

Sexualized Masculinity and the Plurality of the Medieval Male

by

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Introduction

Throughout history, there has almost always been a sense of some inner quality that separates one male from another. Not wealth or power alone but some quality that is distinctly inherent within males. A male who possessed a greater amount of this attribute was different from and superior to the other males around him. For the sake of clarity, I shall refer to this quality as masculinity throughout this thesis. For most of mankind's long history, this term did not exist as a universally definable concept (or at all), and, even today, the definition would undoubtedly change from one individual to the next. However, though the definition of masculinity is constantly in flux, certain trends and qualities pervade distinct segments of time and place. Take homosexuality for example. In ancient Greece having an attractive male lover could possibly have increased (and would certainly not have diminished) one's masculinity. In 1980's America in the midst of the AIDS crisis, the majority opinion was rather different.

The late Middle Ages in England and Normandy¹ were a heyday for masculinity – a masculinity specifically intertwined with sex and sexuality. To our best knowledge the terms masculine and feminine first appeared in this era (giving the modern historian some insight into the significance of gender in the Middle Ages), although their definitions differed significantly from how we utilize them today.² Due to the unusual, and often idiosyncratic, theories on gender and sexuality

¹ For the purpose of this thesis the late or later Middle Ages shall be, approximately, 1100-1500 AD, and for the sake of simplicity, I will often refer to my period of study as the Middle Ages or the Medieval era rather than late or later Middle Ages.

² Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

that were promoted throughout Medieval England and Normandy, many historians³ have tackled medieval gender relations from all different angles and examined connections between gender and sex and various aspects of the larger social and cultural world. However, medieval masculinity is a highly multifarious term, requiring an examination all of its many aspects to create an accurate picture, and thus far, no modern historian has truly *defined* it. In this thesis, I will attempt to accomplish this daunting task. Although I was unable, within the limited pages of a thesis, to examine every medieval document relating to masculinity, I have provided analysis for a broad survey of medieval sources, which should provide the reader with sufficient understanding of Medieval social constructs and beliefs for the creation of a historical definition of medieval masculinity.

Medievalists have often attempted to do so, but they have frequently failed to grasp the enormous scope of the project, focusing in detail on one part or another. A number of historians of sexuality and gender throughout history, including Thomas Laqueur and Joan Cadden, limit themselves and the accuracy of their works by defining masculinity based solely upon medical and philosophical writings, both ancient and Medieval. This method fails to take into account the social aspects of the term – the popular readings of the time, such as Medieval Romances and manuals of manners and chivalry, the new economic necessity for a male heir, and the social constructs and superstitions of the era. The laws of the Christian Church also helped to define masculinity both through positive reinforcement of certain traits and actions

³ This thesis borrows from and builds upon the ideas and works of many Medieval historians, including, but not limited to, Joan Cadden, Rhoda L. Friedrichs, Jo Ann McNamara, Thomas Laqueur, Caroline Bynum, and Catherine Rider.

and strict renouncements of others. Masculinity is a socially constructed concept, and a complete definition and comprehension of the idea is impossible without a thorough investigation into society's views and opinions.

While cultural understanding is necessary for any historical definition of masculinity, medieval masculinity is exceptional in that a common theme permeates the era: almost every aspect of medieval masculinity can be linked in some manner or other back to sex, sexuality, and sexual abilities. This statement must not be taken too far. Medieval masculinity was not so entirely dependent upon sexuality that masculinity without sexuality was impossible, but prominent and superior sexuality was inherently connected with biological maleness (as I will discuss in chapter one) and often played an important part in masculinity as a social label. Furthermore sexuality often remained a prominent focus in determining masculinity whether it was a positive presence or conspicuously absent. A lack of intercourse did not necessarily doom a man's masculinity. He could be masculine without having sex, but the strong focus on sexuality remained even without the physical act (as will be examined in chapter three).

Sex and gender, as we know them today, did not exist in the Middle Ages. The study of anatomy in Medieval England was still relatively primitive, relying on ancient philosophers to explain the differences between male and female genitalia and reproductive processes. Female organs were examined in comparison to male organs, and many prominent scientists believed in a "one-sex" theory that postulated that female genitalia were simply male genitalia that had not emerged from the body, that were simply "stuck inside". Gender was inherently connected to these sexual organs,

with the visible penis determining the evolutionarily superior male and the lack thereof establishing the inferior female, or non-male. Physiological and psychological traits were grafted onto each gender to such a point that the terms masculine and feminine were adjectives not simply used to describe people of the biological male or female sex but to imply the appearance or absence of certain characteristics and abilities. How did people understand sex and gender in the Middle Ages? Were there one sex or two sexes – females using male organs that failed to descend versus two fully distinct sets of sexual organs? Were there two genders or multiple genders – male and female versus masculine females and feminine males?

I postulate that many Medieval English people did not have a definite opinion on the concept of sex (although many philosophers had much to say on the subject and will be discussed in detail in chapters one and two) and simply connected the visible penis directly with the male gender. Therefore, a lack thereof would imply a person of the female gender. One of the foremost authors on medieval sex theory, Thomas Laqueur introduces his one-sex, multiple gender theory almost immediately in his book and spends the rest of the narrative dancing on the very edges of gender, choosing to focus more on the scientific aspects of biological sex. He uses language to interpret the one-sex philosophy, showing that a word for vagina did not appear until well into the Renaissance and that “it was not, for example, until 1759 that anyone bothered to reproduce a detailed female skeleton in an anatomy book to illustrate its difference from the male. Up to this time there had been one basic

structure for the human body and that structure was male”.⁴ On the other hand, Joan Cadden rejects his theories, claiming that “Though there is much evidence in the present study that fits his ‘one sex’ model, Medieval views on the status of the uterus and the opinion of Medieval physiognomers about male and female traits suggest evidence of other models not reducible to Laqueur’s”.⁵ Although Cadden does provide a few two-sex examples, the overwhelming evidence provided by Laqueur leads me to believe that most Medieval theorists accepted the one-sex theory or something similar to it throughout the later Middle Ages.

On the other hand, Laqueur’s gender theory is harder to prove. The appearance of the penis in this “one-sex” system then created two separate but very flexible genders (one with a visible penis and one without). This arrangement allows for Laqueur’s “fluid” gender, where “biological sex, which we generally take to serve as the basis of gender, was just as much in the domain of culture and meaning as was gender. A penis was thus a status symbol rather than a sign of some other deeply rooted ontological essence: *real sex*”⁶. He attempts to prove this point by perceiving the normal through the abnormal. Unfortunately, Laqueur’s use of hermaphrodites as examples throughout late Medieval history creates problems with a fluid medieval gender classification. In declaring that the penis was merely a status symbol rather than a definition of sex, Laqueur allows for the creation of an in-between gender or genders. The modern historian cannot judge the medieval treatment of hermaphrodites as the medieval treatment of men versus women because there is no

⁴ Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1990), 10.

⁵ Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 3.

⁶ Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 134.

evidence that the general person in the Middle Ages understood the concept of hermaphroditism – a person who, in modern terms, possess the sexual organs of both a male and female, but may still identify more with a single gender. If we take the “one-sex” theory as dominant, in which the penis was determinant of gender, then a biological woman with an enlarged clitoris (like a miniature penis) or who suddenly grew a penis was a problematic anomaly did not fit into the medieval system of sex and gender and could not possibly be judged utilizing “normal” methods. She might still portray traditionally female attributes, which will be discussed more specifically in chapter four, or even think of herself as female, but her penis would classify her as a medieval male no matter that she had been raised as a female and judged based upon assumed feminine qualities. Her new penis meant that she was now to be assessed by society using masculine standards. Members of medieval society did not believe that they were performing gender – gender was simply a slightly more fluid reflection of biological sex – and thus, hermaphroditism was probably understand, at best, as a sex change.⁷

Cadden also analyzes hermaphrodites, instead using them to further prove her theories on the regularity of genderizing in the late Middle Ages and entirely rejecting Laqueur’s premise. “First, and more generally, hermaphrodites were pejoratively described as rebellious and disruptive. Second, and more subtly, the traits and behaviors of the individuals in question were at once identified and suppressed by attempts to reduce them to permutations of the conventional categories of masculine

⁷ Judith Butler, "Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory." *Theatre journal* 40 (1988): 519-531.

and feminine”.⁸ Including the irregular within the understanding of the *normal*, Laqueur fails to acknowledge the desire of mankind to reduce the abnormal into the familiar world of social normalcy and acceptability. Cadden rebukes this failure by demonstrating the use of masculine and feminine within medieval society and the implications of that use.

Cumulatively these references suggest what ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ meant and disclose the values associated with the terms. But they do more. First, they demonstrate the extent to which those gender constructs have been abstracted in the later middle ages, creating the explicit possibility of dividing and speaking of the world in terms of gender. Second, to the extent that these references are accompanied by naturalistic explanations, they show a certain cultural discomfort with that same process of abstraction – a desire to anchor properties, whether physical or behavioral in ordinary natural processes.⁹

Cadden introduces a more plausible and rigid gender structure of male and female with transferable traits. She claims, “individuals of either sex may partake of any of these properties – that women may be “masculine” and men may be “feminine””.¹⁰ Everyone acted as best they could and terms, such as masculine and feminine, were applied to each individual from there.

As best they could is a purposely-vague phrase because society defined masculinity (regardless of social caste or wealth), and, therefore, society decided who represented a masculine male and who did not. This social approval was particularly significant in Medieval England and Normandy because of a new focus on the individual as a person within a larger group.

Twelfth century religious writing and behavior show a great concern with how groups are formed and differentiated from each other, how roles are defined and evaluated, how behavior is conformed to models. If the religious writing,

⁸ Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 212.

⁹ Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 204

¹⁰ Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 204.

the religious practice, and the religious orders of the twelfth century are characterized by a new concern for the 'inner man,' it is *because* of a new concern for the group, for types and examples, for the 'outer man'.¹¹

People belonged to a variety of different social groupings throughout Medieval England and Normandy, and such groups were not mutually exclusive. A single man could be assessed via his social status, personal appearance, marital state, religious order, etc. He could desire to join groups of which he was not a member (most notably chivalric knighthood or the Christian clergy). Each group defined masculinity individually, and the members would judge others from their group perspective. Thus, all men were responsible for proving and subsequently defending their social masculinity for each group with which they identified. A man could easily be considered masculine by one group and effeminate by another. As it was possible to lose one's status as masculine in a time of weakness or failure (based upon the judgment of ones' contemporaries), particularly sexually, the Medieval male was constantly trying to demonstrate his masculinity as a chivalric warrior, as a father to many children, as the object of desire for numerous women, etc.¹² In Levi Strauss' work, "The Sorcerer and His Magic", he queries whether the actual powers of the sorcerer matter at all or whether, in fact, the only thing a person needs to become a powerful sorcerer is the approval of society. Even the most powerful sorcerer can be brought low by the disbelief of the crowd.¹³ The same is true for the Medieval male.

¹¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 85.

¹² Vern L Bullough, "On being a male in the middle ages." *Medieval masculinities: Regarding men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 34.

¹³ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The sorcerer and his magic, and the effectiveness of symbols, in structural anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

Since masculinity was defined by society, it was also imbued by society – thus the necessity of *proof*.

If a man could demonstrate an inordinate amount of masculinity then he became an ideal male. There were two main masculine ideals that developed over the course of the late Middle Ages. The clash of ideas between the two forms helped to cement the definition of each through responsive laws, stories, and real life actualities. The Church and the chivalric Knight were pitted against each other in constant battle for the entirety of the late Middle Ages as certain men strove to reach the wanton sexual prowess of Lancelot, and the Church attempted to rein in such promiscuity by restricting the male sexual dominance to within the bounds of holy matrimony. The Church was especially strict during the later Middle Ages, creating new edicts and orders to match the increasingly reputation-based society.

Although the Church and the chivalric knights helped to create and were the main models for, respectively, the two key examples of ideal, they relied upon the writings of ancient and contemporary philosophers and current cultural ethos for components. Within the two larger categories of the Church and Chivalry there were two sorts of ideal males: the fantastical ideal and the real ideal. The fantastical ideal only exists in romantic fantasy stories, troubadours songs of chivalric heroes, and the within the pages of the Bible and stories of saints. This ideal is the quintessential man – a model for all mankind.

The fantastical ideal chivalric knight “denotes a man of aristocratic standing and probably noble ancestry, and is capable, if called upon, of equipping himself with a warhorse and the arms of a heavy cavalryman, and has been through certain rituals that

make him what he is – who has been ‘dubbed’ to knighthood”¹⁴. While, as Keen goes on to describe in his book *Chivalry*, this definition barely scratches the surface, it provides an idea of the brute strength—typically a masculine trait—and noble virtues this lifestyle entailed as well as what Medieval readers would have automatically associated with the chivalric knight. But, what would a romance be without courtly love? A chivalric knight used his strength and prowess in battle as well as his social virtues to protect and politely court women. By gaining the admiration and sexual attentions of the female gender, chivalric knight further proved his manliness. Thus, a female lover also seems to be a requirement for a chivalric knight, but only if he can control his love. To prove his masculinity he must preserve his “natural” dominance over his female lover, and not become her or love’s slave. If a man lost control of his own agency by either following the inferior lead of his female lover or becoming consumed by love as an emotion, he became like a slave with the lack of authority and capabilities suggested by such a title. Such maintenance of masculinity was done by “removing the ‘feminine’ feelings of helpless and inadequacy engendered by love by asserting his maleness – which seems to imply having intercourse”.¹⁵ If by some circumstance they cannot copulate, it must be for valid reasons and he must be the one to reject her. Were the fantastical ideal man, the hero of the story, to fail in any of these aspects, he must die, or at the very least, be punished in some horrific manner. Without his masculinity, the ideal chivalric knight is nothing.

¹⁴ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 1-2.

¹⁵ Bullough, "On being a male in the middle ages." ed. Clare A Lees, *Medieval masculinities: Regarding men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 39.

The religious fantastical ideal male, on the other hand, resisted temptation although it was always very clear in stories that he was fully capable of satisfying a woman. His virginal state was by choice. The ideal Christian male had the inner strength to defeat his own sinful desires, and in his major work, *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas, a highly influential medieval theologian, confidently stated that in God's eyes "Without doubt, therefore, virginity is preferable to conjugal continence".¹⁶ Some fantastical ideal males did not feel any stirrings of desire at all, a sinlessness thought to be far beyond the capabilities of living men. The Church ideal was also intelligent and kind and, as formed during the course of the Crusades, a warrior for Christ with all of the strength and fighting capabilities of the chivalric knight but in possession of a true moral purpose. He fought to resolve his sins without judgment and without desire to enhance his own reputation.

Very few living men could possibly live up to either of these incredibly high standards, and there also existed a standard of idealism set more within the reach of the real (non-fantastical) male. The real ideal chivalric male was handsome, young, intelligent, wealthy, and of reasonably high social status. More importantly, he was an object of sexual desire and possessed the ability to satisfy a woman. All of his basic characteristics were borrowed from the fantastical hero but in lesser quantities (not every man could be the best knight in all of England), and the real ideal need not die if his status as masculine is diminished. The real ideal Christian male was divided into two groups, the churchman and the layman. The job of the real ideal layman was to beget

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. trans., Fathers of the English Dominican Province. (1947). <http://sacred texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/index.htm>. Section Treatise on Fortitude and Temperance QQ 152.

many children and to be an instructive and moral father. He did not engage in various sinful activities such as drunkenness and gambling, standard bonding activities, and daily, easy methods of proving masculinity through dominance over others. Instead he proved his masculinity through his morality and duty. On the other hand, the real ideal churchman served as a father figure over his parish rather than producing children himself. He did not succumb to his desires and engage in sexual activity of any kind.¹⁷ Regardless of whether or not he was an ordained member of the church, the real ideal Christian male was supposed to be a masculine leader of the secular and religious community alike.

If a man was not an ideal male, then he would receive another label, that of either a quotidian man or an effeminate one. The quotidian male will serve as a catchall term for the average, ordinary, or standard male. He is not the non-ideal man because such a label puts him only in comparison with the ideal. He must also be seen in contrast to the effeminate male and the female. He is important in his universality and will be explained in far more detail in the final chapter. Exhibiting any feminine qualities placed a man in danger of being compared to his inferior, female counterpart. In a world where men were considered the superior human and females were practically evil, only necessary for reproduction, being described as a masculine female could, but not always, be considered a compliment. Being deemed a feminine male, on the other hand, was always an insult.

An effeminate male was a man who portrayed generally female qualities. Although these qualities were also rather flexible, the phrase usually meant that the

¹⁷ Jennifer D Thibodeaux, "Man of the Church, or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy." *Gender and History* 18 (2006): 380-399.

man was weak, immoral, stupid, deceitful, or incapable of fulfilling a woman's sexual and reproductive needs. The effeminate male was often mocked by society, regarded as inferior, like the female whose qualities he shared. Homosexual males and sodomites shared in this shame due to their sexual positions (one had to play the submissive female role) and often had female qualities prescribed onto them. Owing to the negative attitude directed towards effeminate males, men lived in fear of failing to display the proper masculinity – again explaining the need for proof. While everyone strove or desired to be an ideal male, the quotidian male, at least, was safe from gender-based and sexualized mockery and social shame.

Regardless of whether the male was trying to fulfill his religious duty to God and mankind by promoting the future existence of the human race, attempting to create an heir to inherit his life's work or fortune, or simply proving his masculinity by sexually pleasuring his female lover, every male (with the exception of those ordained by the church) required the capacity to engage physically in the sexual act. Even Thomas Aquinas acknowledged the necessity for sexual ability. He noted, "Although the act of carnal copulation is not essential to marriage, ability to fulfill the act is essential, because marriage gives each of the married parties power over the other's body in relation to marital intercourse".¹⁸ Furthermore, according to many ancient and late medieval philosophers, the burden of reproduction was on the male. It was his semen that produced the child, and, even though there were many causes (of both male and female origin) of impotence and failure to conceive, the male suffered a far more disastrous blow to his social reputation through the loss of his

¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. Section To The Third Part Of the Summa Theologica QQ 58.

masculinity. The male of the late Middle Ages lived in fear of both impotence and sterility because both would imply his failure as a man. As a result, the medieval males looked for ways to place the blame on someone else's shoulders. Female witches were given most of the responsibility and methods of understanding witch-induced impotence began to appear everywhere, from theological texts to the famous witch manual *Malleus Maleficarum*. Others searched for cures in the strangest of places – the sheer number of which imply the significance of these effeminizing problems and the failure of most to actually cure the inflicted.

The Medieval era was a time for men to prove their masculinity through sex, sexuality, and sexual prowess. Medieval Romances (and other popular readings, such as manuals of courtesy) and the Church provided ideals toward which the quotidian man could strive. Consequently, it was also a time of prominence for philosophy, medicine, and witchcraft as men attempted to alleviate the imminent destruction of their reputations through impotence and inability to reproduce – most often by blaming the inferior or lustful designs of a female. Medieval masculinity cannot be a dictionary entry. It is a truly historical term that can only be understood through a cultural immersion beginning with the possible historical knowledge of the Medieval person (the permeation of the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and Ovid) and moving all the way through the trials of Abelard and Heloise, the songs of the troubadours, and the publishing of the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Medieval masculinity was both fluid and concrete – its definition changing depending upon the particular group but almost always focused on sexuality.

Chapter One: Historical Masculinity Before the Middle Ages

The concept of male domination over females began long before the Middle Ages. Although this superiority had various causes and effects throughout history, many ancient philosophers spent inordinate amounts of time examining the process of reproduction and what each gender brought to the bedroom. Almost all of the philosophers discussed in this chapter have varying opinions on the actual procedure itself (such as whether or not pleasure or love play key roles), but they ultimately concur that the male contributes more to the process of reproduction and the woman's womb provides the fertile ground for the creation of the embryo.

The ancient philosophers were highly important to the later Middle Ages. In the late twelfth century a series of dedicated translators brought the knowledge of the Greeks, Romans, and Arabs from Arabic texts to Latin where it proceeded to invade the libraries and minds of the aristocrats, contemporary philosophers, theologians, and universities.¹⁹ These ancient doctrines brought higher education and understanding into England and Normandy, ending the "dark ages" and beginning a new era of intellectual curiosity. Medieval people read the ancient philosophers and used their theories as a foundation from which to begin further studies. At first men such as Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas preached from the gospel of Aristotle and understanding. But as the Church grew more prominent in the life of the common man, the blind faith and spiritual love of Plato began to permeate the era through the teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Abelard's enemy and debate opponent. Even the love manuals of Ovid captivated the likes of Andreas Cappelanus and helped

¹⁹ Edward Grant, *Physical science in the middle ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), 17.

instill the perception of love as a disease that can weaken the man, an idea that plays a major role in many medieval romance stories. Biology was especially important. Much of what the Greeks and Romans knew from their own scientific observations had been lost as popular knowledge in the intervening centuries. Medieval scholars read their works and began to study the human body anew, leading to medical studies in universities and professionalized dissections. The works of Avicenna, an Arabic philosopher from the 900s, who was heavily influenced himself by Galen, were among the most influential in biology and anatomical studies in the universities and medical schools. Thus, although the average man could probably not quote Plato, many of these ideas probably gradually trickled down from the minds of the elite down the chain through the growing power of literacy and the words of the town priest.

