knight. When the lord returns, Gawain is quick to hold (a part of) his end of the bargain: "'I schal fylle vpon fyrst oure forwardez nouþe, / Þat we spedly han spoken, þer spared watz no drynk.' / Þen acoles he þe knyzt and kysses hym þryes, / As sauerly and sadly as he hem sette couþe" [I shall first fulfill our formal agreement / which we fixed in words when the drink flowed freely.' / He clasps him tight and kisses him three times / with as much emotion as a man could muster].<sup>418</sup> Afterwards, the two men are, again, on great terms: "Gawayn and þe godemon so glad were þay boþe— / Bot if þe douthe had doted, oþer dronken ben oþer" [Gawain and his host got giddy together; / only lunatics and drunkards could have looked more delirious].<sup>419</sup> Gawain keeps the girdle a secret from the lord.

There is no general consensus among scholars regarding the underlying meaning of the kisses and whether the outcome of the poem, in which Sir Gawain is punished for his valuing his own life too much, is meant as an attack on same-sex love. However, it can be argued that the kissing scenes between the two men are as erotically coded as the kisses between Sir Gawain and Bertilak's wife. Carolyn Dinshaw explains that in the medieval period, kisses between men could operate as different kinds of platonic gestures; the possibilities included "kisses of peace,

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<sup>415</sup> *Sir Gawain*, 219–20.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*

of greeting, of partings, of homage, and so on”.<sup>420</sup> These platonic medieval kisses “represent conventional cultural practice, informed by the rules of courtesy and hospitality; there is nothing problematic about men’s kissing one another per se in the medieval romance context”.<sup>421</sup> One could argue, thus, that the kisses shared between Gawain and Bertilak are platonic, but Richard E. Zeikowitz elaborates on why they are not: “Since the narrative leads us to believe that Gawain fully lives up to his oath to offer Bertilak whatever he wins during the day, the kisses he gives him are equal to those he receives from the lady. By dismissing the eroticism of the male-male kisses, one also dismisses the sexual valence of the lady’s kisses”, and those are quite obviously erotically coded.<sup>422</sup>

Because Sir Gawain is obligated to provide Lord Bertilak with whatever he gains during the day, one can assume that if Gawain were to be seduced into sexual intercourse with the lady, Gawain would have to engage in the same sexual act with Lord Bertilak. Gawain never explicitly expresses that that is the reason he does not want to lie with the lady. On the contrary, Gawain and Bertilak seem to subtly desire each other. During their first meeting, for instance, Gawain pays close attention to the lord and concludes that “Bertilak is a suitable lord of a castle (...) because of his powerful, manly physique”:<sup>423</sup>

As frekez þat semed fayn / Ayþer oþer in armez con felde. / Gawayn glyzt on þe  
gome þat godly hym gret, / And þuzt hit a bolde burne þat þe burz aʒte, / A hoge  
hapel for þe nonez, and of hyghe eldee; / Brode, bryzt, watz his berde, and al  
beuer-hwed, / Sturne, stif on þe stryþþe on stalworth schonkez, / Felle face as þe  
fyre, and fre of hys speche; / And wel hym semed, for soþe, as þe segge þuzt, / To  
lede a lortschyp in lee of leudez ful gode.

[Then firmly, like good friends, / arm into arm they fell. / Gawain gazed at the  
lord who greeted him so gratefully, / the great one who governed that grand estate,  
/ powerful and large, in the prime of his life, / with a bushy beard as red as a  
beaver’s, / steady in his stance, solid of build, / with a fiery face and fine  
conversation: / and it suited him well, so it seemed to Gawain, / to keep such a  
castle and captain his knights.]<sup>424</sup>

Zeikowitz analyses this scene and discusses its possible erotic undertones:

The previous embrace adds an erotic charge to Gawain’s visual act—a charge that is heightened by the continued proximity of Bertilak’s body and the positive

<sup>420</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, “A Kiss is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Diacritics* 24 (1994): 210.

<sup>421</sup> Dinshaw, “A Kiss,” 210.