The Role of Man

The role of man as human, and thus above animals and other beings without souls or logical reasoning abilities, and as superior to women has been a common social feature of civilizations throughout history. On the surface the reasons for such egoism is relatively clear. Man has always been larger and stronger than woman, giving him a greater ability to hunt, fight, defend, and control. As societies grew more complex, people began to develop theories on the role of man, giving him more explicit validation for his station as the superior being. These reasons appeared everywhere throughout civilizations – religion, lore, and philosophy all defended the rights of man. The role of man in the Middle Ages did not appear overnight and was a

result of thousands of years of opinions passed on through generations of ancestors and writings that influenced cultures both ancient and medieval.

The Bible places men above women beginning with the story of “Genesis”. Although the nuances of the story change depending on the interpreter and the time period, Adam is clearly closer than Eve to God’s heart. He was created first and fully by God’s hand rather than second and from a rib, implying such things as woman’s dependence on man for existence and woman’s secondary place in society. Furthermore, Eve, the woman, is the one who dooms mankind to the pain and struggle of childbirth and working the land forever. Although Adam can easily be blamed for listening to the advice of a woman, she is the one who consorts with the devil (an idea that is heavily adopted by the medieval and early Renaissance witchcraft movements) and initially bites into the apple. She is the one who leads innocent man into temptation and ruins him for Paradise. The underlying moral of the story is rather unmistakable: Man is God’s first child and Woman is Man’s first temptation – his first downfall.

In ancient Greece and Rome, the male-female paradigm was a solidified structure, assumed rather than debated. The male form was undoubtedly better than the female one. The better question was how to treat the weaker female form in comparison to the superior male? Furthermore, even within each gender, there was a ranking of superior and inferior – some men were better than others and some women were better than others. When Plato began to envision a *Republic*, a utopia for all people, women and lesser males provided key dilemmas. Plato’s reasoning for

creating these strata seems to depend almost entirely on one's strength as a warrior, determining strength as the key quality of a person. He even hopes that

If the difference consists only in women bearing and men begetting children, this does not amount to a proof that a woman differs from a man in respect of the sort of education she should receive; and we shall therefore continue to maintain that our guardians and their wives ought to have the same pursuits... Men and women alike possess the qualities which make a guardian; they differ only in their comparative strength or weakness.²⁰

Where a woman is weak, the strong man is brave, and the brave, young man more potent in bed. While trying to ensure that only the best men and women populated his society, Plato decreed "that our braver and better youth...might have greater facilities of intercourse with women given them; their bravery will be a reason, and such fathers ought to have as many sons as possible".²¹ Thus emerged Plato's concept of the ideal male. However, Plato's hypothetical utopia did not revolve around proof of manhood. His ideal male was brave and strong and, therefore, produced many children. The medieval male, on the other hand, was masculine if he had the ability to father many children. Unlike the medieval male, Plato's male does not become more masculine through exhibiting sexual prowess. Furthermore, Plato's soldier will be spurred onto "win the prize of valour" by his love "whether his love be youth or maiden"²², rather than win the maiden through his valor on the battlefield as in Medieval times. The word father is also rather significant. Plato's man did not need to act as a father, and babies were supposed to be raised by nurses rather than their

²⁰ Plato, *The Republic of Plato*. trans., Benjamin Jowett, (Calredon Press, 1888), Book Five. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>.

²¹ Jowett, *The Republic of Plato*, Book Five.

²² Jowett, *The Republic of Plato*, Book Five.

actual parents. Plato's warrior male was essentially a sperm bank to pass on his good qualities.

The heroes of the Greek world likewise focused on the duties and strength of the warrior. Unlike rules of the medieval chivalric knighthood, the requirements for heroism in Ancient Greece were focused on great deeds rather than sexual encounters and number of female desirers. Hercules provides a truly heroic and nonsexual example. A son of Zeus, his supernatural strength allowed him to perform great deeds all over Greece, killing the monsters that plagued the land wherever he traveled. His armor was not decadent gold and jewels built by a craftsman's hands, but a skin from a lion with an impenetrable hide that he strangled with his bare hands. Although many women fell in love with Hercules along his many quests, he sought valor through completing his twelve tasks rather than pleasing these women. Homer's Odysseus was also a hero of deeds rather than sex. Known for his incredible and fox-like intellect, Odysseus was the diplomat of the Trojan War in addition to killing hundreds through his skill with the bow. In the *Odyssey*, he travels home to his wife for 10 long years, tricking giants and battling the elements both natural and supernatural. Although he misses his wife and she misses him, they do not seem to miss any sort of sexual relationship. In fact, he is needed at home to protect his beautiful wife, Penelope rather than fornicate with her. In his absence (and assumed death) suitors have come from all over the land to seek her unwilling hand in marriage. Penelope, as a woman, cannot physically resist these men, and his son has not yet gained the respect he needs as a man and warrior to command these men to leave. There are a few sexual encounters in the *Odyssey*, but they do not seem to

prove Odysseus' masculinity through sexual satisfaction or reproduction. For instance, when Odysseus overpowers Circe and forces her to turn his men, whom she had transformed into pigs, back into men, he stays with her for a year as her lover and a slave to temptation and overindulgence. In this instance (and before when Calypso bewitches Odysseus and forces him to stay on her island as her lover) Odysseus is not a sexual warrior in charge of his own actions, but the captive of women. He provides a rather unheroic antithesis to the chivalric ideal. Furthermore, although Odysseus lay with Circe many times, no children were produced from their lovemaking. According to Harris Friedberg, an associate professor of English at Wesleyan University, this lack of offspring is because the Greeks believed that children could only be produced when the two people were married to each other.²³ Flings and adultery could not produce children (Note: intercourse with Zeus seems to be an exception to this rule). Thus, Odysseus could not further prove his manhood through reproductive purposes, and his time as Circe's lover was simply to enjoy the pleasure of sex.

Ovid, an important influence on medieval romance stories, the courts of love, and the philosopher Andreas Cappelanus, ruled the world of love in ancient Rome and through his poetry, shows that Rome was just as divided by the male-female paradigm. In his famous works on the subject of Love, Ovid's male lover is not a weak lover-boy poet begging to kiss the tips of his mistress' fingers. He is strong and forceful, both in his love and lovemaking. His words are not simply praise, and when she wrongs him, he reprimands her. His females, on the other hand, are weak, lustful creatures, who bounce from one man to the next if the first is no longer strong enough

²³ Harris A Friedburg, "Epic Tradition" (Lecture).

to contain her. The man must keep her jealous to keep her fickle love alive and rape was encouraged for “Though you call it force; it’s force that pleases girls: what delights is often to have given what they wanted, against their will”.²⁴ Furthermore, a strong man could sleep with many women, but Ovid’s protagonist (presumably himself) quickly becomes angry with his mistress for laying with other men, believing that her infidelities shame him. She also shames him by aborting his child within in her womb, and he is upset by her selfishness. It was her job to bring male children into the world, and her desire to remain free from the burdens of parenthood and maintain her reputation in society possibly cost the world a male being – a being superior to her own weak female self. Although he chides men to be careful to keep love a secret for the sake of their mistress’ reputations and the pleasure of a secret, illicit love, he truly believes that it is far more important for a woman to give birth (which would then inevitably reveal her non-virginal state) than to maintain her reputation.²⁵ Furthermore, in loving her, he is metaphorically weakened. She can control him through his love – make him a slave of her desires. This idea of love as connected to shame is very interesting because it shows the depth of his value for reputation, a significant concept in the later Middle Ages. The one time he cannot pleasure his mistress in bed, he initially blames magic but then moves to shame. It was shame that “robbed me of my strength,” because it was strength that initially

²⁴ Ovid, *The Art of Love*. trans., A. S. Kline (2001), Book 1 Part XVII. last modified August 11, 2001, <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Artoflovehome.htm>.

²⁵ Ovid, *The Love Books of Ovid*. trans., J. Lewis May. (New York: Rarity Press, 1930), Elegy XIV

made him a proper man.²⁶ Interestingly, although it is strength that allows him to be a true man, Ovid disagrees with Plato through his belief that a strong man cannot fail to satisfy a woman. Even a strong man can be weakened by shame.

Ancient Anatomy and the “One-Sex” Theory

The rules of ancient anatomy and reproduction were written by men in a male dominated society. Unsurprisingly, these philosophers tended to continue the traditional roles of males, as generally more strong and active, and females, as more weak and passive, into their theories on conception. The visibility aspect of the penis and male semen after orgasm seems to have also played a major role in their overall philosophies. Unlike the hypothetical world of Plato and mythological stories of Hercules and Odysseus, the concepts of Aristotle, Galen, and Avicenna were based upon conclusions drawn from sensory observations: the scientific method. Unfortunately, their own biases clouded their vision and gave rise to the “one-sex” theory that reigned for over one thousand years. This term does not mean that the philosophers thought that there were no differences between males and females and believed in a single gender. However, they did think that females were derived from male anatomy, the *perfect* anatomy, for reasons ranging from a failure of nature to necessity for reproduction. These ideas played into already established religious ideals, such as Eve created from Adam’s rib and allowed for the fact that male and female bodies seemed shaped for different tasks – the larger, more muscular men went to hunt and fight and the smaller, naturally weaker women stayed home to

²⁶ Ovid, *The Love Books of Ovid*, Elegy VII.

weave and take care of the children.²⁷ Thus, the one-sex theory, in all its different variations, was an attempt to bring culture and biology together into a more comprehensible model.

One of the common theories throughout the ancient world, and one that heavily influenced the Medieval era, is the idea that internal body temperature is based upon gender – men were hot and women were cold. This concept is often directly connected to the active-lifestyle of man and passive life-style of woman. The level of heat in the body was also directly connected to the ability of each person to produce sperm.

While Aristotle believed that both males and females had some sort of secretion, only the man could produce sperma, which was far stronger than the female secretion, and only he contributed to the generation of offspring. The female secretion was important only because if a female had too little of her own secretion, the fetus could not form due to lack of “material” (this feminine material is not defined), and if she had too much, her own secretion would wash away the male semen.²⁸ The male semen had to remain within the female because it acted as a catalyst for the female to create the embryo within her own body, which was also the material ground needed for the embryo. If this process were to work perfectly, then all children would be born as *perfect* males, but sometimes the female body was unable to remain hot enough to maintain a male embryo. The creation of a female was a reproductive failure.

However, Aristotle admitted that it was occasionally necessary for females to be born

²⁷ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 29.

²⁸ Aristotle, “On the Generation of Animals”. trans., A. I. Peck. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 437.

because men were unable to give birth on their own. In addition to the presence or absence of heat creating the differences between males and females, Aristotle creates a hierarchy of blood to explain the regular appearance of menstrual blood in females and not in males. The earlier state of male semen is blood, which acting like the female secretions cannot instigate conception.²⁹ Thus, the female body is essentially a failed version of the male body without heat and with a womb (think of the difference between ice and water. They are technically the same set of molecules that, with the addition of heat, move at a difference pace, which gives them a different appearance). Not quite a perfect example of the one-sex theory, but certainly not an illustration of two distinct sexes.

Galen also believed in the power of heat to control the conception of a child. In his version, men produced semen, which was active, thick, and hot, and women produced menstrual blood, which was moist and cold. The menstrual blood acted as a congenial nutriment for the male semen, which feeds on blood. Regardless of the difference in names, Galen believed that both men and women produced a “true generative seed”³⁰ but that only male seed was strong enough to create a child. This strength was due entirely to bodily heat. It was internal heat that caused the males to have protruding penises and testes and release strong sperm. Therefore, it was lack of heat that made females’ penises and testes remain hidden. Regardless, “females have seminal ducts and testes full of semen”,³¹ and both the male and female seeds were required for the conception of a child. The importance of heat to Galen’s theories was

²⁹ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 42.

³⁰ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 40.

³¹ Galen, *Peri spermatos*, Kuhn ed., in Laqueur, *Making Sex*. 256.

astounding, and even men were liable to failure if they were not sufficiently hot. “If the mixture of the testicles is moist and cold, the surrounding parts will be free of hair, and the subject will be late in embarking on sexual activity. He will not be prone to the sexual urge; and his sperm will be watery, small in quantity, liable to produce females, and infertile”.³² Galen provides an almost perfect example of the one-sex theory. His females and males had the exact same organs producing almost the exact same seed, but, as with Aristotle, heat was required to make the seed potent.

Avicenna, an Persian philosopher writing around 800 years later, continued Galen’s theories of heat in reproduction and also viewed it as required for the rest of the body’s functioning. According to Avicenna, all bodily fluids were driven by heat. Men were hotter and able to digest everything properly. As a result, they were able to create sperm and have the energy to grow strong and active. Females, on the other hand, were unable to digest everything that they put into their body because they were cold and moist. This failure ensured that the “female is smaller than the male. The female is also moister. The coldness of temperament, as well as the habit of lying at home and taking so little exercise, accounts for the accumulation of excrementitious matters in the female”.³³ In accordance with Galen, the heat of the male body made the male seed more powerful and able to aid more fully in the reproductive process.

The connection of heat with conception did not remain solely within the works of philosophers. In Ovid’s poem regarding his own failure to satisfy his mistress, he uses the words “ice” and “benumbed” to describe his own body and his

³² Claude Singer and Peter N Singer. trans., *Galen Selected Works*. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 362.

³³ Cibeles Jolivette Gonzalez, trans., *The Canon of Medicine of Avicenna* (New York: AMS Press).

own problematic sterility. These words are significant because he does not describe anywhere the heat of manhood, thus assuming that his audience would understand that bodily coldness was inherently connected with sexual failure and impotence.

In addition to heat, some philosophers examined pleasure and sexual desire as aids or requirements for conception. Aristotle believed that sexual excitement helped to produce male semen, which must be discharged in orgasm for reproduction to occur. Women, on the other hand, did not need to experience any sort of sexual desire since they did not contribute any seed. He recognized that some people thought that women contributed semen because many also felt pleasure during intercourse but argued that pre-pubescent boys and impotent men felt pleasure as well though neither contributed any seed.³⁴ Galen and Avicenna, on the other hand, looked at female desire as similar to that of males. Since they believed that females also had the true seed, female desire is important to conception. Avicenna goes one step further to claim that some unnamed female organ is “thrust forward up against its mouth as though moving forward through the desire of attracting sperm”.³⁵ In other words, it becomes erect. The essence of this desire lay in the heat created by friction during sex. “Sexual heat is an instance of the heat that makes matter live and orgasm, which signals the explosive lease of the seed and the heated pneuma, mimics the creative work of Nature itself”.³⁶ This sexual heat causes the release of the seed, which, in turn, creates pleasure and signals the successful creation of life.

³⁴ Aristotle, “On the Generation of Animals”, 103.

³⁵ Gonzalez, *The Canon of Medicine of Avicenna*, 75.

³⁶ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 46.

Many of the concepts that became quintessential parts of medieval masculinity were not new to the Middle Ages. They were taken from translations of Plato, Aristotle, and Galen and possibly passed down through the simple diffusion of ideas over time. The male warrior whose strength and bravery in battle was refined into that of a sexual being, fighting to build his reputation and become an object of desire. The strong male sperma that gave men power over conception was a precursor to the guiding Christian fathers and father figures, an idea promoted by the Church in the Middle Ages. The increasing concentration on women's sexual desire, pleasure, and deceitfulness helped to create causation for witch blaming. All of these concepts began a thousand years before the Middle Ages, and yet sexualized masculinity was a truly Medieval phenomenon. The changing economic and social situations made strength and bravery in battle no longer enough to earn hero status. The medieval writers, philosophers, theologians, and men established new ideals and strove every day to reach them, learning from the words and ideas of the past and the present.

Chapter Two: The Chivalric Male

The chivalric tradition evolved over many years through the songs of the troubadours who traveled around England and Normandy and through the words of the romantic fantasy writers. The troubadours helped to ensure that these stories reached audiences of all classes, bringing people to their feet with victories over evil and to tears at the deaths of their heroes. These storytellers helped to create the medieval language of love through their romanticized words and phrases. People memorized this new language and brought it into their own love lives, giving words to previously unexplainable feelings. The rules of courtly love were established through the royal court of Eleanor of Aquitaine and the treatises of the philosopher Andreas Cappelanus, who was himself influenced by the words of Ovid. Fantastical heroes and philosophers alike taught real men how to speak to women and how to treat them as lovers. They taught them how to dress, how to eat, and how to woo. Marriage in the chivalric tradition was almost a hindrance to passion and secret, often adulterous, relationships were key to finding true love³⁷.

Although many of their ideas were not new, the chivalric rule-makers gave real men an ideal – which will now be referred to as the chivalric male – towards which they could strive. Although, technically, not everyone could become a chivalric male, as it was limited to those who could afford the shining armor and splendid jewels and whose personal status could convince a noblewoman to entertain their affections, many people were influenced by the concept. Young boys grew up

³⁷ True love did not mean the same thing in the Middle Ages as it does today. The modern soul-mate as made popular in romantic comedy plotlines did not exist, and a single person could find true love many times in his lifetime.

wanting to be knights in the hope of achieving glory through prowess in battle and the resulting love of a beautiful woman. Taught by the troubadours and romantic stories, villagers understood the love language of their lords, praising those who fit into the chivalric category and bemoaning the noblemen who failed.

The chivalric ideal was built around reputation, particularly a reputation as a strong warrior and virile lover to a beautiful woman. Romantic fantasy stories and the rules of the philosophers not only showed men how to prove their chivalric masculinity but also demonstrated what happened when the hero failed. People learned how to treat those who were no longer masculine and whose reputation had been destroyed. Although the results were far harsher in the medieval romances, where the failed hero must die from loss of masculinity, real life examples do not portray a kind world for those moving down the hierarchical ladder from ideal to quotidian, or even effeminate, male.

Although knights had existed long before, the term chivalry did not emerge as it is known today, with its formal connection to knighthood and standardized “ethical and ideological associations we have come to identify with chivalry, such as the responsibility to protect the unarmed, widows and orphans, to serve for love of the lady or to uphold standards of courtesy” until the thirteenth century.³⁸ The change appeared through literary means: the songs of the troubadours and words of authors of medieval romances. However, as the *Song of Roland* shows the “aristocratic ethos [of earlier knighthood] becomes absorbed into an ethos of chivalry...[Thus, even before the consolidation of the term] Roland and Oliver are noble warriors with

³⁸Linda M. Paterson, *The World of the Troubadour: Medieval Occitan Society, c 1100-c.1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 62.

certain values of bravery, loyalty, service to Kind and Country and to God".³⁹ Like the medical knowledge of the Ancient Greeks for the medieval medical institutions, the chivalric ideal was not an entirely original idea but one morphed from the previous ethics of knighthood and adapted by the philosophers and storytellers of a new age to create a recognizable term with qualifications understood throughout the land. However, the sexual connotations of the chivalric ideal were purely aspects of the later Middle Ages in England and Normandy as masculinity itself came to be defined by sex and sexuality.

The Troubadour and the Language of Love

The troubadour was a wandering bard who traveled the lands singing songs and stories wherever he went. Some troubadours lived in a single palace, where they wrote their own songs funded permanently by some noble benefactor, but most roamed the land and performed for peasants in the town square as well as before courts of noblemen and kings. Through their songs they spread the same stories all over the land, which helped to establish their styles and lessons as standard. The songs and stories of the troubadours were a highly regarded form of entertainment in a world before the printing press, where most books were copied by hand and, thus, too expensive for any but the nobility. They also served a more important historical function: together, by enjoying the same lyrics, the common man and the aristocrats learned the same language of love and the same chivalric ideals.

Although the troubadour sang on many topics, his most common was that of love, especially the duties of love. This love, however, was generally given to a married

³⁹ Paterson, *The World of the Troubadour*, 63.

(and, thus, socially unavailable) woman and was based on service and duty he owed to her as his love. “In the eleventh century the worship of the Virgin Mary became widely popular; the reverence bestowed upon the Virgin was extended to the female sex in general, and as a vassal owed obedience to his feudal overlord, so did he owe service and devotion to his lady”.⁴⁰ Along with the famous courts of love (such as the one lorded over by Eleanor of Aquitaine), where noble women decided the answers to such questions as – could one man love two women at the same time, and if a woman loved a man who was not her husband, could she take him as her lover – the songs of the troubadours helped to provide men and woman with some of these answers. They defined beauty and passion through lyrics.

The troubadour who knew his business would begin with praises of his beloved; she is physically and morally perfect, her beauty illuminates the night, her presence heals the sick, cheers the sad, makes the boor courteous and so forth. For her the singer’s love and devotion is infinite... The effects of this love are obvious in his person. His voice quavers with supreme delight or breaks in dark despair... This passion has transformed his nature: he is a better and stronger man than ever before... Yet, if unrequited, his passion may destroy him... Even so he does not regret his love... Sometimes he is not prepared for such complete self-renunciation; he reproaches his lady for her coldness... he will live in spite of her and try his fortune elsewhere.⁴¹

The troubadour helped to create the guidelines by which chivalric males could woo their women. They told them what to do when this process failed and even how to feel throughout it. Although love generally elicits an emotional response, the troubadours helped to solidify the exact feelings into words. All emotions related to love, whether they were sadness or elation, became overwrought expression: “my

⁴⁰ Henry John Chaytor, *The Troubadours* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 15.

⁴¹ Chaytor, *The Troubadours*, 17-18.

heart has been overwhelmed by a pain so great that my whole body trembles”⁴² or “I feel no pain except the grief within my heart. This is a terrible mortal grief”⁴³.

Through the creation of the chivalric male, love and courtship were set to a specific timeline so everyone knew where they stood and which phase came next. The words of the troubadours turned romantic courtship into a commodity – everyone learned from the same manuals and, hence, thought of the exultations and distresses of genuinely romantic love in the same way.

These lays had extreme power over their audiences. Certain stories were very popular, and troubadours performed slightly varied versions of them around most of Western Europe. Many people were already familiar with the basic storylines of King Arthur and his court and Tristan and Isolde and, as a result, were all the more affected by the troubadour’s songs. They were able to live vicariously through the great adventures and star-crossed love. “Music, such as certain *lais* attached to the Tristan and Isolde story, whose power we are told in their time was so great that it brought performer and audience to tears”, told historical tales that many listeners believed to be true stories of ancient England and its heroic peoples.⁴⁴ In the Middle Ages, people believed that King Arthur and his court had actually lived somewhere in England centuries before, making his prowess all the more legendary in its realness. Like the tales of Homer, where the true heroes were always the heroes of the past (e.g. Achilles and Odysseus would never be as great as Hercules, who died before they were born),

⁴² Marie de France., *The Lais of Marie de France*. trans., Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 57.

⁴³ William W. Kibler, and Carleton W. Carroll. trans., "Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances" (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), 291.

⁴⁴ John Haines, *Eight Centuries of Troubadours and Trouverers: The Changing Identity of Medieval Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

Medieval English and Norman songs created the “medieval warrior par excellence”, the chivalric knight.⁴⁵ He was the stuff of myth and legends, and a powerful guide for the living man.

The Fantastical Ideal

The most extreme examples of chivalric males appear in the medieval romances. Similar to the heroes of the Greek myths, they possess inhuman amounts of strength, fighting skills and capabilities, and the ability to withstand pain. Fictional chivalric knights were given reputations as the best warriors in the land and handsomest men in the kingdom. They proved their worth on quests and in tournaments and saved damsels in distress. They were dominant figures above all women and all men except for their fellow heroes. Most importantly, they were capable of sexual prowess and highly desired by women. Although some knights resisted temptation, the story was always clear that they could satisfy women but simply chose to abstain for religious or moral reasons. These men generally represented an unattainable ideal. However, most possessed some overwhelming flaw – whether that lay in their inability to fully resist temptation or enslavement to love – that kept them realistic enough to be a goal towards which living men could strive. The stories that provided a truly perfect male, almost or actually magical in his perfection, always gave a slightly more realistic example as well. There is no explanation for why this was so (perhaps the story was simply more interesting with a fallible hero or perhaps the authors were actually trying to provide role models for

⁴⁵ Paterson, *The World of the Troubadour*, 37.

real men), but, regardless, the evidence remains that even the ideal chivalric male could make mistakes but still maintain a level of ideal masculinity.

The *Lays of Marie de France* and the stories of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *Quest for the Holy Grail* provide examples of such chivalric knights and their quests for manhood. The tales of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *Quest for the Holy Grail* specifically include detailed descriptions of the chivalric knight and the intricate connections of sexuality to masculinity. In the first tale, special attention is paid to the appearance of the knight. His clothes and armor tell his tale before he even begins to speak. The costly appearance of both Sir Gawain's and the Green Knight's apparel immediately distinguishes them as the great knights whose "massive blows [no one could] endure".⁴⁶ The Green Knight further defines greatness as "your name, sir, is so highly regarded,/ And your city and your warriors reputed the best,/ Dauntless in armour and on horseback afield,/ The most valiant and excellent of all living men,/ Courageous as players in other noble sports,/ And here courtesy is displayed".⁴⁷ The *Quest for the Holy Grail* provides a similar definition, focusing on the material and visible aspects of knighthood. At the beginning of the story, Lancelot is the most masculine man in the realm. In fact King Arthur declares "for I know you with-out a doubt for the best knight in the world".⁴⁸ He is a perfect

⁴⁶ James Winny, trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1995), Lines 201-202.

⁴⁷ Winny, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Lines 258-263.

⁴⁸ P.M. Matarasso, trans., *Quest of the Holy Grail*, (London: Penguin Group, 1969), 35.

“paragon of chivalry” – strong, handsome, elaborately clothed, and possessing the love and sexual favors of Queen Guinevere.⁴⁹

These two stories also give examples of two different types of ideal masculinity – attainable ideals and unattainable ideals. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain’s knighthood is tested throughout the story, as he embarks upon a quest to find the Green Knight and let him attempt to chop off his head in the name of honor. This adventure seems a true test of Gawain’s courage, but the audience already knows that Gawain is courageous because he was described as such in the first few pages. Of course a man such as Gawain has the honor and bravery to venture on a quest to find the Green Knight and face his destiny. The real test of masculinity occurs after Gawain unknowingly finds the Green Knight. In his castle, the Green Knight’s wife seduces Gawain daily. Tempted by this beautiful woman who desires him, Gawain kisses her but goes no further. Both his struggle with desire (proving his ability to satisfy her) and his ability to overcome this temptation in loyalty to his new friend and host except for several small, but still traitorous kisses, prove Gawain’s human, attainable masculinity. Although one of the best knights in the realm, Gawain was not truly masculine until a woman desired him. His failure to enjoy sexual activity, in this instance, does not mean that he forfeits his masculinity although the lady questions him, saying, “why so young/ And both, so vigorous a man, so knightly/ So courteous—and your name is known far/ And wide, and a knight’s good name rests/ Most on his loyalty to love/ his learning in its weaponry...could find me/ Sitting at your bedside, not one but twice,/ And never reveal...A single word of love,

⁴⁹ Matarasso, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, 41.

not one?”.⁵⁰ However, he could not in good conscience have sex with the wife of his generous host, and responds “so gracefully evasive that he seemed/ Always polite, and nothing happened/ But happiness”, which allows him to reject her while retaining his masculinity.⁵¹ Ultimately, Sir Gawain does not reject sexual activity as an act, only the adulterous act of engaging in intercourse with his host’s spouse. This story also provides an example of an unattainable male. In the end, even Gawain must bow to the Green Knight, whose magical powers, superhuman strength, and actual possession of the unavailable sexual object, crown him the truly ideal, unattainable male.

Similarly, in *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, Lancelot cannot see the Holy Grail because he is an attainable ideal male who was unable to resist the temptation of sex with his true love, Guinevere. He is warned at the beginning of his quest that he “will most certainly pursue this Quest in vain, unless you seek wholeheartedly to keep from mortal sin and to withdraw your affections from worldly thoughts and pleasures”.⁵² In the end, he has been too stained by sin through his human sexuality and must return to Arthur’s kingdom to remain one of the most celebrated knights in the realm. Although Galahad, Lancelot’s illegitimate son, does resist temptation through a seemingly complete and utter lack of desire for the female body, he seems almost too perfect as evidenced by the fact that the sword in the stone, meant for “the best knight in the world”, comes easily when he pulls.⁵³ He does not belong to this world – a saint rather than a man. Regardless of Galahad’s perfection, Lancelot’s course of

⁵⁰ Winny, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 95.

⁵¹ Winny, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 95.

⁵² Matarasso, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, 135.

⁵³ Matarasso, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, 35.

realistic sexual desires and activities is a far more common one for the heroes in these medieval romances, depicting the import of sex and sexuality to the authors of this literature.

All of the *Lays of Marie de France* show the value of sexuality in a medieval romance. In the stories of “Lanval” and “Yonec”, especially, Marie de France explains the importance of reputation and sexual prowess for true masculinity. In “Lanval”, the protagonist is a knight who has just successfully fought alongside the King. Surprisingly, the King has not provided him with fair compensation for his aid through part of the bounty – his ability to be overlooked shows that he lacks a prominent enough reputation. Soon however, a magical queen becomes his lover and gives him riches and love with the single caveat that she must remain a secret or he will lose her forever. This rule is an example of the common medieval romance trope that love must remain a secret for it to succeed. Unfortunately for Lanval, the queen attempts to seduce him, and when he rejects her advances without disclosing his real reason, she replies, “ I have been told often enough that you have no desire for women. You have well-trained young men and enjoy yourself with them”.⁵⁴ The Queen is so astounded by his rejection that she jumps to what she believes is the logical conclusion. He has no known female lover, which means that he should have no reason to rebuff the sexual flirtations of a beautiful, young queen unless he has no interest in women at all. His masculinity in jeopardy, he claims that he does have a truly beautiful love, but without her presence, no one believes him. It is not until “he can provide proof and his beloved comes forward” that Lanval’s masculinity is

⁵⁴ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie De France*, 76.

restored.⁵⁵ The term proof is especially significant as it reminds the reader of the import of demonstrating masculinity, that personal masculinity is a public affair. Even though Lanval reveals his secret, it can be inferred from his lover's arrival to restore his social standing that his reputation and masculinity are more important. If she had not appeared, Lanval would have lost all credibility as a man and a hero.

In the story of "Yonec", an old (and possibly impotent) husband locks his young, beautiful wife alone in a tower to keep her from "going astray" not knowing that she hopes a "handsome and courtly lover" will come to save her from her unloved and unsatisfying predicament.⁵⁶ One day a handsome young knight flies into her tower in the shape of a goshawk. There they fall in love, and he fulfills her desires. He visits many times but is eventually mortally wounded through the trickery of her suspicious husband, who is not man enough to face her far more masculine lover in person. As the knight dies he tells "her she was with child by him and would have a worthy and valiant son to comfort her".⁵⁷ Not only has this handsome knight succeeded sexually where her elderly husband failed, he has provided her with a male child to act as the new masculine figure in her life. Eventually, she gives birth to their son and raises him to be a proper knight. He grows up to avenge his father by killing the evil husband with his own father's sword – a piece of rather phallic symbolism. The moral of this particular story seems to be that a beautiful young woman belongs with a handsome, masculine knight, regardless of her current martial state to another

⁵⁵ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie De France*, 79.

⁵⁶ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie De France*, 86.

⁵⁷ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie De France*, 90.

man if that other man does not possess the capability to satisfy her needs and love her correctly.

Due to their extreme heroic capabilities, authors often had difficulty attempting to bring such characters as the chivalric knights to their metaphysical knees. The only way to ruin these men was by completely eviscerating their manhood. This process of castration occurred both literally and symbolically. What happens when a knight who has lost the use of a key element of his manhood, his genitalia, through a wound in his loins or “upper thigh”? Due to the fragility of maleness, “it was important for a man to keep demonstrating his maleness by action and thought”.⁵⁸ Whether this “action” is the ability to satisfy his female sexual partners and produce children or his ability to ride a horse, a wound that prevents any such achievement brings the knight’s masculinity into question. Even without the context of chivalry, castration implies lack of manhood. Real-life castrated medieval men were socially demoted to the status of women and traditionally effeminate qualities were often projected onto them because “castration, the removal of the outward, visible sign of manhood, made the male body more closely resemble the female body...[and even] render them less than human”.⁵⁹ The thigh already had a well-known significance from the old Testament when Abraham asked his eldest servant to swear testimony in seeking a wife for Isaac, requesting that he place his “hand under my thigh [and] swear by the

⁵⁸ Bullough, "On being a male in the middle ages", 41.

⁵⁹ Jacqueline Murray, *Sexual Mutilation and Castration Anxiety: A Medieval Perspective*. In *The Boswell thesis: Essays on Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality*, ed. Mathew Kuefler, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 267.

Lord”⁶⁰ and when Jacob asked his son to swear in the same manner not to bury his body in Egypt.⁶¹ A wound to this area would render the man unable to swear thus, and diminish the value of his solemn word. Therefore, when such wounds appeared in romances, the contemporary reader would have automatically looked for a reason behind such an emasculating incident and any feminizing effects thereafter. The assorted causes vary from story to story, but one thing seems common to these medieval texts: this emasculation through castration is a punishment for a romantic or sexual crime – again tying in the medieval fascination with sex and the masculine heroic figure – and without this proof of masculinity, the knight no longer fit the requirements for a chivalric hero.

Thomas of Britain’s Tristan provides the readers and audiences of these stories with an extreme example of the failed masculine hero reduced to an effeminate cripple reliant upon women. Knights, such as Tristan, are brought low through the severe punishment of castration – dependent upon others and unable to perform either as a warrior or sexual partner. Although living men were rarely castrated, the essence of emasculation as ultimate shame is clearly marked throughout the story. These stories also acted as hyperbolic manuals to teach their readers how to treat real emasculated figures, especially ones who had fallen from such lofty heights. From the first pages, Tristan is clearly the chivalric hero of Thomas of Britain’s story, *Tristan*. He goes on adventures, he is aristocratic, he constantly displays his physical prowess, and he gets the girl. By the end of his story, he is dead. On his final heroic adventure, “they did not cease from fighting till they had slain the four. Tristan the Dwarf was struck down dead,

⁶⁰ Gn 24: 2-5. *The Holy Bible*.

⁶¹ Gn. 47: 29. *The Holy Bible*.

the other Tristan [the hero] was wounded through the loins by a lance bated with venom".⁶² Tristan is not only wounded, but specifically through "the loins" thus destroying his physical evidence of masculinity and eventually killing him. Since Tristan's death can only be seen as a punishment for his treason against the King through his affair with the Queen rather than the martyrdom of an unjustly killed hero once his status as masculine chivalric hero has been revoked, Thomas of Britain gives him a wound that makes him physically incapable of performing his knightly duties as well as socially emasculating him. Thus, Tristan dies a feminine weakling rather than a masculine hero. In the final chapter of the story, "Tristan lies in bed languishing of his wound...He longs for the coming of Ysolt...it is because of her that he lives so long".⁶³ The main trouble with waiting for Ysolt is that she is coming to heal Tristan. When he is ill, "The man's vulnerability and weakness are contrasted with the strength and ableness of the female healer".⁶⁴ He is supposed to protect her from physical harm by fighting rogue, unchivalrous knights who wish to carry her off and rape her. Instead, Ysolt battles with the ultimate enemy, death, to save her wounded damsel in distress, Tristan. A female physician also suggests an education and knowledge not normally attributed to women in medieval romances. Ultimately, "the subordination of an uncharacteristically weak male to a knowledgeable and powerful woman is made *explicit* where the description of love's agony is coupled with a depiction of the man as a concretely

⁶² Thomas of Britain, *Tristan*. trans., Alan Fedrick, (London: Penguin Group, 1970), 155.

⁶³ Thomas of Britain, *The Romance of Tristan*, 164.

⁶⁴ Katja Altpeter-Jones, "Love Me, Hurt Me, Heal Me—Isolde Healer and Isolde Lover in Gottfried's Tristan." *The German Quarterly* 82 (2009): 14.

wounded or ill, and with the tagging of the man as patient and the woman as healer”.⁶⁵

Due to his sexual injury, Tristan is fully at the mercy of the women in his life and cannot do anything to save or redeem himself.

The weakened Tristan is also unable to perform the necessary actions of a masculine chivalric hero. The lance that caused Tristan’s current wound was “bated with venom,” also causing Tristan to be weak and vulnerable. The venom spreading through his loins furthers his course into emasculation and implies that Tristan is no longer capable of intercourse with anyone, much less his ladylove. Unfortunately for him, the sexual “‘superiority of the male’ has to be demonstrated continually or else it will be lost”.⁶⁶ He also loses some of his aristocratic privilege through his inability to leave his bed. He can never return to the land of King Mark except in disguise, thus negating his noble power as the King’s nephew. He is now also completely unable to ever consummate his marriage with Ysolt of the White Hands, rendering their marriage forever incomplete in the eyes of the Church and him incapable of cementing his aristocratic power in Caerdin’s court. Tristan cannot ride a horse and go on adventures to increase his own fame by displaying his strength and skill in battle. Without this fame, however, Tristan’s social status as a hero, and his chivalric masculinity, diminishes. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain is treated incredibly well in the court of the Green knight because his reputation had preceded him. Without such renown and skill to back it up, Tristan loses his value as a knight. Emasculated and unchivalric, Tristan’s status plummets, and he must die.

⁶⁵ Altpeter-Jones, “Love Me, Hurt Me, Heal Me—Isolde Healer and Isolde Lover in Gottfried’s *Tristain*”, 15.

⁶⁶ Bullough, “On being a male in the middle ages”, 34

The Real Chivalric Ideal Male

Although the stories of chivalric knights sweeping through the countryside, saving damsels in distress and killing vicious barbarians were incredibly romantic and entertaining, most real men were unable to live up to the fantastical ideological standards. The peasants also tended to complain when errant knights rampaged through their fields and destroyed the harvest. Based upon the ancient works of Ovid and focusing on intelligence and wit as well as strength in battle, aristocratic standing, courtesy, and sexual prowess, the real chivalric ideal male's model of behavior seems similar to the later Victorian *gentleman* in addition to the chivalric knight of fantasy. But he too had to prove his worth as a man, and if he failed, similar castigations occurred. The real chivalric ideal was defined through manner and love manuals, the condemnatory opinions of medieval society members, and as always, sexual ability. Men throughout England and Normandy endeavored to become the real chivalric ideal male, striving to be a real-life King Arthur and perhaps be worthy of immortalization in songs and stories. The real chivalric ideal male also depended upon societal approval, however – he needed to aim for the stars of the romances and also fit the guidelines written by living men for the proper judgment of others.

Although the true era of manuals was not for several more centuries, people have always thought to tell others how best to live their lives. In the case of Daniel of Beccles (also known as Danielis Becclesiensis) and Andreas Cappenalus, they were most interested in helping others become proper gentlemen and lovers. Although no one knows when exactly Daniel of Beccles wrote his poem (thought to be sometime within the thirteenth century) or even who exactly he was, his advice in *The Book of*

the Civilized Man gives the modern historian a glimpse into what would be considered important courtesy for the average medieval nobleman. There are still several partial manuscripts of the document today, and this style of book was quite popular (in fact some historians believe that *Urbanus Magnus* was the initial book of courtesy to begin such a trend) leading to the theory that many people likely read and followed the rules put forth by Daniel of Beccles.⁶⁷ In this book, he seems to be trying to help those men aiming to move into a higher class of society as well as men who already possess the title but lack the newly popularized set of courteous manners. He has advice for all ages on many different subjects, including social-hierarchy, self-control, and, of course, sexual morality. Although sexual deviancy is generally frowned upon (the civilized man should not go to a “common whore” to fulfill his needs) the sexual desire inherent within each gender is acknowledged as legitimate and normal.

The notion of sexual desire as a basic human characteristic seems to have actually been rather accepted in the twelfth century, though most mentioned such sexuality only to criticize it. “Thomas of Chobham...described fornication as ‘the vice of everyone and excused by many.’ Gerald de Barri urged his readers not to listen to those who said that fornication, far from being a mortal sin, was only natural”.⁶⁸ In fact, “the earliest surviving records of archdeacons’ courts show that 90

⁶⁷ Danielis Becclesiensis. ed. Anne Frith, Dorothy Smith, and Susan Treggiari. *The Book of the Civilized Man*. (Beccles: A Deed Frith, 2007), http://www.foxearth.org.uk/daniel_of_beccles.html.

⁶⁸ Danny Danziger and John Gillingham, *1215: the year of Magna Carta*, (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc, 2003), 79.

percent of the offenses brought before them were sexual, mostly fornication”.⁶⁹

Daniel of Beccles accepted the natural desires of mankind and tried to give men some rules for maintenance of polite society even within impolite situations. According to Beccles, if a man followed the rest of his advice on manners, he would need to understand sexual morality because so many women would suddenly begin to desire him. However, a gentleman was only supposed to take a single lover. While it may seem surprising that sexualized men were supposed to remain monogamous, the women in question were all of noble birth with reputations to maintain and the ability to be more choosy about their lovers and, thus, also probably considered much more valuable as trophies of masculinity. One woman was then enough to prove one’s desirability.

However, Daniel of Beccles also believed in the social sanctity of marriage in regard to a man’s reputation. Women were lustful and would take lovers no matter what, but a gentleman should always resist the women he morally should not possess, such as the wife of his lord, by feigning illness. This advice is similar to Sir Gawain’s situation where he had to refuse the advances of the wife of his host although he was greatly tempted by her. Furthermore, “cum sis zelotypus discas spectare lacunar”⁷⁰ or the cuckold should learn to stare at the ceiling. Such advice implies that Daniel of Beccles believed in the fragility of reputation, especially the reputation of the man. Nowhere does he mention that the woman would be harmed if the adulterous relationship were revealed, undoubtedly since women were already thought to be sexually insatiable. If a man were to acknowledge publically any unfaithfulness on

⁶⁹ Danziger and Gillingham, *1215: the year of Magna Carta*, 79.

⁷⁰ Danielis Becclesiensis, *Urbanus Magnus*.

the part of his wife, he would be shaming himself far more than her. Similarly, if a man were to accept the advances of his lord's wife (whether he acknowledged these actions publically or not) he would be shaming his lord. Thus, the gentleman was born, as intricately connected with sex as he was with status, manly sport, and, apparently, table manners.