<sup>422</sup> Richard E. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 63.

<sup>423</sup> Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism*, 92.

<sup>424</sup> *Sir Gawain*, 203.

evaluation Gawain gives it. The pleasure Gawain experiences is not caused by Bertilak's return haze but rather Gawain's action on and reception of the species emanating from Bertilak. Like a model Knight, Bertilak exerts power over Gawain, who at least in part because he is enraptured by Bertilak's appearance places himself under his command.<sup>425</sup>

Bertilak, in turn, expresses desire for Gawain. As is revealed in fitt IV, Bertilak was fully informed about Morgan's plan of scaring Guinevere and testing the knights of the Round Table. Bertilak even proudly exclaims that he was the person behind his wife's seduction: "Now know I wel þy cosses, and þy costes als, / And þe wowyng of my wyf: I wro3t hit myseluen. / I sende hir to asay þe, and sothly me þynkkez / On þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote 3ede" [And I know of your courtesies, and conduct, and kisses, / and the wooing of my wife—for its was all my work! / I sent her to test you—and in truth it turns out / you're by far the most faultless fellow on earth].<sup>426</sup> Zeikowitz notes that Bertilak's voluntary involvement "adds a homoerotic dimension" to the heterosexual kissing scenes; if Bertilak concocted the seduction scenes himself, he may have been prepared (or willing) to engage with Gawain in any manner that his wife would manage.<sup>427</sup> Additionally, Bertilak may use his wife to connect deeper with Gawain, as argued by Dinshaw: "We could imagine that Bertilak had more agency in this whole plot than he finally admits to Gawain – that his sending his wife in to Gawain was a way of bonding himself, via the woman, to the man".<sup>428</sup> Boyd agrees that Bertilak's involvement hints at homosexual desire, elaborating on how this desire is placed within the lord's homosocial environment:

since the Lady's sexual hunt for Gawain is actually Bertilak's homosocial hunt to entrap him, and since Bertilak's homosocial hunt carries sexual traces from its relationship to the Lady's temptation, then Bertilak's masculine world of homosociality, violence, and aggression—all types of masculine exchange—discloses traces of (homo)sexual desire.<sup>429</sup>

In a way, Bertilak used both Morgan's plan and the different customs of homosociality to connect deeply to Gawain.

### *Sir Gawain and Masculine Identity*

The lady's last resort in her quest of receiving some physical reaction from Gawain is accomplished by a strategy that holds a close resemblance to a scene in the twelfth-century's

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<sup>425</sup> Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism*, 92.

<sup>426</sup> *Sir Gawain*, 234.

<sup>427</sup> Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism*, 63.

<sup>428</sup> Dinshaw, "A Kiss," 215.

<sup>429</sup> David L. Boyd, "Sodomy, Misogyny, and Displacement: Occluding Queer Desire in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Arthuriana* 8 (1998): 86.



*Lanval*. As mentioned already, Lady Bertilak only succeeds in wavering Gawain when she tells him how she doubts his reputation as courtly knight. In *Lanval*, the queen gains a reaction from Lanval when she openly doubts his heterosexuality. Both remarks have the knights on their toes, eager to prove the ladies that they are wrong. For Lanval, it ends in admitting he is together with a woman despite promising he would hide it; for Gawain, it ends in him kissing Lady Bertilak despite refusing at the beginning.

Both accusations – the accusation that Gawain is not courtly and that Lanval prefers men – are attacks on the knights’ chivalrous reputations. An accusation of homosexuality was an indirect attack on one’s masculine identity, and, as the scene in *Sir Gawain*, shows, so is an accusation of uncourtliness. Moreover, the phrasing of “So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden, / (...) / Couth not lyȝtly haf lenged so long wyth a lady, / Bot he had craued a cosse” [a good man like Gawain, so greatly regarded, / (...) / could never have lingered so long with a lady / without craving a kiss], insinuates that Gawain has little interest in women and, possibly, would rather seek his advances with men. In a sense, both Gawain and Lanval are accused of a lack of desire for women, which translates to a desire for men instead.