In his late twelfth century manual, "A Treatise on Courtly Love", Andreas Cappenalus provided the gentleman with a guide to attain and maintain not manners but love affairs. However, this "love" was not the modern romantic love but one "inborn suffering proceeding from the sight and immoderate thought upon the beauty of the other sex, for which cause above all other things one wishes to embrace the other and, by common assent, in this embrace to fulfill the commandments of love".⁷¹ Love was sexual by nature and brought out the beauty and good in even the most corrupted of men. However, like Daniel of Beccles, Cappenalus recommends that the gentleman only take one lover, since those who could not resist the embrace of another could not possibly be in love. Since all women were lustful and devious, the man must be the one to determine his proper lover. Love was a feeling that required the wit and understanding of a gentleman as well as the sexual enterprise. Unsurprisingly, peasants were not supposed to be able to love – though few peasants would have had the time it took to woo a woman using Cappenalus' protracted conversational style.

The most interesting part of Cappenalus' treaty were the requirements for secrecy and jealousy, which also appeared in several of the fantasy stories examined

⁷¹ Cappenalus, *Andreas Cappenalus on Love*. trans., Patrick G. Walsh, (London, 1982).

earlier. He argued that “Love rarely lasts when it is revealed” from which the reader can deduce that marriage impedes love.⁷² However that obstacle did not stop Cappenalus. In fact, he believed that “marriage is no excuse for not loving”.⁷³ One was instead supposed to have a spouse and a lover. Love also could not exist without jealousy (an idea taken directly from the works of Ovid) – another reason for secrecy because a public love rarely leads to flirtations with others and the instigation of jealous feelings. However, with a secret love, how does the man prove his masculinity through sexuality? Cappenalus did not directly discuss the remedy because for him the act of loving itself was what was essential to being a gentleman, but his advice on marriage and love reveals an easy solution. A man retained his masculinity by getting married – and thus publically proving a woman’s desire for him – and then secretly continuing his romantic liaisons. Cappenalus believed that a person was always falling in and out of love, so when a man fell in love with a woman and married her (it was not love if he would be ashamed to marry her, usually due to a difference in social status⁷⁴), he would quickly fall out of love with her and in love with another woman. Thus, a man could satisfy his need to prove his masculinity and his need for true love.

However, while the real chivalric ideal male could easily be faithful to one woman on paper, he was not always capable to resisting such temptation in reality. People disagreed upon whether or not he *ought* to maintain multiple relationships, but very few questioned the nobleman’s inborn right to fornicate with many women if he

⁷² Cappenalus, *Andreas Cappenalus on Love*.

⁷³ Cappenalus, *Andreas Cappenalus on Love*.

⁷⁴ Cappenalus, *Andreas Cappenalus on Love*.

so desired (particularly servants). Twelfth century writer Giselbert of Mons languished praise upon his masculine benefactor who “had clearly known many other women besides his wife while he was married.” All were, of course, “beautiful, noble, and virginal” – a common catalogue of traits for the chosen lovers of noblemen.⁷⁵

Similarly, Lambert of Ardes comments

From the beginning of adolescence until his old age, his loins were stirred by the intemperance of an impatient libido...; very young girls, and especially virgins, aroused his desire”⁷⁶ Bauduoin and his kinsmen are said to have preferred pretty women; no matter how casually sexually encountered they were all described as “beautiful.” And, evidently, fruitful: This count was buried with twenty-three bastards in attendance, besides ten living legitimate daughters and sons.⁷⁷

Both of the noblemen described were highly successful in proving their masculinity – both had many affairs with beautiful, noble women. Love affairs with noblewomen was far more difficult to achieve because they were supposed to protect their virginity for their future husbands, and so these affairs give him an even greater reputation for his masculinity and sexual prowess. Bauduoin’s children even provided him with visible proof of his masculine sexuality, and the incredible number of them further showcased his ability as a masculine creator of life.

For the modern historian, the idea of so many women willingly jumping into bed with the same man, even one with noble status, and happily remaining in his household to raise their illegitimate children seems unlikely. There is a high possibility that many of these young virgins were raped or forced by their noble lords to engage in sexual activities. Unfortunately, rape was treated as a relatively

⁷⁵ Laura Betzig, *Medieval Monogamy*. *Journal of Family History* 20 (1995) 181.

⁷⁶ George Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 93.

⁷⁷ Duby, *Medieval Marriage*, 93.

insignificant crime in the Middle Ages, especially when the man was from a higher stratum than the woman. A woman who was raped in the Middle Ages was welcome to sue in a court of law, but often the accused man would receive little to no punishment. In a world ruled by men with a superiority complexes, “women were both sexual and legal victims of male-defined crimes tried by men...in medieval as in modern law, we discover a system that claims to celebrate female chastity, but affords men broad sexual access to women and is unwilling to protect them”.⁷⁸ Additionally, many women were afraid to ruin their reputations by publically admitting that such a rape occurred and, thus, sacrifice their valuable virginal status. Furthermore, women were thought to be lustful and deceitful, so many judges and other men were of the opinion that they were always desirous and eager to have sex, even if they said no. Thus, Giselbert of Mons’ benefactor’s and Baudouin’s sexual encounters could be considered legitimate proof of masculinity whether or not the women were forced. These men were wealthy nobles. How could the women not be sexually desirous?

On the other hand, Giselbert of Mons’ ex-benefactor was a failure as a masculine figure. He “blasts his ex-benefactor for uxorious (exclusive) devotion to his wife: It seemed “risible” that a strong young count should stay “attached to one woman”—his own uncomplying wife”.⁷⁹ Not only did this man, a strong young aristocrat and, thus, an ideal male in every other fashion, fail to maintain any sexual encounters with young or beautiful women external to his marriage, but he was also unsuccessful in his own marital bed. The fact that he could not have sex with his wife

⁷⁸ Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 131.

⁷⁹ Betzig, *Medieval Monogamy*, 181.

meant that he had not managed to be the dominant figure in his marriage, where he was legally and socially considered to be her superior. In addition to Giselbert of Mons' praise for his current, sexually active benefactor and complimentary references to his ex-benefactor's other idealistic characteristics, his strong renouncement of the ex-benefactor's lack of intercourse demonstrates the importance of sex to the chivalric ideal.

The tragic love-story of Abelard and Heloise provides the most famous example of a real chivalric ideal male who plummets down the social ladder, becoming an effeminate figure with a ruined reputation and no penis. Although, technically, historians have not found proof that the word chivalric had the connotations used in this thesis during his lifetime, Abelard remained historically relevant through his infamous life story and teachings long after his death in the mid-twelfth century. He did not try to live as a real chivalric figure but, instead, provided the basis for the first recognized definitions appearing in philosophy and stories less than a century later.

Peter Abelard, born in 1079 into a wealthy noble family, was a theologian, philosopher, and famous logician. He gained fame far and wide as a teacher, and thousands of students traveled from around the known world to study under him. Then he met Heloise. She was a beautiful and well-educated young woman, and they fell in love while he worked as her private tutor. In his own words "so distinguished was my name, and I possessed such advantages of youth and comeliness, that no

matter what woman I might favour with my love, I dreaded the rejection of none”.⁸⁰

He was right. At the beginning of his affair with Heloise, her servant addressed him:

I am in love with you, Abelard; I know you adore Heloise, and I do not blame you, I desire only to enjoy the second place in your affections. I have a tender heart as well as my mistress; you may without difficulty make returns to my passion. Do not perplex yourself with scruples; a prudent man should love several at the same time, then if one should fail he is not left unprovided.⁸¹

Although Abelard refused the servant’s proposal, she provides another example of Abelard as the desired chivalric gentleman. Furthermore, the young servant’s proposition supplies an instance of a lower class opinion of the real chivalric male in regard to female lovers. Significantly, her attitude matches that which was often expressed in the writings of medieval philosophers and authors. The later teachings of Andreas Cappenalus similarly expressed the belief that a gentleman should always have a lover – because man was always in the process of falling in or out of love – such that no man should be “left unprovided”.⁸² The romances discussed earlier likewise instruct that the male protagonist was not a true masculine hero until he either had a lover or, at minimum, the opportunity for sexual relations presented itself in the form of a desirous female. The servant’s offer helps to prove the pervasiveness of the connection between the masculine gentleman and the possession of a love and lover outside of the literary realm and through all levels of society.

Thus Abelard and Heloise began their affair, and Abelard made no real effort to keep it secret except from Heloise’s uncle and primary caretaker. Abelard was a

⁸⁰ Peter Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum: The Story of My Misfortunes*. trans., Henry Adams Bellows, (New York City: Printing House of William Edwin Rudge, 1922), 16.

⁸¹ Peter Abelard, *The Love Letters of Abelard and Heloise*. trans., Betty Radice, (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 2009), Letter 1.

⁸² Cappenalus, *Andreas Cappenalus on Love*.

true chivalric ideal. Young, wealthy, handsome, aristocratic, possessing a flawless reputation, known throughout the land, desired by thousands of women, and sexually active, Abelard was, for a brief period, essentially a hero of fantastical proportions. His life seemed to be written in a medieval romance. Even the shame of discovery by Heloise's uncle did not daunt him for long. Abelard discovered that he had impregnated her, the final signal of his overwhelming masculinity, and stole her away in the dead of night. Such was Abelard's power and reputation that Heloise's uncle, also a famous and influential man, "had no power to seize me and imprison me somewhere against my will, though I make no doubt that he would have done so quickly enough had he been able or dared".⁸³ He married Heloise (even though she was reluctant and argued vehemently against such a permanent and public match because of the disgrace their past relationship and her current stature would bring Abelard and the distractions to his philosophical genius), and they planned to live a happy life together.

But even Abelard's success could not last. In the dead of night thugs hired by Heloise's uncle appeared in Abelard's room and castrated him. The repercussions, both intended and unintended, were catastrophic. No longer could Abelard satisfy his ladylove. They could not have any children within the legal bonds of marriage. Abelard was no longer a man in front of God, who "holds eunuchs in such abomination that men thus maimed are forbidden to enter a church, even as the unclean and filthy... Thus in... Deuteronomy (xxiii, 1), 'He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the

⁸³ Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum: The Story of My Misfortunes*, 21.

lord”’.⁸⁴ Knowing that only mocking awaited him in the public sphere, he entered a monastery, confessing, “it was the overwhelming sense of my disgrace rather than any ardour to the religious life that drove me to seek the seclusion of the monastic cloister”’.⁸⁵ But this decision haunted him. He was not well received by the other monks, who he deemed “scandalous” and was often overtaken by fits of jealousy in regard to his inability to satisfy Heloise sexually. In their letters they often discussed the difficulty they were both having in overcoming their lust for each other. Heloise was miserable at the nunnery but remained there because Abelard could not stand the thought of her nearness to any sexually capable rival for fear of her succumbing to temptation.

Although Abelard could no longer be a chivalric ideal, he did attempt to establish a new reputation as a religious ideal. He began teaching theology and quickly gained popularity as a religious professor, inspiring the hatred of the other teachers’ whose students he was busily acquiring. But within the confines of religion, Abelard was not the indomitable force he had once been in the secular world. In his private life, he failed to maintain his duty to God, lusting after Heloise and his previous lifestyle. In his public one, he was forced to watch as his enemies raged against him, eventually burning his book, chasing him from monastery to monastery, and locking him up like a common prisoner. They brought “two principal charges against me: first, that it was contrary to the monastic profession to be concerned with the study of secular books; and, second, that I had presumed to teach theology

⁸⁴ Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum: The Story of My Misfortunes*, 32.

⁸⁵ Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum: The Story of My Misfortunes*, 32.

without ever having been taught therein myself”.⁸⁶ Eventually his enemies (Bernard of Clairvaux in particular) brought him to trial for his “heretical” teachings and insulted him “unjustly”. He died a broken man with a failed reputation. In the words of his beloved, “I shall never forget your reputation, so justly acquired, torn to pieces and blasted by the inexorable cruelty of pseudo pretenders to science”.⁸⁷ Thus, although Abelard did not die immediately after his castration as some storybook character would, he was never able to achieve the ideal status he had previously possessed. Without his physical or metaphorical manhood, he could not be an invincible chivalric male and was doomed to live the rest of his days lusting after the woman he could no longer have. Whether his wound made him effeminate in the eyes of society remains unclear, but post-castration Peter Abelard was not a masculine ideal.

Although Abelard failed to maintain his status as a chivalric ideal, many others succeeded, and through the works of philosophers and manual writers, such as Andreas Cappenalus and Daniel of Beccles, and the stories made popular by the increasing literacy of the late Middle Ages and songs made popular by the Troubadours, the concept of the chivalry was consolidated into an easily definable word. Men were taught the most basic of popular manners, from how to dress to the appropriate occasion for riding one’s horse into the main dining hall, as well as more complex emotions and methods of expressing oneself. People from all classes of life were given the ability to articulate previously indescribable feelings of love. Love

⁸⁶ Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum: The Story of My Misfortunes*, 35.

⁸⁷ Abelard, *The Love Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, Letter II.

was suddenly incredibly complex; it was strengthening and improving or painful and destructive.

The same Romantic fantasy stories that provided the medieval public with explanations of love offered them two kinds of ideal chivalric males to feel and express that love: the unattainable and the attainable. The unattainable chivalric ideal male represented a true hero: a person who connects the members of a diverse society through their collective worship. In truth, his manner of living may not have even been possible in the existent medieval world because the real world lacked the dragons and desirous damsels in distress that made him so incredibly perfect. The former, attainable, male acted as a goal toward which real men could strive. He was imperfect but in the best of ways – generally through his inability to restrain his sexuality and resultant surrender to temptation. For the living male, engaging in intercourse with a beautiful woman almost never had negative consequences – unless a man slept with his lord's wife and was foolish enough to advertise cuckolding his superior. He could still have sex with her, but he should know to keep the relationship secret.

In addition to his own strength, valor, shining armor and jewels, and abilities as a warrior, the real chivalric ideal male also required the sexual interest, and preferably actions, of a beautiful woman to prove his masculinity. She could be his wife, his mistress, or even his rape victim (provided that women actually meant yes even when they begged no). Although people disagreed on whether more than one lover was possible or appropriate, the chivalric male could easily maintain sexual relationships with many women, if he possessed a relatively high social status,

without creating any sort of public hullabaloo and even garnering explicit praise or admiration from some admirers. Although fatherhood was not a necessity for the chivalric male, generating children with these women provided further verification of his virility.

Perhaps the failed chivalric real ideal male, Peter Abelard, presents the most interesting figure because he lived most of his life as a chivalric male and had the desire for a sexual relationship with Heloise (though he tries to repent and forget her) even after entering the abbey, and yet he admonished his enemies in the abbey for their licentious activities. Specifically, the “abbot himself was as far below his fellows in his way of living and in the foulness of his reputation as he was above them in priestly rank”.⁸⁸ Between this comment and his understanding of his own sins in his letter to Heloise, Abelard clearly understood how the clergy were expected to live. As the Church gained power over the lives of its constituents in the late Middle Ages, through increasingly strict edicts and more willing, religious followers, the personal code that newly religious men like Abelard sought to follow helped to define the proper life for the Christian secular male as well as the clergyman, and, slowly but surely, the concept of a Christian ideal male began to form alongside its chivalric rival.

⁸⁸ Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum: The Story of My Misfortunes*, 34.

Chapter Three: The Religious/Christian Ideal

In Medieval England and Normandy, most people were Christian, and religion was an important part of daily life. Throughout the later Middle Ages the power of the Catholic Church blossomed over an increasingly religious and impressionable society (through the influence of Plato's blind faith), spreading the impact and authority of Church principles. With this increased power, theologians and churchmen began to create their own ideal male as an example for all Christian males. This Church-based ideal male – who will now be referred to as the religious or Christian ideal – seems to have been created as the opposite of the chivalric ideal. The religious ideal did not worship at the feet of any lady but the Virgin Mother and scorned material possessions as earthy and sinful. He resisted sexual temptation and fought for the glory of God rather than his own pride or reputation.

Based upon the works of Plato and Aristotle, as well as the Bible itself, the Christian ideal male was essentially created by the Church, in fantasy stories, such as *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, with religious themes and heroes, and through the lives of real men sanctioned by the Church as saints and warriors of God. Real life Christian ideal males were also subdivided into men of the Church, who were subject to the stringent rules of the clergy, and laymen, who were only subject to basic Christian laws outlined in the Bible and interpreted by the Church. The fantastical type of Christian ideal was sinless and existed almost entirely within the words of romances and (probably hyperbolic) stories of saints. This male either did not recognize women or material possessions as desirable and could not be tempted or was strong enough to withstand even the strongest of desires, in which case

overcoming his temptations helped ensure his ideal status. The most perfect living examples of the Christian ideal were the saints, like Augustus, battling their desires for the approval of the Church and God. Regardless of his status within the Church, however, the Christian ideal was also a creation based on the medieval idea of masculinity, and his reputation as a masculine figure was as entirely dependent upon proof as his chivalric contemporaries. A Church-given title or simple shroud of religious righteousness did not protect men from the mocking of their peers – as already seen through the miserable final years of Peter Abelard.

However, since the layman Christian ideal male was unable to prove his masculinity through willy-nilly sexual encounters, – the sexual act had been deemed sinful if performed for lustful or other reasons rather than for procreation – he had to demonstrate his masculinity through domination within the marriage and the bedroom. According to the Christian Bible, every man had a duty to God to father children.⁸⁹ As the naturally superior being, Christian males were also considered the active party in conception and in parenthood as a guiding father figure. Therefore, a Christian male failed in his masculine duty towards God and the human race if he was infertile. Given this requirement, all medieval Christian males would have doubtlessly claimed fertility regardless of the truth. Due to the ease of this lie, the real proof of masculinity for a Christian male (as the dominant figure in the household and in his ability to create a masculine seed) lay in actually producing offspring. Even some church figures engaged in reproductive processes (much to the outrage of their

⁸⁹ Gn. 1:28. *The Holy Bible, King James Version*. (Cambridge Edition, 1769), *King James Bible Online*, 2014, <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>.

superiors) as a method of proving masculinity within their parishes.⁹⁰ The Christian ideal was the essential father figure within his family and a leader within his community.

The battlefields of the Crusades provided another opportunity for righteous men to display and prove their Christian masculinity while simultaneously rebuking the sinful nature of the chivalric knight. The standard knight had long been a problem for the Church. He roamed the countryside destroying as he went, fighting and killing in the name of a living man, himself or his lord, and for his own personal glory. The Crusades provided the Church with the opportunity to create a new type of knight: the warrior of God. He fought in the name of God and killed only heathens. He did not rape and pillage, for God's warrior had no need for the material rewards of battle. He fought to repent his own sins rather than to receive praise and admiration from others. But the Crusades drew all types to its battlefields, not all of them the Christian ideal, and the Christian army became a factional army, fighting the same enemy for different reasons and with different motivations. This division created a more direct battlefield of ideas between the Church and Chivalry, showcasing the different philosophies of the Middle Ages and the reality of the Christian ideal male as a socially understood concept.

The Precedents

The Christian-based inferior view of women and problems with extraneous sexuality in the Middle Ages reflected the concepts first made clear in the stories of the Holy Bible. The vaguely worded stories of Adam and Eve and Sodom and

Gomorrah brought the human body to the forefront and allowed for enormous reinterpretation as sexual stories in the Middle Ages. Such interpretations were possible because many Christians and non-Christians believe that the Bible is not the direct word of God. Although it was divinely inspired – meaning that God gave man the basic concepts through Moses’ and Jesus’ teachings – the Christian Bible was written by man and could, therefore, be interpreted by man. If the Bible were the word of God, it’s phrasing would be infallible. However, if man interpreted the ideas of God and wrote them in his own words, then his word choice and phrasing are probably imperfect. Man must then read carefully and attempt to interpret what each passage truly means, allowing for conflicting opinions and changes in mass opinion over time and alterations in social beliefs.

The stories of Adam and Eve and Sodom and Gomorrah deal with the purpose of sex for mankind. Woman is created for man to be his wife and non-sexual companion in the Garden of Eden. However, once Adam and Eve have eaten from the tree of knowledge, they realize that they are naked. For the first time they can feel lust, and their nudity becomes a sin. Afterward, God declares that Eve’s (women’s) punishment will be painful childbirth and to live under the rule of her husband. Thus, Adam and Even must populate the Earth while ashamed of their own lust for each other and regardless of the pain of birth. In Sodom and Gomorrah, the men of the town insist upon “knowing” the visiting strangers. This story has been interpreted for thousands of years as a warning against sodomy, for when the men of the town tried to force themselves upon the visitors, God caused sulfur and ash to rain down upon the town. The non-sodomite owner of the house is allowed to escape with his

daughters after trying to offer his daughters as sexual partners in place of the visitors – showing that even non-procreational sex with a woman is better than sex between two men.

Even though the story of Sodom and Gomorrah seems to advocate against sodomy, there were no Church laws banning such practices until the twelfth century. Due to Greek and Roman habits of taking young male lovers, the Church was unable to do more than preach against sodomy for centuries. Furthermore, the ability to interpret the Bible allowed for the possibility that religious Romans could read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as they chose rather than as God's ruling against sodomy. Finally, in the twelfth century, the Church "issued 25 canons against the sins of the flesh, four of which related to homosexual practices. Death at the stake was decreed for those convicted of those specific crimes...such was the horror that surrounded the sin against nature that, by late twelfth century sodomy was a reserved sin for which absolution was reserved to the Pope".⁹¹ In the *Inferno* (written in the late Middle Ages), Dante condemned sodomites to the never-ending field of burning sand where fire falls from the sky.⁹² Such lustful sex as homosexual and non-procreational sin conflicted directly with Christian masculine sexuality. Males were supposed to be the dominant figure in the sexual relationship, but sodomy allowed for the submission of one male to another. Furthermore, the study of anatomy had proven that injection of the male seed into the anus could not possibly create a child. The ability of the Church to pass these canons shows the importance of this issue to the

⁹¹Atila Sinke Guimaraes, *The Catholic Church and Homosexuality*, (Charlotte: Tan Books and Publishers, 1999), The Tradition of the Ecclesiastical Magisterium.

⁹² Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri The Inferno*. trans., James Romanes Sibbald. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), Canto XV.

medieval Church as well as a movement among the common people away from the homosexual male relationship tradition of the past. The Church began to grasp for control over all human sexuality, and a new era of sexual restrictions for mankind began.

Saint Augustine was one of the fathers of early Christianity, and his works helped to shape the religion for centuries. He believed that marriage was for the procreation of children and rejected the concept of sex for pleasure, though he, himself, had enjoyed the freedom of desire as a youth before his conversion. He also praised his mother as the epitome of the perfect female, one who had been dismayed at his own sexual freedoms – urging him to release his concubine and take a wife – and one who had always remained happily beneath his father as the subordinate female.⁹³ She was the submissive wife who always bowed to her husband’s sexual needs – even if she did not wish to have intercourse. Although Augustine did praise sexual abstinence in a marriage, using the example of Mary and Joseph,⁹⁴ he did recognize that many people battled with sexual desire and would be unable to maintain such sinlessness. Saint Augustine provided the later theologians with an example of a real man who was able to resist sexual temptation and find – and eventually accomplish – the “correct” way of living, becoming a saint in spite of his previous sins. Through these ideas, Saint Augustine helped to create the framework for his future adherents from which they built more complex ideas of sexuality and masculinity.

⁹³ Augustine, *Saint Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*. ed. Elizabeth A Clark. (Catholic University of America Pr., 1997), 13-21.

⁹⁴ Augustine, *Saint Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, 24.

Philosophers and Theologians

The Medieval era brought a new desire for explanation in addition to translations of the texts of old, and thinkers began using ancient words and ideas, twisting and adding to them to fit into a contemporary framework. Like Aristotle and Galen, they focused on sex and reproduction but pleasure, desire, and love began to play a more important role. These new works were neither simply “scientific” texts meant to understand the human body nor hypothetical worlds of perfection like Plato’s *Republic* – they were supposed to be about real people. The medieval thinkers passed personal judgments on scientific matters and many used religion to explain generally secular topics. Thomas Aquinas, his teacher - Albertus Magnus, Hildegard of Bingen, and Paracelsus all influenced each other and had enormous influence on Western thought and the Catholic Church for the following centuries.

A Dominican Friar and Catholic Bishop, Albertus Magnus had a vested interest in the Christian belief system and making science fit into his religious ideals. Working in the thirteenth century, he began studying the process of conception. His main book *Women’s Secrets* has been commented upon numerous times throughout history. These annotations make it difficult to discern which writings were the voice of Albertus Magnus and which were his followers, so he is often called Pseudo-Albertus Magnus. The benefit of such commentary, however, is that these remarks show the enormous influence of his works. His commentators do not tend to deviate much from his thoughts and simply add in new ideas to his already established theories, depicting the faith that others put in his ideas. It long time span of popularity

(the book was still being printed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) also demonstrates Magnus' weight in the field.

The book itself focused on conception, pleasure, and the differences between males and females. He quoted Aristotle and Avicenna directly and many of his other ideas were not new, which implies that others not directly cited influenced his writings as well. According to Magnus (and Aristotle), the male ejaculation was the most important part of conception. He took it one step further to say, with surprising accuracy, that a man without testicles could not father children for "he is lacking in the seminal vessels through which the seed must be borne".⁹⁵ With the seed, however, the woman seemed hardly necessary. He gave an example of a cat, which ejaculated onto a plant. If a man then were to eat the plant, cats would be born into his stomach and have to be vomited out.⁹⁶ This denigrating view of women is carried throughout the whole work. Cold, wet, and passive women acted as a sort of leech to hot, dry, and active men – their own health improved due to the stealing of their male partners' heat during intercourse, while over-sexual men died from heat loss. Women, who had previously indulged in sexual behaviors, were to be considered corrupt, and they got pleasure from sex due to the friction caused by rubbing against a penis. Men were supposed to avoid sex whenever possible because the hotter they were (less heat stolen by sexual women), the greater chance for conception. Furthermore, females did not produce a true seed, only her menses, which, like the male seed, came from excess of undigested materials. This menses, however, formed a human when

⁹⁵ Helen R. Lemay, ed. *Women's secrets: a translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's De secretis mulierum with commentaries*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 66.

⁹⁶ Lemay, *Women's secrets*, 66.

catalyzed by the true male seed. Given these views, it is no surprise that, for Magnus, the penis symbolized manhood for it allowed for reproduction and created pleasure and desire in the female. Magnus gave it even more power by saying that “in the male penis all sensitive veins run together, and therefore when it is wounded the entire body is affected”.⁹⁷ He provided “scientific evidence” to help prove what many already thought, that the descended penis (and testicles) of the man were truly the root of his manhood, and, thus, when damaged, the man could no longer be the same, masculine figure.

He passed all of this information, and more, onto his most famous disciple: Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas was born in the early thirteenth century, destined for the abbey. He spent his life studying theology and wrote one of his most famous works, *Summa Theologica* as a guide for other Christians. It combined the beliefs of his teacher, Aristotle (whom he called the Philosopher), and Christian doctrine, and, as a result, covers everything from reproduction, to God, love, and sins. Aquinas’ women were entirely inferior to men in life and in the bedroom. Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that a woman was a misbegotten male but that she was necessary for further procreation as man’s “helper” in generation. Sex itself, according to Aquinas, was not a sin, and man and woman had sex before the first sin. Their natural state as animals made it possible to have generation without lust – the sin typically connected to sex. However, after the fall, lust overtook mankind, and people began to desire each other for the pleasure of sex rather than reproduction.

⁹⁷ Lemay, *Women’s secrets*, 89.

Love, on the other hand, was a force of both good and evil. It dominated man and made him the passive rather than active figure, but if he loved someone suitable, this love then improved him and made him a stronger and better man. If he loved someone unsuitable, however, he became enslaved to his beloved and that love destroyed and weakened him. Noteworthy in this idea is the fact that strength and weakness were so innately connected to both love and the concept of improvement. Cappelanus also found that proper love improved and strengthened a man. Suitability was decided by many different factors, but generally men were supposed to love someone of equivalent status, beauty, and reputation to themselves. Reputation was especially important because of the significance of virginity to Aquinas and the Church.

Although sex, was necessary for reproduction, lust created many problems for Aquinas in his understanding of an ideal Christian human nature. Virginity was always “preferable to conjugal continence”,⁹⁸ but as quoted from Augustine “What food is to man’s well being, such is sexual intercourse to the welfare of the whole human race”.⁹⁹ The virgin was better because she thought of nothing but God, but the married (and thus having been corrupted by the pleasures of sexual intercourse) woman must have thought of how to please her husband in bed. While these thoughts may not have always been lustful, they were earth-bound rather than holy. Without lust, sex was only a sin when done in such a way as to prevent the generation of children, such as sodomy. This type of sex was thus done purely out of lust and desire

⁹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Section Treatise on Fortitude and Temperance QQ 152.

⁹⁹ Augustine, De Bono Conjug. XVI. in Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, Section Treatise on Fortitude and Temperance QQ 152.

for venereal pleasures rather than for the glory of God and man. Marriage was then necessary as a method of making intercourse focus on procreation.

Aquinas also worried that without the union of marriage the parents of the child would not remain together, as evidenced by the number of illegitimate children wandering around in the Middle Ages. The child had to remain with both parents because his mother provided nourishment, and “his father...guide and guardian, and under whom he progresses in goods both internal and external”.¹⁰⁰ Just as within conception, the female was placed in the inferior role. She had little to do with actually influencing the child’s behavior and worldviews and more to do with sustaining its life with food and safekeeping. The woman’s minor role in the child’s psychological upbringing also meant that it was far more important for a child to know its father than its mother. Any female with milk in her bosom and food on the table could provide proper nourishment. Sex within the marriage also played a role in male domination. As previously mentioned, the woman must have thought of how to please her husband in bed and to fulfill her marital duty. Additionally, “Although the act of carnal copulation is not essential to marriage, ability to fulfill the act is essential, because marriage gives each of the married parties power over the other's body in relation to marital intercourse”.¹⁰¹ Therefore, a man must be able to have sex to prove his masculinity over his female wife.

Most of the people writing about the science of marriage and conception were men, and so modern historians could believe that not everyone held such male-

¹⁰⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Section Treatise on Fortitude and Temperance QQ 154.

¹⁰¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Section To the Third Part of the Summa Theologica QQ 58.

dominated views. However, even a famous and influential female writer, Hildegard of Bingen, gave males the power in the relationship. Born in the late eleventh century, Hildegard of Bingen was a Benedictine abbess. She was put into an abbey from a very early age due to her “visions” and, as a result, was extremely well educated. As well as writing works of theology, she was known for her musical and theatrical compositions and was regarded as a source of knowledge for the common man. Her books “enjoyed modest circulation”, but her personal fame was far greater.¹⁰² She wrote hundreds of letters giving advice and promoting her ideas to people from all areas and levels of society.

In regard to conception and sex, she tended to stay along more traditional lines with a few exceptions. She gave women more power within conception by declaring that love between a man and wife determined the gender and personality of the child and that fat women were often strong enough to make the child resemble them, regardless of gender. However, the male semen still held the power of conception because (according to Genesis) he was created from clay and “has his procreative power in himself and generates his seed as the sun generates life”.¹⁰³ The female, on the other hand, was created from flesh and can only nourish life not create it herself. Male semen was also stronger in determining the gender of the child. If the male had strong semen, the child would be male. Thus, the gender of the child became entwined with masculinity. A female child meant that the father had weak sperm. Furthermore, like Albertus Magnus, Hildegard of Bingen considered the importance

¹⁰² Barbara Newman, introduction to *Hildegard of Bingen: Scivias*. by Hildegard of Bingen (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), 10.

¹⁰³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Holistic Healing*. trans., Patrick Madigan, S. J. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), 54.

of the male sexual organs in terms of masculinity. She believed that the testicles helped to lift the male member because they contain the man's "fire of passion".¹⁰⁴ In other words, his desire – and thus ability to become erect – is stored within his testicles. However, if

A man no longer has these two powers, either because he has lost them by chance in a natural way or through castration, he has no more manhood and no more masculine storm of passion that erects the member to its full strength. Hence his member cannot be raised to plow the woman like the earth because he is cut free from the storm of his power which should strengthen his member as a means to beget offspring.¹⁰⁵

There is no subtlety in Hildegard of Bingen's argument – without the male sexual organs or the capability to use them to impregnate a woman, a man is no longer masculine.

Hildegard of Bingen differed slightly from most biological sources of the time by declaring that desire in both man and woman is necessary for procreation. The heat of desire in a man created the semen out of his blood and in a woman, normally so cool, made her warm enough to allow for conception. The strength of his desire met with her thin foam and strengthened and warmed it within her, creating the child. Therefore, if a woman were to remain always in the heat of desire, she would be able to conceive any time. In this process, Hildegard of Bingen believed that the woman and man became one flesh, which allowed the woman to produce a child. This one-flesh theory seems rather similar to the "one-sex" theory mentioned in the introduction. When combined with the heat of a man, the woman in a way becomes a man as "his flesh becomes mixed with the woman's whereby he becomes one flesh

¹⁰⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Holistic Healing*, 89.

¹⁰⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Holistic Healing*, 89.

with and through the woman”.¹⁰⁶ Because she was originally taken from his body (Eve was created from Adam), she can become one flesh within his flesh (one-sex) to create a child. According to Hildegard of Bingen, it is due to this mixing of flesh that married couples cannot divorce. If they were to engage in intercourse with a new partner, all the flesh would mix and create an improper child.

In the later writings of Paracelsus (like those of Aquinas), on the other hand, desire is a sin. Paracelsus, born in the late fourteenth century, was known as a rebel in the philosophical and medical sciences. He read the ancient texts and rejected them, using his observations of nature to create new theories. But he was also a religious man and believed in the word of the Bible and intentions of God. However, though he often disagreed on why and how both procreation and sexual impotence occurred, he frequently came to the same ultimate conclusions as his forebears in philosophy. Combining the rules of the Church and contemporary scientific thought, Paracelsus declared that impure thoughts rendered the man impotent and the woman sterile. The two distinctly different words reminds his reader that only people in possession of penises (men) could become impotent. Women did not even have the ability to be potent in the first place. Furthermore, in accordance with the commonplace belief in the inferiority of women, he stated that woman was made from man and was therefore less than him. Man had a dark and fiery (strong) will and women were light and love filled. “Thus it is neither man nor woman who longs for sexual intercourse, but nature in them”.¹⁰⁷ Paracelsus believed that man and women were essentially

¹⁰⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Holistic Healing*, 61.

¹⁰⁷ Franz Hartmann, *The life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus: and the substance of his teachings concerning*

civilized animals, and like animals needed to love and have children. However, animals were missing the moral and cognitive abilities that God granted humans. While animals roamed free without knowledge of sin, God had a special plan for mankind. Man was to be civilized (not sinful) in his behavior, especially sexual behavior, which could be made civilized through the act of holy matrimony. Within the state of marriage, though, it seems that sexual behavior and lust were allowed because it was desire that created the seed. “There-fore God has put semen into the imagination of man, and planted into women the desire to be attractive to man”.¹⁰⁸ In the opposite view of Hildegard of Bingen, Paracelsus believed that women were nearer to Nature, which allowed them to nourish the seed of man that she could not produce at all. He did not specify further whether women did produce anything like his seed that simply does not produce a child but did declare that “Man, although born of women, is never derived from women, but always from man”.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, in the mind of Paracelsus, women had nothing to with the process of conception.

All of the ancient and medieval philosophers discussed in this thesis stated that women were weaker than man. Some merely specified that they were physically weaker, but others looked at emotion as well. Many of these philosophers argued that men felt emotion more strongly, hence why men burned with a fiery passion and could handle the rage of war. Another group, looked at the fact that virtually all

cosmology, anthropology, pneumatology, magic and sorcery, medicine, alchemy and astrology, philosophy and theosophy. (London: Kegan Paul, Trech, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1896), 78.

¹⁰⁸ Hartmann, *The life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus*, 73.

¹⁰⁹ Franz Hartmann, *The Life & the Doctrines of Paracelsus*. (Pomeroy: Health Research, 1998), 94.

members of society believed that women were more lustful and deceitful than men. They examined the causes of such passion and found that it could stem from the fact that women were weaker in body than men and could not resist the onswell of such emotions (like Eve could not resist the temptation of the Devil) or that women actually had stronger emotions than men. Paracelsus was of the latter group. He examined women's passion of love and hate, and he came to the conclusion that women's imagination was usually stronger than men's imagination, assumably allowing her to feel such things as love, lust, and jealousy in greater quantities. This belief in the emotionality of women correlated strongly with his time period, and the rise of anti-witch sentiment. Witches will be discussed more fully in chapter four of this work, but suffice it to say that witches were considered to be emotional creatures, full of lust and hate. Many of their spells sprung from jealousy of the love between a happy couple or of desire for a taken man. The prevalence of this idea in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries does not mean that previous philosophers and writers had not believed in the emotional powers of women; they were simply more prevalent in the end of the Middle Ages.

From the lower status of women to theories of reproduction, many ancient philosophers influenced the medieval thinkers and theologians, but none so much as Aristotle and Plato. Their ideas gave the Church increasing amounts of power and responsibility, respectively, and as the Middle Ages progressed, the popular philosophy shifted from the dominance of Aristotle to the ascendancy of Plato. Early philosophers, such as Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, and Abelard spouted the ideas of Aristotle, but Aristotle did not promote blind faith in God and the Church. He

endorsed careful and frequent questioning. Belief came from understanding rather than lack of doubt. This doctrine meant that the Church was required explain God's word to His Earth-bound followers. Furthermore, Aristotle believed in the equal importance of earth and heaven. Every man had an earthly component (his body) and a spiritual one (his soul), but he did not place the soul above the body. In fact he believed that "we can merge the two halves of ourselves into a single higher whole".¹¹⁰ Using this premise as a foundation, Aristotle argued that sex was a natural part of human behavior.

For years, these views pervaded the Middle Ages, but such doubt did not help increase the power of the Church. Ultimately, many theologians turned to Plato for help. Saint Augustine had promoted Plato's way of life centuries earlier, and Bernard of Clairvaux famously returned to it in his famous trial against Abelard. Unlike Aristotle, Plato focused entirely on the spiritual aspect of the human body. His medieval followers spouted that sex was purely for procreation, a sin brought upon mankind by Eve. They promoted his ideas of blind faith, and a man who doubted or questioned God or His doctrine was not a true believer. Unshakable spiritual love of God was the most important type of love – far above love for a spouse, love for material goods, or love for life. Such views allowed the Church far more power over its constituents, who were suddenly told not to question and to simply believe.

In the later Middle Ages, the Virgin Mary also gained far more importance as a truly spiritual figure, who lived entirely in faith, never once succumbing to earthly

¹¹⁰ Aristotle, *The Cave and the Light: Plato Versus Aristotle, and the Struggle for the Soul of Western Civilization*. by Arthur Herman. (New York: Random House LLC, 2013), 239.

desires, and remaining a virgin throughout her marriage. She was a figure of motherly protection combined with maidenly virtue – the ideal woman. She appeared in later chivalric literature, such as on the back of Sir Gawain’s shield in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to serve as a protective mother over a questing knight. She appeared as a queen in medieval art, powerful, majestic, and merciful. Her mercy was especially important, and “when ordinary late medieval men and women prayed, they usually prayed to the Virgin”.¹¹¹ In this way, a prominent aspect of the Church’s predominant view of the sexual act versus virginity changed over the course of the later Middle Ages. What was once natural became a bodily sin. But whom did this transformation really affect? The celibate monks remained celibate, but other men had more difficulty. Regardless of the contemporary Church ideals, medieval males still felt the burden of proof (the need to constantly demonstrate masculinity), and, possibly as a result, sexual deviancy did not disappear, even within the ranks of the virginity-focused Church itself.

Masculine Adulthood Within the Church

A man reached adulthood in the later Middle Ages when he got married and had a child. His role as father established his status as an adult within his community – a man with duties and ties to local life that forced him to become responsible for his family and village. Before reaching this stage in life, all males were treated as youths. Children, especially those who were not the first-born and generally considered the heirs, had no real ties to any one place and could often leave at will. Young boys were able to get away with a number of activities generally considered inappropriate for an

¹¹¹ Gary Waller, *The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature and Popular Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31.

adult male. Most of the knights that roamed the countryside raping and pillaging were young, unmarried men and, though their wanton destruction was resented, the acts were simply labeled the folly of youth. However since the state of boyhood lasted until marriage, many males were considered boys until well into their thirties. This virtual immunity against social norms in combination with the common view that women were passive objects of sexuality, who desired all men even when they said no, meant that many youths were highly sexually active.¹¹² Those destined for the Church, however, were taking vows of celibacy around the same age that their peers were given the most sexual freedoms. These unfortunate youths were thrown into a clerical adulthood that followed the same rules as those placed upon the rest of society, such as marriage (to God and the Church), fatherhood, and responsibility for the community.

Whether the similarities between the clerical and secular adulthood were purposeful or not remains unknown, but the concepts are remarkably similar for coincidence. Regardless, the notion of fatherhood is a requirement for both, showing the importance of a paternity to medieval society. The young cleric entered into a marriage with God and became a father over his new Parish without ever being given the sexual freedoms of the standard youth. “According to Odo [Archbishop of Rouen from 1248 to 1275], God created spiritual sons from the ‘womb of mother Church’. As ever-faithful sons, priests served their father, God, by performing the sacraments of the Church. As sons, priests too would marry and procreate, only in this case by

¹¹² Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

spiritual means. This ‘fatherhood’ began as a spiritual marriage”.¹¹³ The Church seems to have believed that this “marriage” would act as to fulfill both the religious and secular requirements for adulthood. As an adult in his community, the new clergyman was supposed to have been given the same responsibilities and respect as a non-clerical male. He would be able to act as a spiritual leader within his community, advising his congregation as a guiding father figure without actually fulfilling the role of biological father.