Boyd touches upon the possibility that Sir Gawain refuses the kisses because he knows that he would have to convert his homosocial bond with the lord into a homosexual one, which Boyd regards as a homophobic message: “If Gawain’s refusal of the Lady’s advances signals a rejection of adultery and disloyalty, then it also denotes an implicit repudiation of both homosexual activity and its potential mediation through heterosexual and homosocial practices”.<sup>430</sup> To maintain his masculine, knightly identity, however, he has to give in to the lady and accept both her kisses and the fact that he is going to have to share these kisses with Lord Bertilak. If this line of reasoning is correct, it reveals a paradox: Gawain refuses the kisses to maintain his masculine, heterosexual identity, which leads to an accusation of unmanliness, because of which he has to kiss Lord Bertilak, which, in turn, makes him lose said masculine, heterosexual identity.

As already explained previously, medieval homophobia was closely tied to medieval misogyny. *Sir Gawain* does contain an explicit misogynistic scene, when Sir Gawain blames women for his loss of honour:

And comaundeȝ me to þat cortays, your comlych fere, / Boþe þat on and þat oþer,  
myn honoured ladyez, / Þat þus hor knyȝt wyth hor kest han koyntly bigyled. / Bot  
hit is no ferly þaȝ a fole madde, / And þurȝ wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorȝe,

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<sup>430</sup> Boyd, “Sodomy,” 88.

/ For so watz Adam in erde with one bygyled, / And Salamon with fele sere, and  
 Samson eftsoner— / Dalyda dalt hym hys wyrde—and Dauyth þerafter / Watz  
 blended with Barsabe, þat much bale þoled. / Now þese were wrathed wyth her  
 wyles, hit were a wynne huge / To luf hom wel, and leue hem not, a leude þat  
 coupe. / For þes wer forne þe freest, þat folged alle þe sele / Exellently of alle þyse  
 oþer, vnder heuenryche / þat mused; / And alle þay were biwyled / With wymmen  
 þat þay vsed. / Þaȝ I be now bigyled, / Me þink me burde be excused.

[And mind you commend me to your fair wife, / both to her and the other, those  
 honorable ladies / who kidded me so cleverly with their cunning tricks. / But no  
 wonder if a fool finds his way into folly / and be wiped of his wits by womanly  
 guile— / it's the way of the world. Adam fell because of a woman, / and Solomon  
 because of several, and as for Samson, / Delilah was his downfall, and afterwards  
 David / was bamboozled by Bathsheba and bore the grief. / All wrecked and ruined  
 by their wrongs; if only / we could love our ladies without believing their lies. /  
 And those were foremost of all whom fortune favored, / excellent beyond all  
 others existing under heaven,' / he cried. / 'Yet all were charmed and changed /  
 by wily womankind. / I suffered just the same, / but clear me of my crime'.<sup>431</sup>

Boyd connects this misogynist scene to medieval homophobia. Men engaging in sexual acts with men were not judged for lying with men, but for lying with men *like women*: “the late medieval discourse of male-male sodomitical relations saw the passive position as a barren feminine one”.<sup>432</sup> Behaving as a woman was shameful, and presuming a passive role in sexual intimacy with other men was what caused one’s shame. Boyd calls Gawain’s sudden misogynistic outburst “a crucial [shift] in the poem’s sexual politics” as “the patriarchal order usefully employs the relationship between homophobia and misogyny to assure its continued control over the medieval cultural scene by displacing homosexual desire”.<sup>433</sup> According to Boyd, Gawain’s denunciation of women would be an indirect denunciation of homosexuality as well. Moreover, Gawain’s would supposedly try to justify his homosexual advances to the lord by blaming women for his mistake: “The threat of sodomy to the male imaginary is effectively, and easily, displaced onto a feminine Other”.<sup>434</sup> This idea recalls Edward III’s unsuccessful attempt at softening Edward II’s negative reputation: by blaming Edward II’s wife for their marital problems, Edward III tried to distract from Edward II’s rumours of sodomy. Boyd argues that misogyny and homophobia are connected in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

#### *Further Speculations Regarding the Depiction of Homosexuality in Sir Gawain*

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<sup>431</sup> *Sir Gawain*, 235–36.

<sup>432</sup> Dinshaw, “A Kiss,” 215.

<sup>433</sup> Boyd, “Sodomy,” 91.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

Still, *Sir Gawain* lacks explicit signs of either condemning or praising same-sex intimacy, so readers are left with much room for speculation. It is likely that a medieval audience was aware of the fact that Sir Gawain would have to share the bedsheets with his lord if he let himself be seduced by the lady,<sup>435</sup> which allows one to ponder whether the writer of *Sir Gawain* may have played into this awareness and how. One possibility is that the intimate acts between Gawain and Bertilak are used for comedic purposes. Although texts in which same-sex love appears as a comedic device are few, Linkinen notes that “the ones in which laughter at same-sex sexuality has been represented appear to have had the intention of mocking misfortunes and defaming those whose sexuality was seen as unusual”, with Edward II as the fourteenth-century primary victim.<sup>436</sup> The scholar also concludes that “[r]idicule and mockery in relation to the reversal of gender hierarchies proves to have been an existing means of facing same-sex sexuality with laughter”.<sup>437</sup>

Since *Sir Gawain* makes it obvious that Gawain would presume the role of the woman during sexual intercourse with Bertilak, this disruption of gender roles could be presented as humorous. However, since Gawain and Bertilak do not actually copulate, this “comical” possibility is left to the imagination. Perhaps for the better, according to Danko Kamčevski, because “that sort of humour would have turned the romance into a somewhat too comical or farcical story, damaging the deep considerations of faith, steadfastness, loyalty, which the work also espouses”.<sup>438</sup> If *Sir Gawain* used same-sex sexuality as a comedic device, it would distract from the poem’s clearer messages of knightly valour, which is for Kamčevski an argument that the kisses and the possibility of sexual intercourse between Gawain and Bertilak are not used to provoke laughter.

Another possibility, then, is that the kisses make for an unfulfilled but not negative representation of same-sex intimacy. The attraction between Gawain and Bertilak stops at kisses and embraces and does not flower into sexual intercourse or a romantic relationship. According to Boyd, this development presents an indirect homophobic message, because the story “[sets] up a potentially queer situation and then [rejects] it”.<sup>439</sup> Considering the intolerant climate of the century, however, the poem’s depiction of male-male erotic intimacy does not

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<sup>435</sup> Boyd, “Sodomy,” 80.

<sup>436</sup> Linkinen, *Same-Sex*, 207.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>438</sup> Danko Kamčevski, “Orality and Humour in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Fabula* 54 (2013): 267.

<sup>439</sup> Boyd, “Sodomy,” 88.

appear harmful. As explained before, Gawain and Bertilak grow closer after each kiss, and by keeping his oath of providing the lord with everything he gains during his host's absence – with as much conviction as possible – Gawain saves (most of) his own skin.