Unfortunately, society did not accept the clergyman’s “marriage” as enough for a legitimate entrance into adult manhood. Although the Church attempted to manipulate the system used by the secular male, it banned many other activities in the Lateran IV canons of 1215 that

Signified masculinity to secular men. Among the restrictions were the often repeated rule for clerical celibacy (c.14), rules against drunkenness, hunting and hawking (c.15), a canon forbidding secular business or commerce, the frequenting of taverns and gambling that also included an admonition for clerics to wear the appropriate dress of a clergyman (c.16). In addition, there were rules against the clergy shedding blood or bearing arms (c.18).¹¹⁴

These rules meant that the cleric could not prove his masculinity in any form, whether it be by winning at cards or fighting in a tournament. Tournaments, as acknowledged by the Church, “demonstrated the masculinity of the knightly class during peacetime”.¹¹⁵ Most importantly a man of the church could not exhibit any sexual

¹¹³ Thibodeaux, “Man of the church, or Man of Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy.”

¹¹⁴ Thibodeaux, “Man of the church, or Man of Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy.” Section Men of the Church: reform efforts and clerical manhood.

¹¹⁵ Thibodeaux, “Man of the church, or Man of Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy.” Section Men of the village: parish clerics and secular manhood.

behaviors. But without these methods of proving masculinity the lower clergy (without any real power within the Church) had difficulty acting as a leader for the masculine men within their parishes.

In Medieval England and Normandy, men only humbled themselves before those of higher rank or proven masculine prowess. The lower clergy possessed neither such attribute and, as a result, failed to gain the respect of the adult males or possess any real power within their community. Rising in social rank was nearly impossible in the Middle Ages, and as a result, these powerless (and effectively impotent) clergymen felt the need to prove their masculinity through other channels, banned channels. When Archbishop Odo went on a tour of Normandy, he discovered that priests were breaking rules everywhere in order to establish some sort of masculinity (and perhaps simply have some fun). Many priests drank in the taverns or gambled. Others engaged in various levels of sexual liaisons ranging from basic sexual affairs in the bushes with the wives of males from all ranks of society to impregnating their mistresses and producing children with them. On such “priest at Venestanville took advantage of an absent husband, who had gone overseas; the priest had an affair with this man's wife for eight years, and the woman became pregnant with his child”.¹¹⁶ Some clergy went even further and abused their parish with threats of violence. Regardless of the method each priest chose, the fact seems clear that these clergymen were unable to remain within the rules of the Church in their communities, and all of their chosen rule-breaking activities were ones that

¹¹⁶ Thibodeaux, “Man of the church, or Man of Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy.” Section Men of their households: concubinage, sexual conquest and biological fatherhood.

helped to demonstrate masculinity. The Archbishop Odo does not have hundreds of accounts of priests dressing up as women or practicing witchcraft, which were banned by the Church but were feminizing rather than masculine.

As Jennifer Thibodeaux discusses in her article “Man of the church, or Man of Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy”, the tavern was a specific place of masculinity. Women rarely entered and priests were able to address their fellow men as males rather than religious leaders. In this realm of the tavern men could demonstrate their ability to hold their drink, outplay each other in gambling games, and even win the occasional brawl. The masculine worlds of violence and, of course, sex also allowed clerics some form of illicit masculinity.¹¹⁷ There is no proof that these clerics were all physically unable to resist sexual temptation. Many of them were models of celibate perfection while attending their clerical universities, – which were all men anyway – but quickly lapsed back in sexual behaviors when they returned to the secular world.¹¹⁸ I believe that the possibility that the women of the villages, especially the married ones, would have attempted to seduce the new priest in town is very unlikely because of the harm it would do to their reputations. Additionally, there should have been a high chance of rejection by the supposedly celibate priest, making the woman’s move almost impossibly bold. Thus, the clergy were probably to blame for most of their affairs. Their inability to truly join the realm of secular adulthood through biological progeny (without illicit sex and reputation-

¹¹⁷ Thibodeaux, “Man of the church, or Man of Village? Section Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy.”

¹¹⁸ Thibodeaux, “Man of the church, or Man of Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy.” Section Men of the Church: reform efforts and clerical manhood.

damaging impregnation) left the clergy grasping for masculinity anywhere they could find it.

Furthermore, in his marriage to the church, a clergyman could act as both mother and father, nurturing his community while keeping them in line with the Church. The role model for such a figure was Jesus himself. Jesus was the “father as one who rules and produces [and] the mother as one who loves”.¹¹⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, expounded upon this point, telling the members of the Church to “learn that you must be mothers to those in your care, make an effort to arouse the response of love, not that of fear; and should there be occasional need for severity, let it be paternal rather than tyrannical. Show affection as a mother would, correct like a father”.¹²⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux’s speech was not to women, however, but to prelates and abbots, whose masculinity in the community was already in question. Despite the fact that Jesus (inherently a model of Christian ideal masculinity) was thought to display maternal affection for his followers, the average clergyman did would likely not have had enough standing as a masculine figure to get away with such feminine actions. He would probably have been seen as effeminate and actually decreased his ability to help those in need because fewer and fewer people would listen to or respect him. The maternal clergyman could become weak and useless – like a medieval woman.

The Christian Male and the Crusades

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Church began to refer to its true and faithful followers as warriors of God. Mostly these warriors had to fight sin and temptation

¹¹⁹ Bynum, *Jesus As Mother*, 113.

¹²⁰ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 118.

within themselves, resisting material goods, sexual desire, and other forms of physical pleasure. However the crusades provided the warriors of God the possibility to fight in real battles. The Church had banned its priests from practicing any sort of violence in their daily lives, but fighting in the name of God and against the infidel/heathen was a different story. Nevertheless, though these battles were supposed to be religious affairs, not all of the holy knights arrived for war with the same motivations. Along with the redemption of sin, a successful crusader would gain a reputation through his prowess in battle and gather riches by pillaging the destroyed towns. The crusades provided many who were normally denied it, the opportunity to prove their masculinity. The lack of true order on the battlefield meant that soldiers could forcibly take and abandon female lovers as often as they desired, fulfilling their sexual desires and masculine reputation at the same time.¹²¹ However, the fact that many knights did participate in such activities angered those who actually went to fight in the name of God. Thus, regardless of the fact that crusaders were all fighting on the same side, there was a distinctive split between those who fought under the chivalric flag and those who fought under the rules of the Church, such as the Knights of Templar.¹²² Each side viewed the other as effeminate for failing to follow their respective rules of masculinity. This conflict raged far beyond the realm of the actual battlefield, and people debated the purpose of the crusades in letters and in the court of Louis IX, the spiritual Christian ideal leader of two crusades.

¹²¹ Thomas Ashbridge, *The Crusades: The Authoritative History of the War for the Holy Land*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010)

¹²² Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*. trans., Conrad Greenia. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1996).

The spiritual knight or warrior of God provides a different version of the Christian ideal. He was a “chaste and humble warrior, who did not celebrate his manly deeds through boasting of his achievements, but instead gave the credit to God”.¹²³ He wore neither jewels nor expensive fabrics and did not use his victories to rape or pillage. He did not come to judge or dispense God’s justice. Only God could impose holy justice, and in this case, the spiritual knight did not fight to kill others, whether for his own glory or to avenge the wrongs done to God. He actually fought an inner war against his own sins, and his sword avenged his own wrongs not the wrongs of others. The true crusade was within each knight rather than on the battlefield as he fought for his own redemption in God’s eyes.¹²⁴ Saint Bernard of Clairvaux declared that the unwashed knights of the Templar were the only truly “true knights” of the Crusades – note: they were unwashed to show that they not care about personal appearance to a putrid extreme. In fact, “THE KNIGHTS OF CHRIST may safely fight the battles of their Lord, fearing neither sin if they smite the enemy, nor danger at their own death; since to inflict death or to die for Christ is no sin, but rather, an abundant claim to glory. In the first case one gains for Christ, and in the second one gains Christ himself”.¹²⁵ Notice that the glory was not an earthly glory of masculinity or renown by fellow knights, but the heavenly glory of killing evil. If a warrior of God dies in while fighting in the name of Christ, “he has not perished, but

¹²³ P. M. Holt, *The Crusader States and their Neighbours: 1098-1291*. (Eastbourne: Pearson Education Limited., 2004), 186.

¹²⁴ Miriam Rita Tessera, “Philips Count of Flanders and Hildegard of Bingen: Crusading against the Saracens or Crusading against Deadly Sin?” in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan Edgington and Sarah Lambert. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹²⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux. *In Praise of New Knighthood*, Ch. 3.

has come safely into port” and, thus, has “gain[ed] Christ himself”.¹²⁶ These spiritual warriors considered themselves far above their fellow crusaders, whom they placed in comparison with the Saracens for their effeminate habits.

The crusades also provided religious men, normally prohibited from participating in showy acts of violence that gave normal males the opportunity to prove their masculinity – such as tournaments or wars – a chance to demonstrate their masculine skills on the battlefield without offending their Christian ideals. The Christian warrior would never have admitted to be fighting for such a cause because the fact that he cared about his reputation at all would ruin his claim as a Christian warrior. However, even religious men, who by definition did not care about personal glory or pride, gained prestige through their acts on the battlefield. “Philip of Dreux, bishop of Beauvais, and Geurin, bishop of Senlis, strategist of Bouvines” were two such men, among many others, who used the wars to their own advantage while remaining within the bounds of their faith.¹²⁷ They gained military power (as warriors and even commanders) and personal glory while fighting in the name of God and clearing their own sins. One such knight who managed to maintain both a powerful chivalric-esque reputation and his faith was King Louis IX of France.

The Church found its ideal spiritual knight in Louis IX of France. Louis IX has become a topic of debate in recent years. People began to wonder, who was the real King Louis IX, the saint or the man? He was not canonized until after his death, causing historians to speculate if the living man resembled the saint described in the

¹²⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux. *In Praise of New Knighthood*, Ch. 3.

¹²⁷ Achille Luchaire and Edward Benjamin Krehbiel, *Social France at the time of Philip Augustus*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), 160.

Church documents. Through the now immense amount of research done into the life of King Louis IX, modern historians have discovered that he was already being groomed for sainthood in his lifetime. He was completely supported by the Church and eventually became the first Christian King.¹²⁸ King Louis IX was an ascetic who led two Crusades and died of illness on the battlefield, fighting in the name of his God. There are many things written about Louis IX, and while all of them claim his saintliness, the reasons vary according to the exact religious doctrine of the writer. His cult following was carefully groomed by various Christians all over Europe, as he transformed from a real person into a religious ideal image who also happened to possess a physical body. Geoffrey of Beaulieu, one of Louis' IX most famous biographers, gave specifics on what made Louis IX so perfect a Christian king. At Pope Gregory X's request, Geoffrey of Beaulieu began his "hugely influential [account], and verbatim passages from his vita were borrowed by every hagiographical author afterward".¹²⁹ According to Geoffrey of Beaulieu, Louis IX was humble, chaste, religious, did penance and abstinences, promoted religious works and institutions, and so forth. William of Chartres took Geoffrey's writings even further, adding in an evaluation of Louis' IX rule and experiences in the crusades. He described Louis' IX devotion to his God, even in captivity of the Saracens, and focused on his requirement that all of his loyal servants within the realm be as honest as himself.

¹²⁸ Marianne Cecilia Gaposchkin, *The Making of Saint Louis: Kingship, Sanctity, and Crusade in the Later Middle Ages*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 11.

¹²⁹ Gaposchkin, *The Making of Saint Louis*, 34.

Both of these works were written before his canonization and show the support of the Church in Louis' IX status as a saint throughout his lifetime. Such praise after his death would not have been unusual and could have been for the purpose of recreating a normal king as a saint. However, the fact that the Church endorsed these commendations during the course of his lifetime meant that they wanted his actions as king to have religious significance. As a religious leader, his decision to lead a crusade did not have the same chivalric connotations as a battle lead by a standard layman. Yet, Louis' IX approach to government was "heavily influenced by notions of honour, justice, and obligation. These principles were at the heart of the codes of chivalric conduct that had solidified in the course of the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and now informed almost every aspect of Christian knightly culture".¹³⁰ Thus chivalric ideals had successfully invaded part of the Christian masculine ideal through the concept of the spiritual warrior. Louis IX was different from the previous male saint because he was able to retain his power. "Male saints achieved sainthood through total renunciation of worldly power",¹³¹ making them less masculine in the judging eyes of the secular world. However, Louis IX was a Christian King, and "the enormous gap between his actual power and his seeming desire for humility and self-humiliation made the quality of his saintly spirit appear even more exalted".¹³² As a result, Louis IX became a true spiritual warrior - the real spiritual ideal male.

¹³⁰ Ashbridge, *The Crusades*, 579.

¹³¹ Gaposchkin, *The Making of Saint Louis*, 228.

¹³² Gaposchkin, *The Making of Saint Louis*, 228.

Unlike the ascetic Louis IX, the chivalric knight was supposed to show his nobility and masculinity by wearing jewels and beautiful armor. He was always a properly groomed gentleman, ready to charm a noblewoman with his words of courtesy. On the tournament grounds and in stories no one would respect or admire the knight who appeared for battle dressed in rags and smelling like a pigsty. His reputation would be dashed in seconds. On the crusade battlegrounds, however, the warriors of God looked down upon the material goods of the chivalric knights and called them effeminate. They compared them to the Saracens for the sinfulness of their appetites. William Rufus was one such chivalric knight, but he was considered effeminate for “wearing ‘outlandish shoe styles’ and for ‘excessive grooming’ . He also committed ‘adultery with violence and impunity’ and to have been ‘given insatiably to obscene fornication and frequent adultery’”.¹³³ Rather than exude masculinity as intended, the chivalric knights were mocked. Religious leaders, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, who helped to define the proper and improper warrior of God through his descriptions and rebuttals, questioned the jewelry and armor of the chivalric knights: “Are these the trappings of a warrior or are they not the trinkets of a woman?”¹³⁴ By declaring that the chivalric knights were effeminate rather than masculine, the spiritual knights protected their own version of masculinity. As diametric opposites on the battlegrounds of the crusades, the masculinity of the chivalric and the masculinity of the spiritual knights could not happily coexist. Thus, each faced two enemies on the battlefield, the heathens who rejected God and their own countrymen who dressed a little differently.

¹³³ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 230.

¹³⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of New Knighthood*, Chapter 2.

The debate between the Christian warriors of God and the chivalric knights is most easily examined through the letters between Philip of Flanders and Hildegard of Bingen. The biography of Philip of Flanders is a rather scandalous affair. He was a powerful count with the large county in Northern France. Philip and his wife Elizabeth had no children, and two sources confirm that she had an adulterous affair. He killed her supposed lover “first by mortally wounding him with clubs and swords and then by suspending him, head down, over a privy. For Philip this kind of cruelty might not have been unusual; he was known as a proud man, prone to anger”.¹³⁵ Throughout his lifetime Philip brought enormous amounts of prosperity and valor to Flanders. He is also thought to be the final patron of the romance writer Chretien de Troyes – the lines of praise for him at the beginning of *Perceval, the Story of the Grail* are rather telling – though the story remains unfinished. Philips of Flanders was not a religious man and “conceived this idea of crusade in a secular way, shared with contemporary French epic poems, where Christendom was a ‘geographical, social and cultural being’ rather than a purely religious one”.¹³⁶ His family had a history of participating in the crusades, and the tradition had become one of family honor rather than religious faith or redemption of sin. It was an “occasion for personal prowess and knightly pride” – concepts entirely connected with the chivalric tradition of knighthood.¹³⁷ The crusades provided him with the opportunity to continue tradition as well as to rebuild his name and masculinity after his wife’s betrayal. Her adulterous relationship brought his masculinity into question, especially given their

¹³⁵ Karen S. Nicholas, *Aristocratic women in medieval France* ed. Theodore Evergates, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 124.

¹³⁶ Edgington and Lambert, *Gendering the Crusades*, 81.

¹³⁷ Edgington and Lambert, *Gendering the Crusades*, 81.

lack of children. Science and religious tomes placed the blame on his sperm, and he would have needed a method of reproofing his masculine abilities. However, before undergoing this immense undertaking, Philip sent a letter to Hildegard of Bingen to ask for her advice.

This letter mentioned his longing to show his “*pietas*” (a loaded word meaning piety, duty, religiosity, etc) as “one of the virtues required in the ideal prince,” and his desire to use his power and money to care for religious institutions – a trait instilled in him through his religious and holy mother.¹³⁸ He looked to Hildegard of Bingen, one of the most recognized spiritual women in the Middle Ages, to help him decide his future path as a crusader, and his reasons were all based in religion. However, Philip spoke as a chivalric warrior. He thought of himself as God’s warrior, sent to kill the Saracens. In her response, Hildegard of Bingen attacked this notion and all of Philip’s chivalric values. Perhaps reminding him of the arbitrary murder of Walter of Fountains, Elisabeth’s lover, asked him “why have you killed your neighbour without considering My own justice”.¹³⁹ Echoing the words of Bernard of Clairvaux, she reminded him that the true battlefield of the crusades was within himself. The crusades were an opportunity for men all over Europe to resolve their own sins by serving God. She rejected all of his chivalric notions by taking the fighting off of the battlefields where he could gain glory before his fellow men. His desire to prove his masculinity did not enter her concept of motivations for a crusader. According to Hildegard of Bingen, the purpose of crusades was not to kill heathens but to save Christians, such as the very sinful Philip.

¹³⁸ Edgington and Lambert, *Gendering the Crusades*, 80.

¹³⁹ Edgington and Lambert, *Gendering the Crusades*, 83.

On the other hand, the Saracens, the sworn enemy of God and the crusaders were infidels who needed to be killed for their heretical way of life. As well as insulting God with their rejection of His way in the Holy Land, according to the European crusaders, the Saracens were encouraged to pursue any sexual act with as many women as possible and many Saracens dressed in women's arraignment, including face paint, clothing, jewels, and shaving their beards.¹⁴⁰ Although these slurs may have been exaggeration, they provide an example of whom the crusaders believed they were fighting. From the start of the late Middle Ages (around the twelfth century) there was a "growing European intolerance to all forms of nonconformity".¹⁴¹ But the Europeans could have chosen just about anything from the "other's" culture to attack. This specific form of nonconformity was intrinsically combined with sexuality and masculinity. The fact that normal Saracens lived and interacted with these effeminate men was horrifying to the crusaders who saw them as sinful beyond compare. Furthermore, Saracens were free to engage in any and all sexual activities. The most horrifying of which, for a Western European audience, was most likely sodomy, which had recently been banned by the Church as one of the gravest of sins against God. Thus, the spiritual knights and the chivalric knights may have disagreed on the appropriate clothing for God's war, but they were able to fight against a common enemy rather than each other. This common enemy failed the initial test of belief in the Christian God, but he also failed both categories of knights' tests of masculinity. On the one hand, he engaged in incorrect sexual behavior for a

¹⁴⁰ 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, 2009), 282.

¹⁴¹ Boswell. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 277.

chivalric knight, who was supposed to desire and be the object of desire for women, and he dressed in feminine clothing. For the Christian warrior, the enemy failed because he dressed in extravagant clothing (any kind) and engaged in sexual sin. Regardless of the intensity of European knights' fights with each other, their dispute with the ways of the Saracens took precedence.

The crusades caused many problems for its warriors as the chivalric and spiritual warriors came to the same battleground to fight the same enemy but with different motivations and desires. The effeminacy of their enemy helped to bring them together even as they fought over the definition of masculinity. The concept of the spiritual warrior also created the opportunity for religious males, now given the chance to fight, to be able to prove their masculinity on the battlefield of God and led the way to a new real spiritual ideal in King Louis IX.

Louis' IX sainthood helped to define the Christian ideal through the characteristics most praised by his Church-supported bibliographers along with other Church edicts and the philosophical works of theologians, such as Aquinas, Hildegard of Bingen, and Albertus Magnus. Using ideas stolen from or in reaction to the developing chivalric ideal male as well as prior Christian thought from the Bible and the works of Saint Augustine, the Christian ideal male became an attainable status for men of all classes of life. Unlike the chivalric male, the Christian male's achievement of ideal status was completely unreliant upon his physical beauty or ability to purchase expensive materials. Instead, he proved his worth through piety and capacity to resist temptation, only copulating for the sake of procreation. His masculinity was dependent upon his marriage (entrance into Christian adulthood) and subsequent

fathering of children through his virile member and dominant male seed. Without this living form of proof, the Christian male's masculinity was subject to questioning, regardless of whether he participated in other forms of masculine activities, many of which (drunkenness, gambling, fighting) were either banned or highly condemned by the Church. As a result many clergymen participated in illicit sexual behaviors to gain proper masculine reputations and the respect that accompanied such social repute. Ultimately, however, not every Christian male could provide sufficient proof of his masculinity and failed to become an ideal in the eyes of society.