Although scholars such as Boyd have dived deep into more indirect messages of the Green Knight's motive for punishing Gawain by giving him the scar,<sup>440</sup> the only explicit reason given is because Gawain chose his own life over his Christian faith: “Bot here yow lacked a lyttel, sir, and lewté yow wonted; / Bot þat watz for no wylyde werke, ne wowing nauþer, ‘Bot for 3e lufed your lyf; þe lasse I yow blame” [But a little thing more—it was loyalty that you lacked: / not because you're wicked, or a womanizer, or worse, / but you loved your own life; so I blame you less].<sup>441</sup> If *Sir Gawain* had intended to harshly criticise same-sex love, one could argue that the poem would have been more explicit about it. Taking its rather oppressive social framework into account, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* seems to embrace rather than condemn queer desire, at least on the surface. Perhaps, *Sir Gawain's* depiction of homosexuality is more in keeping with the legal silence on same-sex discourse in fourteenth-century England than with the destructive force of accusations of same-sex desire.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, clear-cut evidence of the poem's opinion on same-sex love is hard to find. Perhaps Gawain refused the lady's advances because he did not want to engage in homosexual intimacy with his lord, but it is also possible that Gawain refused in order to maintain his lord's favour and did not truly mind kissing him when his masculine identity was on the line. Open condemnations of homosexuality are not visible, as both Gawain and Lord Bertilak seem to enjoy their game and kissing each other in an erotic way. Moreover, Lord Bertilak is depicted as the epitome of a good and masculine lord, and kissing and desiring Gawain does not seem to make him any less of one. Lady Bertilak's comment that convinces Gawain to kiss her reminds of the queen's accusation in *Lanval*, that Lanval prefers men over women. Both Lanval and Gawain find their masculinity under attack, and react strongly to it. Furthermore, one scene explicitly reveals the poem's misogyny: Sir Gawain's rant blaming women for his shame and lost honour. Medieval homophobia and medieval misogyny were closely linked – by sleeping with men, men became like women and that was shameful – and thus there could be hidden homophobia present in the poem's misogyny. In short, if criticism on queer desire is present in

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<sup>440</sup> Boyd, “Sodomy,” 90.

<sup>441</sup> *Sir Gawain*, 234.

the poem, it is not overt. And considering the poem's historical context, *Sir Gawain's* depiction of same-sex intimacy could even be considered positive.

## CONCLUSION

The Arthurian Legend proves an interesting subject of investigation for queer studies. Its knightly community creates in itself a setting of homosocial interactions in which many layers of deeper affection can be found. Some knowledge of the socio-historical context in which these tales were written, aids at understanding the layers of same-sex affection that can be detected in the texts, which is what this thesis has shown.

The status of same-sex desire in the Late Middle Ages went through a notable development: while the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century expressed a certain tolerance, with influential homoromantic clergy and literature, voices against same-sex practices, such as that of Peter Damian, grew louder. In the latter half of the twelfth century, these voices were heard and official Church-wide sanctions against same-sex practices were established by the Third Lateran Council of 1179. Same-sex acts were often categorised as acts of sodomy and against nature, and being accused of engaging in these acts could cost one's social reputation.

Marie de France's *Lanval* reflects the danger of being accused of sodomy. Lanval, a knight ostracised by the members of Arthur's court, faces risk of losing his masculine and heterosexual identity when the queen accuses him of preferring men over women. He reacts strongly to this accusation, aware that if the queen were to be believed, he would lose face in Arthur's society. *Lanval*, when contextualised within its historical frame, appears to contain homoerotic subtext which comes to light in several elements of the story: Lanval is portrayed as a social outcast and it is rumoured throughout court that he preferred men instead of women; his romantic interest lies with a divine creature who subverts social expectations; his relationship to the divine woman must remain a secret because others would not understand or condemn their love, and even at the supposedly happy heterosexual ending of the story, Lanval is forced to leave. *Lanval*, thus, shows notable parallels to the increasingly intolerant climate of late medieval Europe.

In the thirteenth century, the concern over homosexuality increased. Same-sex practices became topics of discussion in clerical texts, and these discussions often included suggested punishments for engaging in said practices. Law codes issued in this century contain some of these suggested punishments, but there are few existing documents that mention actual enactments of penalties. Be that as it may, homosexuality was less tolerated than hundred years

prior; the century saw a strong increase in the persecution of nonconformists and expressing a desire for someone of the same gender was no longer safe.

Remarkably, the thirteenth-century *Prose Lancelot* features a male character who expresses a clear desire for a man. Galehaut loves Lancelot deeply, which is repeatedly stressed within the story. Although Galehaut's declarations of love towards Lancelot are not confirmed romantic or platonic, this thesis argued that Galehaut loved Lancelot romantically by, for instance, comparing the knights' relationship to traditional tropes in heterosexual romances from the same period. In regard to its historical context, the story clearly considers the possible shamefulness that others may have seen in Galehaut's love for Lancelot and thereby reflects the century's unease of same-sex affection. Still, Galehaut is neither punished nor slandered for his love, and is still regarded highly after his death – therefore, same-sex love does not appear to be condemned in the *Prose*.