Chapter Four: The Quotidian Man and His Problems

The concept of the *ideal* only maintains its meaning if something exists “beneath it” per se, to which it can be compared and considered superior. Furthermore, there must exist more of this lower quality entity than exists of the ideal, otherwise the ideal would itself become the norm. Likewise, the lowest end of the spectrum – the effeminate male – must only contain a small number of the male population or else effeminacy would become the standard (and would likely no longer be considered effeminacy). Thus, most medieval men did not fit the description of the ideal or the effeminate and lived in an indeterminate space between the two labels. Such men could be members of any social strata and display any number of personal traits. Through their inherent lack of overtly masculine or feminine characteristics, they were lost in the masses of society, neither praised nor mocked. These amorphous men were the quotidian males.¹⁴²

No medieval person would have used such a term, and the concept itself is rather confusing. Who would decide if a man displayed enough masculinity to be deemed ideal instead of some sort of higher quotidian? What if people had different opinions on the same man? A true chivalric knight would have thought that King Louis IX failed in a true test of masculinity because of his chastity and peasant-style clothing, but the church held him up as the highest extreme of spiritual idealism, naming him a saint. In truth, the quotidian man was every man, independent of social status – whether his social group called him an ideal or effeminate. Every man needed to showcase his masculinity to society and was subject to the same societal rejection

¹⁴² I avoid using the terms common or average here due to their associations with social status. As stated above, a quotidian male could belong to any level of society.

if he failed. It did not matter if he had begun as a highly respected ideal male (such as Peter Abelard) or a random civilian; every male – from ideal to effeminate – had the same worries concerning the protection of his masculinity in the eyes of society through constant demonstration. Impotence and the general inability to reproduce were immediate channels to effeminacy, and, thus, these two inflictions had significant influence upon the life of every medieval male. A handsome young knight who became impotent was suddenly effeminate, and a previously effeminate male (due to lack of sexuality) who impregnated his wife was no longer mocked by society for his failure to display masculinity.

Even in a society focused on sexuality, the idea that impotence and reproduction anxiety governed the lives of every male seems like a stretch, and yet between a new necessity for heirs and the comments on such impediments to masculinity that began to appear in abundance in a variety of medieval sources, the common theme seems hard to miss. The medieval male required a working and virile penis – whether he needed to prove that his sperm was potent because only he contributed to conception or he needed to produce children to help populate God's Earth. Although many modern history classes tend to focus only on the importance of heirs for the upper class with money and power to protect, – specifically the royal family – a change in the law in the later Middle Ages made heirs significant for all class levels, increasing the necessity of children. Because an impotent or sterile male now failed to ensure his family's future, such problems became an even bigger worry in a specifically medieval manner.

To help affected males, philosophers and doctors began writing down cures for such ailments and trying to provide biological justifications that redirected the blame off of the male. Folk cures, the more outlandish the better, were spread throughout the countryside, whether they worked or not. The rise of witch-discrimination began in the later Middle Ages as well, and, unsurprisingly, witches were blamed for all sorts of problems with the penis, from impotence to actually making the organ disappear – an extremely visible cause of effeminacy and a metaphysical castration (such as was often experienced by the heroes of the *Lais of Marie de France*). Religion even made an appearance in witch-lore as witches everywhere were accused of sleeping with the devil and receiving their powers from him. If penis-related ailments were not an actual problem in the Middle Ages, causes and cures would undoubtedly never have appeared in such quantity and variety.

Instead, it seems as though impotence and sterility were given the gravity of a serious disease, whether that be a disease of the physical body (cured either by medical science or by convincing the witch cursing the male to cease and desist) or a disease of the soul (dealt with by the Church). The disease had to be contemplated, understood, and then either cured or, if incurable, managed. Although it could not possibly be contagious, its victims still became social pariahs – men who could not satisfy their wives or provide for the future were no longer men. Unlike the chivalric hero – for whom the shame of having lost his heroic status through effeminacy was fatal – the quotidian man had to live with his private shame and public mockery. Thus, through constant demonstrations of masculinity – how he chose to demonstrate his maleness depended upon his and his society's definition of male – he strove to

never face the indignity of society's suspicious allegations. Even the most minor of uncertainties could spark a flame that would ruin a reputation. The quotidian male was thus highly concerned with proving his sexuality for his own benefit, and the benefit of his spouse (who would have to face the scornful pity of the public and accusations towards her own ability to conceive), and would go to many, often rather absurd-seeming, lengths to protect himself from the social shame of effeminacy.

Furthermore, effeminacy based upon actual impotence or reproductive failure was not simply founded on social judgment (as compared to the states of ideal, quotidian, or effeminacy not based on sexuality) because such impediments were clear-cut. An actually impotent man could not sexually prove his masculinity. As a result, finding a cure or justification became all the more important because the sexually incapable man could not simply work his way back into society's good graces. Either his penis functioned correctly, or it did not.

The Economics of Producing an Heir

In early Medieval England and Normandy, land was a borrowed and unreliable commodity. Nobody but the King truly owned the land, and everyone depended on the person above him for a plot. The King granted his aristocrats some land, and the aristocrats then parceled it out to their various vassals and peasants. If a man displeased the person above him in the chain, his family would probably lose the land upon his death. The higher lord of the land could easily pass the claim onto another vassal. However, the Assize of the Mort D'ancestor, passed in the late twelfth century, changed everything and made every man dependent upon producing an heir to save his land for his family. The Mort D'ancestor declared that any rightful heir

(usually the son or daughter of the previous owner of the land) could sue an imposter for wrongful possession of his or her inheritance. With this statement the “Mort d’ancestor had fundamentally altered the balance of power between lord and tenant, and made it impossible for a lord to deny the claims of an heir, or to exploit heirs in an arbitrary fashion”.¹⁴³ However, without the presence of a rightful heir, the king or lord would be able to reassume the land.¹⁴⁴

Heirs were also important for broader economic purposes. In wealthy families, the heir assumed the responsibilities of the household after the father’s death. Poor families needed many children because they gave their families financial and social advantages when they were well placed in other households and through their labor value. Large numbers of children required significant support, so producing heirs and grooming them for adulthood quickly became very important just in case the father died young, especially in poor families with higher death rates. In both cases, male children were preferred. In poor families, the predilection for male children was very practical. Male children tended to remain at home and provide labor for the family. Female children, on the other hand, had to be provided with dowries, which left with their labor abilities when they married and moved away.¹⁴⁵ In reality not all men provided their families with children, and family trees were collected extensively as people tried their best to keep track of the next in line. Wills became increasingly popular because, without a will or direct heir, people often had a difficult time

¹⁴³ Nigel Saul, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93.

¹⁴⁴ Frank Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England, 1042-1216*, (London: New York: Longman, 1988), 6.

¹⁴⁵ Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 256.

determining to whom the land should belong.¹⁴⁶ Such uncertainties led to extensive disputes over even the smallest plot of land, which wasted the valuable time, money, and energy of everyone involved.

Barbara Hanawalt, a historian who studies the medieval peasant family unit, examined the issue of illegitimacy and heirs. She discovered that “Illegitimacy appears not to have been heavily stigmatized, indicating either that it was rare or that all children were valued”.¹⁴⁷ In fact, at least in wealthier families, illegitimate children were quite common. Wealthy and powerful men often had many lovers – some by choice and some through rape – and, as a result, many bastard children.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, it seems more likely that every child was so highly valued that even illegitimate children had significant and useful purpose in the lives of medieval families. In the best of times, they provided more labor and the possibility of more connections for the family, and in the worst of times, they could serve as possible heirs to keep the family land from being returned to the lord or king. Ultimately, all heirs were economically significant for medieval families, demonstrating good reason for males to be sexually capable. Impotent and reproduction impaired males could not provide properly for the future of their families. They could not protect their women and dependent relatives or increase the renown of their name through successful children. They were not masculine figures.

The Sexual World of Women

¹⁴⁶ Barbara A Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 90.

¹⁴⁷ Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound*, 103.

¹⁴⁸ Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

This thesis is about men and masculinity. As a result, women have generally been considered important only in their relationship to men as inferior in strength, wit, bravery, and in their passive role in reproduction. According to most medieval sources, women were weak, lustful creatures who felt the true flame of passion only through jealousy or when heated by the sperm of a man.¹⁴⁹ But this connection also gave them a sort of unusual power. Women were put on earth to be desirable to men, so that men would want to have sex and procreate. Sometimes men were even improved by the love of the right woman.¹⁵⁰ Women were vital to the regular display of masculinity as lovers or wives and as the nourishing ground for offspring. Consequently, even though they were the unimportant gender, the sexuality connected with women was a much-discussed topic. Lust for a beautiful woman could ruin a good man – he tried to have the strength to resist her overabundant sexual desires but fell into temptation and, as a result, became distracted from other, more important things or weaker through too much wanton copulation. Women, beginning with Eve, were the ultimate temptation. Because they always wanted to have sex (saying no meant that she was being coy)¹⁵¹ and men were the ones with sexual control, men were at fault for giving in to women. Women, on the other hand, had virtually no control over their sexual desires, copulating with everyone from man to demon.

Her sexual desire was universal to the point that in various lyrics and treatises from the Middle Ages men were advised to have regular sex with their wives. “For

¹⁴⁹ Bingen, Hildegard of. *Hollistic Healing*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ Cappenalus, *A Treatise on Courtly Love*.

¹⁵¹ Ovid, *The Art of Love*, Book One.

three skillis may a man knowe fleschly his rightful wif, the firste for to geten children, to fulfille the noumbre of men and wymmen that schullen be savyd; the secunde to kepe his wif fro lecherie of othere men; the thridde is to kepe himself fro lecherie of othere wymmen".¹⁵² Thus, if a man were bad at having sex or did not have enough sex with his wife, she would commit adultery.¹⁵³ Old men were counseled against taking younger wives because if a man were too old to have sex, his wife would also leave him or commit adultery.¹⁵⁴ In the short satire piece, "The Meaning of Marriage", the male protagonist has no interest in having sex with his wife. His wife complains, and the village priest tells the husband that he must have sex with her for the creation of children. The priest pities the wife because a life without sex must be very dull and suggests that they give the husband a demonstration. The priest and the wife have sex, and the story ends with the wife begging the priest to show her husband once again, demonstrating her feminine sexual appetite.¹⁵⁵

If a wife were to commit the sin of adultery, there were significant consequences for both herself and her husband. However, while she was the one who would be going to hell for her sin, he suffered more in this life. Through her actions, she proved her "husband's inability to control and govern her" as well as suggesting

¹⁵² John Wycliff, "Of Weddid Men and Wifis And OF Here Children Also", ed. Eve Salisbury, *The Trials and Joys of Marriage*, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002).

¹⁵³ Wycliff, "Of Weddid Men and Wifis And OF Here Children Also".

¹⁵⁴ John Lydgate, "Prohemy of a Marriage Betwixt an Olde Man and a Yonge Wife, and the Counsail", ed. Eve Salisbury, *The Trials and Joys of Marriage*, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002).

¹⁵⁵ Anonymous, "The Meaning of Marriage", ed. Eve Salisbury, *The Trials and Joys of Marriage*, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002).

his incapability to satisfy her sexually.¹⁵⁶ Significantly, there is no known female version of the term cuckold.¹⁵⁷ Examining the term cuckold as a husband's failure as a dominant, sexual male implies that the male is either metaphorically (or corporally) impotent. Since a woman cannot possibly be impotent as long as she possesses a proper vagina, she cannot be cuckolded. Her reputation would be destroyed as a good and loyal wife, both for her unfaithfulness and her lack of proper obedience to her husband, but she will maintain her femininity while her husband loses his masculine standing.¹⁵⁸

Given the low expectation of women's sexual control, the general medieval husband would have been surprised if his wife claimed that she no longer wanted to engage in intercourse. In the case of Margery Kempe, she had lived her life in sin. She was greedy and jealous of her neighbors and, as a result, spent large sums of money on fancy clothes and jewels. She also enjoyed the sexual pleasures of married life and bore her husband fourteen children. However, after a near death experience resulting from illness, Margery Kempe believed that she had spoken with God and needed to reform her life. In addition to religious worship and days of fasting, she attempted to stop having sex with her husband. In her autobiography, Margery commented that she still had "great difficulty and labor with temptations...and so she was tempted for a long time with the sin of lechery".¹⁵⁹ She resisted these hungers – with moral strength typically ascribed to males – and, instead, "did great bodily

¹⁵⁶ McSheffrey, Shannon. *Marriage, sex, and civic culture in late medieval London*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 142.

¹⁵⁷ McSheffrey, *Marriage, sex, and civic culture in late medieval London*, 142.

¹⁵⁸ McSheffrey, *Marriage, sex, and civic culture in late medieval London*, 142.

¹⁵⁹ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans., Barry Windeatt (London: Penguin Group, 1985), 47.

penance and wept many a bitter tear, and often prayed to our Lord that he should preserve her and keep her so that she would not fall into temptation".¹⁶⁰ Predictably, her husband reacted to her initial decision to forgo sexual pleasures with surprise and suspicion. His previously lustful wife (a normal woman who was weak, jealous, lustful, and easily tempted) no longer desired him and refused to be obedient in her marital duty to him. Gone was his standard female spouse, and in her place was a person who seemed distant and cold; her husband was unaware of her secret temptations. Gone was the woman in Margery Kempe, and in her place lived a criticized saint with masculine strength of character or possibly a bedeviled lunatic. Either way, her husband and the community at large criticized her new standard of living. She displayed abnormal *moral* tendencies for a woman and was, therefore, crazy.

Women were seen as very sexual creatures, and yet for many of them their lives as independent sexual beings were cut short by marriage. Often young girls had barely begun menstruating (if they had at all) when they were given to their new husbands. The job of the woman was to be the womb for a proper heir and, thus, marriage "had an importance for the social elite which sometimes overrode other beliefs, including the preference to allow girls a period of growing up before marriage and sexual activity."¹⁶¹ These girls went straight from childhood to sexuality, skipping any steps in between. It is quite possible that, due to this jump, such girls never had to learn to restrain their sexuality. From the moment procreation was

¹⁶⁰ Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 49.

¹⁶¹ Kim M. Philips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, C. 1270-c. 1540*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 39.

possible (and thoughts of sex began entering their minds as puberty began), these girls were having socially acceptable sex. There was no period of public pretense, of hiding inner desire and acting demurely among all men, and these girls simply never learned how. Lust was technically unacceptable, but the open desire to create children with her husband was almost laudable as a key characteristic of a good and obedient wife.

For other maidens, flirtation was the key to social sexuality. Some maidens resisted marriage for years in order to enjoy the social freedom of sexuality found in flirting. “Unlike the Victorian maiden, whose purity was identified with a need for shelter from any mention of sexuality, the medieval virgin, while meek and modest, was expected to have sexual feelings and to relish bawdy humor”.¹⁶² However, though flirtation was socially acceptable, it also tells us what medieval society believed about women. The fact that women were supposed to love to express their sexuality in public through flirtation meant that women inevitably had all of these sexual desires bubbling underneath their skin waiting to come out when “raped” by a knight or successfully married to a sexually capable male. Combined with the need for someone to blame for male impotence and inability to reproduce, these negative sexualized views of women were the perfect recipe for the rise of witches and witch discrimination in the later Middle Ages.

Double, Double, Toil and Trouble

¹⁶² Friedrichs, Rhoda L. "Phillips, Medieval Maidens" review of *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in English, C. 1270-c.1540*, by Kim M. Philips, *The Medieval Review* 2 (2004).

In the Middle Ages, the dilemma of how to handle magical powers and curses was not a new question for mankind. People with supernatural powers had come in and out of style for thousands of years. Sometimes they were worshiped as deities or a human link to the divine like shamans or prophets, and other times they were cast out as heretics. However, the witch blaming of the later Middle Ages was not simply focused on the magical abilities of the witch. This discrimination matched the emphasis on masculinity and sex in society and created a new sort of witch. The witches themselves were now inherently sexual creatures, and they inflicted many sorts of genital-based wounds upon their victims. Although many witches did wreak the more traditional havoc of curses, the medieval authors who wrote about witches focused very heavily on the sexual side of their spells. Perhaps sexual ailments, such as impotence and inability to produce children, simply received more attention because they caused more social damage to the wounded males. Perhaps witches actually were fixated on sex, and, thus, such curses were more common throughout the Middle Ages. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive, and both could be correct.

Regardless, in Medieval England and Normandy, witches were a popular topic, appearing in the works of theologians, medical, political and philosophical treatises, art, and the famous biography of witchcraft (the *Malleus Maleficarum*) alike. Magical people who cursed their neighbors or who could not be killed (like Sir Gawain's Green Knight) were an undefined group. Witches, on the other hand, were the result of careful processing. Their powers, real or not, came from the hand of the Devil, with whom they had a special relationship. Most of the famous texts defining

witchcraft, however, did not appear until the fifteenth century. Although there are numerous references to magic and people with magical powers throughout the Middle Ages, there was apparently no need (or no one thought) to create an establishment of rules and practices for witches before this time. The reasons for this significant detail remain unclear.

These new texts agreed on many basic premises, but the details were constantly in flux, depicting an age where the rising popularity of witchcraft led to an upsurge in ideas and debate on the topic. In other words, everyone was now concerned with witches. Regardless of the late appearance of official texts, medieval witches were the culmination of centuries of thoughts on magic, religion and, of course, masculinity.

The *Malleus Maleficarum* was essentially the bible of witchcraft. Written by German catholic clergymen in the late 1400s, it combined the concepts of witchcraft that had been developing over the last few hundred years into a simple, easy to use sourcebook. It explained how witches were created, why more women than men became witches, common curses and how to remedy such ailments, and contained enormous sections on how witches cursed the genitalia of men and impeded their power of procreation. Using the superstitions of previous eras, the authors, Institoris and Sprenger, truly created the term *witch*, which applied to both males and females.¹⁶³ Before this encyclopedic work, the word witch was not widespread and people who possessed magical abilities were given many names, including heathen, heretic, and sorceress. But, according to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, not all people who

¹⁶³ Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the construction of witchcraft*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 3.

could perform magic were witches. Witches were people, mostly women, who had entered into a sexualized contractual relationship with the Devil. The Devil was unable to use his powers in human form, so he seduced impressionable humans and gave them his powers for harmful use.

Rather than simply stating that women were more likely to be witches, Institoris and Sprenger provided reasons for such a concurrence that well fit the stereotypes of the time, further demonstrating the historical basis of this work. Women were naturally more impressionable, they were weak and unable to prevent their tongues from wagging, they were deceitful, and they were carnally insatiable. Lust was the best indicator of witchcraft, since “it follows that those among ambitious women are more deeply infected who are more hot to satisfy their filthy lusts; and such are adulteresses, fornicatresses, and the concubines of the Great”.¹⁶⁴ While being a medieval nymphomaniac did not necessarily make a woman a witch, the greater combination of these vices found in women rather than men simply made them more liable to be seduced by the Devil and become a witch. If someone were to make note of all of these characteristics within a single person, it could help him to detect a witch – perhaps one who has cursed him. Since becoming a witch also meant copulation with the Devil, it also made more sense for lustful women to be witches. Either they were simply so desperate to have intercourse that they desired even the Devil, or they were lusting after another man and needed a way to get rid of his wife – or at least his desire for or ability to copulate with his wife. Institoris and Sprenger also argued that most witchcraft was performed to inhibit or harm men in some way,

¹⁶⁴ Henry Institoris and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans., Reverend Montague Summers, Part 1 Question 4. <http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org/>

especially sexually, so, since women lusted after men, it seemed more likely that there were female witches (rather than male witches) cursing the men.

Once such women became witches, they could perform all sorts of magic, and yet many spells were focused strongly on the processes of sex and reproduction. Numerous sections of the *Malleus Maleficarum* specify how and why witches might choose to impede the male sexual process. Other parts, then, provide remedies for the different possible scenarios. One significant curse was that of general impotence. In his major work, *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas addressed the issue of impotence and marriage from a Christian perspective. Impotence caused by witches could sometimes be remedied using medicine or by compelling the witch to lift the curse and, therefore, was not always considered permanent.

If the impotence were not permanent, then the Church would not approve of a “divorce”. Divorces were only granted in very rare occasions and were generally considered sinful. The two parties (especially the woman) often found remarrying difficult after a divorce due to societal derision. Thus, a couple would ask for divorce in only the most serious of cases. However, procreation was of such critical importance for the medieval Church that it approved of the breaking of holy matrimony – if the impotence were enduring. Additionally,

There is, however this difference between a spell and frigidity, that a person who is impotent through frigidity is equally impotent in relation to one as to another, and consequently when the marriage is dissolved, he is not permitted to marry another woman. Whereas through witchcraft a man may be rendered impotent in relation to one woman and not to another, and consequently when the Church adjudges the marriage to be dissolved, each party is permitted to seek another partner in marriage.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Section To The Third Part Of The Summa Theologica QQ 58.

The legality issues created by impermanent impotence in those men inflicted by witchcraft meant that they needed to fix their problems themselves. Two significant first steps were identifying the common curses and understanding how witches caused such problems. Some men simply lost sight and sensation of their genitalia, seeing, instead, just a smooth body. This visible loss of the penis was all the more problematic for medieval people who attributed biological maleness and masculinity to the observable phallus. This castration was not real and was only a glamour caused by the powers of evil, which also meant that men who were made thusly impotent by witchcraft could become, once again, virile. Of course, witches could also make women barren, but Institoris and Sprenger insisted that “such obstruction generally occurs more in the matter of erection, which can more easily happen to men”¹⁶⁶ as well as the fact that if a man were made frigid only towards his own wife, he might seek the sexual company of others, such as the witch herself.