Attitudes towards same-sex desire changed further in the fourteenth century. In England, same-sex intercourse does not seem to have been legally persecuted, and the subject does not seem to have been a matter of particular concern, but attitudes were different when it came to figures under suspicion, such as the Knights Templar or the two English kings Edward II and Richard II. The kings and their excessive love for their favourites aroused suspicion and jealousy among the other noblemen and -women, and voices of condemnation arose among the people. Edward II's first favourite, Piers Gaveston, was sent into exile several times before he was put to death, and the king's second favourite, Hugh Despenser the Younger, was murdered. Richard II's favourites were disliked in the same manner, and four of the five were sent into exile. Especially Robert de Vere was loved by the king, which became obvious when the king summoned his body back to court after his death and lovingly stroked his bejewelled fingers. These kings and their fates show that, at this point in the Late Middle Ages, accusations of sodomy aided at deposing disliked figures.

In the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, same-sex desire appears in the relationship between Sir Gawain and Lord Bertilak. As a result of their game, Sir Gawain and Lord Bertilak kiss several times, in the same erotic manner that Gawain and Lady Bertilak kissed. The story does not explicitly reference events from the century, nor is it explicit in its opinion on same-sex romance, but Gawain is lauded by Bertilak for keeping his oath and kissing him in the way that Lady Bertilak kissed him. Moreover, Gawain and Bertilak do not seem to mind kissing each other, and neither of the two men is actively or explicitly denounced for doing so: Bertilak remains a manly and much-esteemed lord, while Gawain's only flaw,

according to Bertilak, is his unchristian desire to place his own life above his loyalty. In a way, the attitude towards same-sex desire in *Sir Gawain* appears in keeping with fourteenth-century England's desired silence on same-sex activities. Same-sex love was not necessarily persecuted in England, and the desire that Gawain and Bertilak express for each other is not visibly condemned.

To conclude, each Arthurian text depicts a particular form of male-male love or desire: Lanval is accused of preferring men, Galehaut openly loves and devotes his life to his fellow knight, and Gawain and Bertilak kiss in the same erotic manner as Gawain and Bertilak's wife. Aside from these more obvious same-sex aspects, the stories also contain more subtle depictions of same-sex desire, and placing the stories within their historical frameworks enables a much broader perspective – one that invites speculation about how each story treats same-sex love compared to how it was generally regarded in each century. *Lanval* seems to actively include the twelfth-century's conceptions on homosexuality and the danger of being accused of same-sex desire, while the *Prose Lancelot* expresses awareness of the century's unease of same-sex love – repeatedly acknowledging others would regard it as shameful. The *Prose* engages with this shame by rebuking it and portraying the same-sex love of Galehaut and Lancelot as worthy and powerful. *Sir Gawain*, too, engages with the notions of homosocialism between knights and lords, by repeatedly jumping over and playing with the thin line between platonic and erotic physical interactions between men. Like fourteenth-century England, *Sir Gawain* does not express too much general concern over same-sex desire.

Over the course of four centuries, concerns over same-sex intimacy intensified in Western Europe, and by understanding this development, one can gain a deeper understanding of the kinds of same-sex desire or subtext incorporated in medieval stories such as the Arthurian legend. As shown, queer studies enable us to grasp historical texts in manners which have not been explored too thoroughly. The Arthurian texts discussed in this thesis contain many different forms of male-male affection, and by “queering” these texts, one elucidates a side of these forms of affection that have been overlooked in previous studies. These medieval texts seem to have engaged in the rowdy discussion around same-sex desire of the Late Middle Ages – each in different ways – and have shown to be worthwhile objects of research for queer studies. Surely, the path of queering historical – and especially medieval – literature will from now on, too, prove to be a long and interesting one.



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