There were many different ways for a witch to curse a man, including making his wife seem repulsive (again through a glamour), cutting off the blood or sperm supply to his penis, or making it physically impossible for a man and his wife to move in close proximity to each other. The *Malleus Maleficarum* also provided explanations for how to determine which sort of bewitchment had befallen each man. This method depended entirely upon who he could and could not have sex with and why. If a man were able to have an erection for other women but not his wife, then he had been made impotent only towards his wife. If he found his wife repellent but could copulate with her, he was under a glamour spell rather than cursed with actual

¹⁶⁶ Institoris and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, Part 1 Question 8.

impotence. Although men could be cursed with impotence for a number of reasons, the most common example seems to be one in which a man had an extramarital affair with a witch and then wished to end their relationship. Instead of agreeing to a peaceful end, the witch would curse him either to maintain their relationship or to punish him for rejecting her. In the town of Mersburg, a young man was cursed to only be able to copulate with one certain woman (the witch) but was unhappy with the situation and “had often wished to refuse that woman, and take flight to other lands; but that hitherto he had been compelled to rise up in the night and to come very quickly back, sometimes over land, and sometimes through the air as if he were flying.”¹⁶⁷

The *Malleus Maleficarum* was not the only work on witchcraft. Ulrich Molitor also composed a treatise on witches known as the *De lamiis et pythonicis mulieribus*. Writing in 1489, his ideas were not new for the time, and he utilized the ideas of his contemporaries throughout the work, including Vincent of Beauvais’ encyclopedia, *Speculum Maius*, written centuries earlier. “Molitor did not think critically. He did not question established concepts, emphasizing for instance the power of the devil without considering how witches played a role in divine providence and the devil’s schemes”.¹⁶⁸ The work changed constantly over its forty-two editions, showing that Molitor was always adding the most recent or most recently popular views of witchcraft to his work. Along with the written dialogue the work also included woodcut images of witches. Significantly, these images did not

¹⁶⁷ Institoris and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, Part 2 Chapter 6.

¹⁶⁸ Natalie Kwan, “Woodcuts and Witches: Ulrich Molitor’s *De Lamiis et Pythonicis Mulieribus*, 1489–1669.” *German History* 30 (2012): 493–527.

always correspond directly to the dialogue, which also shows the constant transformation of the public concept of witches throughout this time period. The changing woodcuts in each new edition depicted slightly different kinds of witches. One image by Johann Otomar depicts the Devil attempting to entice a woman (see Appendix – Figure 1). In it “the devil dominates with his hand placed provocatively on the woman’s hip...in von Zierickzee’s edition [see Appendix – Figure 2], the devil seems to be in a more platonic relationship, holding the woman by her shoulders. Zainer’s edition depicts the devil with his hands on her breast... These variations...reinforc[ed] the trope of the witch as the devil’s lover”.¹⁶⁹ All three images show the witch and the Devil together but with varying levels of physical displays of affection and control.

But *De Lamiis* did not provide its audience with a clear explanation for the actual power of witchcraft. In the dialogue, Molitor claimed that witches were powerless, that “they were in fact tricked by him [the Devil] into thinking that they could harm people, transform or travel to the sabbath by supernatural means. Nevertheless, these women deserved to be burned because they renounced God and dedicated themselves to the devil”.¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, in the woodcut “Witches Before A Cauldron”¹⁷¹ (see Appendix – Figure 3) two women are depicted working over a bubbling cauldron and seem to be using magic to create the hailstorm in the background of the piece. Ultimately, the reader remains unsure exactly what capabilities Molitor granted his witches.

¹⁶⁹ Natalie Kwan, “Woodcuts and Witches”.

¹⁷⁰ Natalie Kwan, “Woodcuts and Witches”.

¹⁷¹ Natalie Kwan, “Woodcuts and Witches”.

In other woodcuts, witches are causing direct harm to males while assuming the dominant, male position in the scene. In one image (see Appendix – Figure 4), a woman (presumably the witch) points an arrow at a man's naked foot – his shoe lies on the ground next to him. However, the arrow is pointing backwards, displaying the supernatural aspects of this situation. According to medievalist Natalie Kwan, both the arrow and the foot were phallic symbols in the Middle Ages and represented “an attack on male virility”.¹⁷² Furthermore, “the witch's flowing hair indicates her youth and lasciviousness: in medieval images of insanity, ‘flame hair’ was also a symbol of inner wildness and demonic possession”.¹⁷³ Whether or not this woman had actual powers as a witch or only believed that the devil had given her powers, in this illustration she easily has the power over the man. He is shown hopping up and down with one shoe off, a truly humiliating position. The woman holds the reins of power with her ability to actually damage his foot using the arrow and metaphorically harm his manhood.

Although people could not agree on everything in regard to witches, they all believed that witches meant to harm those around them. Paracelsus believed in a sort of voodoo magic. He said that “some sorcerers who make an image representing the person whom they desire to injure, and they drive a nail into the foot of that image, and evil will and malicious thought cause the person whom the image represents to experience a great pain in his foot, and to be unable to walk until the nail from the

¹⁷² Natalie Kwan, “Woodcuts and Witches”.

¹⁷³ Natalie Kwan, “Woodcuts and Witches”.

image is removed”.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps Paracelsus also meant the foot as a phallic symbol through which witches could take away the masculinity of their victims. Perhaps he simply wanted to explain how witches could injure innocent people if they so desired. Regardless, Paracelsus believed strongly in the power of thoughts to have real effects, especially evil or lustful ones.

While evil thoughts could cause harm, lustful thoughts, according to Paracelsus, created Incubi and Succubae. These demons were lust-filled creatures who were supposed to travel around seducing men and women into illicit sexual relationships with them. Thomas Aquinas believed that they were sent by the Devil to play with weak humanity and convince them to live in sin. Since Incubi and Succubae were not human – and the Devil could not create true life like God – they stole the sperm from living males in the shape of a Succubus and transferred it to human females in the form of an Incubus. Given their powers by the Devil, they were essentially earlier forms of witches. By stealing sperm and sexual encounters, they corrupted the normal path of human reproduction (like later witches).¹⁷⁵ A man could not impregnate his wife if he was too busy copulating with a tempting Succubus. Institoris and Sprenger in the *Malleus Maleficarum* reciprocated this view of the demons, but Paracelsus had a different idea. He believed that some were born through the impure thoughts and sperm of masturbation. The ejected matter of masturbation from sexual fantasy “Coming as it does from the imagination alone, it is no true

¹⁷⁴ Hartmann, *The life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus*, 166.

¹⁷⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Section Treatise On The Angels QQ 51.

sperma, but only a corrupted salt (essence)".¹⁷⁶ Therefore, Incubi and Succubae were useless things, and "Thomas of Aquinas has made an error by mistaking such a useless thing for a complete one".¹⁷⁷ Incubi and Succubae were also more intimately connected with witchcraft and could be the "astral bodies of sorcerers and witches visiting men or women for immoral purposes".¹⁷⁸ They were inherently connected with sex and sexuality and helped to tie together magic and sorcery with sex. Between this correlation of magic and sex and the prevalent theories on female lust, the modern reader should not be surprised that treatises on medieval witches were all about sex.

Scientific and Religious Theories and Cures

Although blaming witches for impotence and failure to reproduce certainly could help a man retain some of his damaged masculinity, sometimes there were no witches to be found. Supplementary explanations for sexual failures appeared in the works of philosophers and theologians. Some blamed the woman for barrenness, which created problematic contradictions with the accepted theories that men were supposed to contribute more to reproduction. Others looked for natural causes, such as length of penis or timing of orgasm – neither of which were fully under the man's control and, thus, not directly his fault. Furthermore, theorists began to seek methods of fixing such ailments, and solutions ranged from noxious sounding potions to detailed instructional manuals for sexual intercourse. This sudden rush of

¹⁷⁶ Hartmann, *The life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus*, 130.

¹⁷⁷ Hartmann, *The life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus*, 131.

¹⁷⁸ Hartmann, *The life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus*, 58.

explanations helps to show just how significant problems such as impotence and failure to reproduce were for the medieval quotidian man, both for himself and the preservation of his masculinity. With science and religion on his side, hopefully a man could return from effeminacy to masculinity.

Medieval society believed that males were superior in every way, especially in regard to conception. If there was a problem with conception, theoretically the blame ought to have been placed upon the shoulders of the inferior female. This method protected men from failure by claiming that it was absolutely inconceivable for the male to be the problem. However, by granting males complete or almost complete hegemony over the process of conception, medieval theorists created a paradox for masculinity when conception did not occur. If the male was the only contributor for conception, then it logically follows that he must have been to blame if his wife did not become pregnant, emasculating him. On the other hand, if the woman was at fault, then the male must not have been the only significant party in procreation. Medieval theorists took many different approaches to try to solve this problem of blame.

Hildegard of Bingen believed that only women could be infertile, and the main cause of their infertility was lack of heat. If women could always maintain the heat of desire, they would always be able to conceive.¹⁷⁹ Paracelsus took a slightly different approach. The lustful imagination prevented men and women from producing a child. Sexual fantasies “results the expulsion of an ethereal fluid...Such an imagination is the mother of a luxurious unchastity, which, if continued, renders

¹⁷⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Hollistic Healing*, 68.

man impotent and woman sterile, because much of the true creative and formative power is lost by the frequent exercise of the mobile imagination".¹⁸⁰ He does not explain why only the female can be stricken barren while the male only becomes impotent. Although impotence essentially makes the man unable to reproduce as well as unable to have sex, the word choice and distinction between male and female is significant. Taking this point to its logical conclusion would mean that Paracelsus believed that men always possessed a working seed even if he could not release it through erection and orgasm. Women, on the other hand, could lose their ability to nourish the seed into a human child. Unfortunately, it would be difficult to maintain that only females could be infertile because what if a woman could not produce a child by one man but could do so by another? Then the blame must be placed upon the initial male. Paracelsus could have countered that the woman simply stopped her dangerous habit of erotic fantasizing in time for the second male, but that theory would have been difficult to prove either way. This debate is pure speculation on my part but may help to account for the fact that other theorists put forth a range of ideas rather than simply agreeing with Hildegard of Bingen and Paracelsus.

Psuedo Albertus Magnus, William of Saliceto, Peter of Abano, and Arnold of Villanova took a more scientific approach to the process of reproduction. Psuedo Albertus Magnus believed that the male seed and female menses had to meet for proper conception. However, there were many things that could cause difficulty in conception in either the male or female. He examined sex positions (standing up and sideways sex in particular) and decided that those positions wasted sperm –

¹⁸⁰ Hartmann, *The life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus*, 139.

conception became impossible. He worried about “closed womb,” an ailment in which the female closed off her own womb with a fleshy mass created by the build-up of her lustful desires. He proclaimed that all women with too much fat would be unable to accept the man’s sperm, and that many men had sperm that was too thin and liquid caused by “cold or dry testicles”, which allowed it to flow out of the woman in her urine rather than stay in her womb and initiate the process of creating the fetus.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, he looked at the length of the penis. It is important to remember that in the Middle Ages, modern preferences did not always apply. While today the lengthy penis is venerated by popular culture, and the average porn star has an above average length penis (making the standard male feel inadequate), some medieval theorists believed that the longer penis actually impeded reproduction and the cultivation of female pleasure.

Pseudo Albertus Magnus was one such theorist. As taken from Galen the penis “ought not to be longer than eleven inches at most, for if it were longer the seed would be dispersed in the womb and conception prevented. The penis should be no shorter than one inch, because if it were any shorter it would not be able to touch the opening of the womb”.¹⁸² William of Saliceto, on the other hand, believed that increasing the size of the penis increased female pleasure, which in turn increased the possibility of conception. Timing was highly important because if a male orgasmed (emitted his seed) before the female had felt enough pleasure, they would not produce a child. Arnold of Villanova agreed and wrote extended instructions for man on how to increase woman’s pleasure in order to maximize chances of conception.

¹⁸¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Hollistic Healing*, 137.

¹⁸² Lemay, *Women’s Secrets*, 68.

But most of these theorists still believed in the inferiority of women. Women did not need to emit their seed for conception (quoted by William of Saliceto from Aristotle), and the women contributed less to conception than men. Failure to conceive was sometimes caused by lack of physical compatibility between partners (such as the size of the penis). However, he believed that it was easier to change the woman than the man because she contributed less to conception. Peter of Abano was different. He also wrote specific instructions for the man, looking at both the changeable and unchangeable biological attributes of the male that made him more viable as a partner of procreation. He said that “the man must be young, but not a child, have well-distributed flesh, and a large quantity of sperm that is sufficiently gross and hot. He should also have an immense appetite that is not weakened by coitus; his testicles should be large with the veins manifest in them, and the right testicle should inflate first”.¹⁸³ Without such qualities, a man would be unlikely to produce offspring. Unlike the other theorists, this manual of reproduction placed the control in the hands of the man. If the man could not fit the description, it was his fault for not being masculine enough. Furthermore, Peter of Abano’s sketch fits with other requirements for masculinity. A man without an “immense appetite that is not weakened by coitus” would probably not have had the required strength to exude and prove masculinity regardless of his ability to produce a child.

Not all of the cures were based upon maneuvering and understanding the human reproductive system, however, and some cures acted more like medicine; the patient had to essentially take or wear an antidote as though impotence and sterility

¹⁸³ Lemay, Helen Rodnite, "William of Saliceto on Human Sexuality," *Viator* 12, no. 1 (1981): 165-182.

were diseases like the flu or common cold. For example, in one unpublished treatise a man was supposed to kill a vulture and “dry and beat its little kidneys and testicles and give with wine, to him who is unable to have intercourse with his wife and he will find remedy”.¹⁸⁴ Pseudo Albertus Magnus suggests many sorts of folk cures in order to conceive a child, specifically a male. He suggests the one should take the “womb and intestines of a hare, dry them out and pulverize them, and then let the woman drink this mixed with wine...then perform the same process with the testicles of the hare and give this to her at the end of her menstrual period”.¹⁸⁵ Other methods include using goat’s hair, female donkeys, and the liver and testicles of a small pig. Although there are no testimonials from the users of such remedies extolling their powers as in modern day infomercials and no possible way to prove that any such methods were effective, people obviously sustained either belief in their powers or a simply possessed a desperate need to try anything that might cure them.

The sheer number of pages dedicated to understanding and explaining the effects of magical curses and biological uncertainties upon the reproductive process, dedicated to defending the concept of masculinity even through the most emasculating circumstances, and dedicated to relieving the symptoms and anxieties surrounding impotence and reproduction anxiety show the import of such ailments to medieval society. As the superior beings, men had the awesome responsibility of caring and providing for their families for the present and future. If a man failed to provide his family with an heir, it was not only his reputation as a man that declined

¹⁸⁴ Mackinney, Loren C. “An Unpublished Treatise on Medicine and Magic from the Age of Charlemagne,” *Speculum: A Journal of Mediaeval Studies* 18 (1943): 495.

¹⁸⁵ Franz Hartmann, *The Life & the Doctrines of Paracelsus*, 139.

but also the standard of living of his wife and dependent relatives. If he lost his status as a masculine figure and the social respect that followed, his family lost that status with him. His children had decreased potential for good marriages and occupations, and his wife was dragged down beside him in the dirt of public scorn and mockery. Thus, for the quotidian man the concept of masculinity was not a purely superficial label based upon the judgmental views of his neighbors, it was the conceptualized and socially understood version of his daily duty as the dominant figure accountable for the lives, wellbeing, and even social reputations of others. Without magical and scientific pretexts to explain away his problems, the impotent or infertile quotidian man failed in all of his roles: a masculine figure, a father, a head of household, a member of society, and a biological male. Trivial though they may seem, witch blaming and “scientific” excuses released men from some of the culpability of being a male in the Middle Ages. Although impotence and sterility still emasculated the quotidian male, such defenses gave him a second chance – the ability to redeem himself when the curse was lifted or the biology fixed or at least the chance to blame something other than himself.

Conclusion: Medieval Masculinity

Thus, the medieval male makes for a difficult topic of study. He has so many facets that attempting to understand and examine them as a cohesive subject beyond the single unifying theme of “male” proves a rather daunting goal. However, identity – both personal and within the larger group – was important for members of medieval society.¹⁸⁶ Masculinity was a key part of determining the social hierarchy. Although an aristocrat would have retained his title and the status associated regardless of his personal masculinity, and a truly masculine peasant could probably never have used his masculinity to attain power above a nobleman, the effeminate aristocrat, like poor Marie de France’s poor Lanval, would certainly have merited less respect and fewer privileges than the quotidian or ideal lord.¹⁸⁷

Society, rather than the individual, determined one’s personal level of masculinity. If society’s verdict said one thing, the celebrated or maligned individual would have to act to change his social masculinity. Words and thoughts would likely have been entirely ineffective. Furthermore, the desire for grouping within Medieval England and Normandy led to a consolidation of masculinity into several distinct sections with different (though often parallel) and explicit definitions. These factions were chivalric masculinity, Christian masculinity, quotidian masculinity, and effeminacy. Each individual was judged from the basis of either the chivalric or religious classifications and placed accordingly on the masculinity scale: ideal,

¹⁸⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, 85.

¹⁸⁷ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie De France*.

quotidian, or effeminate.¹⁸⁸ A single person, therefore, could be an ideal chivalric male and an effeminate Christian one. Everything was dependent upon the views of each individual's society.

Such specific groupings and definitions did not simply appear out of thin air – each faction was created through the works of various artists, philosophers, theologians, and clergymen. These people established the rules in every possible manner – the romance writers created the requirements for the idealized male; the philosophers laid out the code of courtesy (regulations for the gentleman); the Church banned gambling, drinking, tournament fighting, and extramarital intercourse. The troubadours created a new language of love through their songs, learned by the peasant listening in the town square as well as the nobleman in his palace. These definitions were fluid and reactive to each other and to popular opinion. Much of the Christian warrior of God seems to have been taken from the chivalric ideal male – although without the fancy clothing and rampant sexuality. Similarly, as the Church grew in its control over society, religious heroes began to make appearances in medieval romances. Although not all medieval thinkers concurred on the minute details of their definitions, there was by and large enough overlap for general agreement on the broader issues.

These rule-makers also helped to institute the concept of idealism within masculinity, both in fantastical proportions and more realistic ones. The fantastical ideal male existed predominantly in stories, with qualities beyond the reach of most

¹⁸⁸ Please continue to keep in mind that these terms were not universally understood or used medieval terms. I am using them to maintain consistent order within the larger concept.

mortal men. The real ideal male was defined through stories and the lives of real men, who, upon reaching such a level, personalized the larger definition to their narratives. Abelard made the real ideal male a chivalric intellectual. The Church paid clergymen to write biographies of King Louis IX while he was still alive, forming his natural virtuous and heroic tendencies into those of the ideal Christian male. Through the works of these scholars, artists, and churchmen, all of Medieval England and Normandy understood what was required of masculine men, whether that be honor, prowess in battle, or sexual capability.

Although the chivalric male could prove his masculinity through battle and the Christian male did so by displaying his pious virtues, sexuality played the most significant role in determining masculinity. Sexual skill was not the only method of gaining a masculine reputation, and men were certainly able to accomplish such feats while maintaining their virginal status. However, basic sexual capabilities were absolutely necessary. Impotence or the inability to reproduce immediately labeled a male as effeminate regardless of his other qualities, magnificent though they may have been. Sexual potency was important in regard to all of the different types of masculinity. Chivalric rules demanded that a man be able to satisfy a female lover's every need. Even basic medieval lyrics and poetry advise men that their wives will either leave them or commit adultery if they fail to complete their duties as husbands.¹⁸⁹

The ability to reproduce further qualified a man as a fully functioning male. The anatomical ideas of Aristotle and Galen were examined and adopted by medieval

¹⁸⁹ John Wycliff, "Of Weddid Men and Wifis And OF Here Children Also", ed. Eve Salisbury, *The Trials and Joys of Marriage*.

philosophers, resulting in the prevalent notion that men were responsible for creating the fetus. Depending on the philosopher, the mother provided either nothing or close to nothing for reproduction. Thus, if a woman never conceived, the fault was likely the male's anatomy (although people spent centuries placing the blame elsewhere). In Church doctrine, man was told that he had a duty to procreate and to act as a moral and guiding father for his children. Without children, man failed in his responsibility to humanity and God. Additionally, the 12th century Mort D-ancestor edict increased the importance of heirs for the continued ownership of family land and capital. A man who failed to produce children ran the risk of leaving his widow penniless after his death.

Even the required absence of sexuality – and the blatant disregard for such bans – helps to create a picture of the immense attention paid to the topic. Although the Church essentially required its constituents to procreate, the clergymen were banned from such activity as well as virtually every other method of proving masculinity. These clergymen were expected to be father figures within their communities, but, as Thibodeaux theorizes, the very people they were expected to guide did not see these clergymen as masculine.¹⁹⁰ Local clergymen had no authority that deemed automatic respect. They had not married and so had not reached metaphorical adulthood. Clerics could not have children and so did not have experience as responsible fathers. They had not had intercourse, beaten a man on the tournament field, or out-drunk him at the local pub and so were not respected as masculine. Thus, many clergymen broke these rules by drinking publicly at the tavern

¹⁹⁰ Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*.

or through not-so-secret sexual relationships to gain, somewhat paradoxically, the respect of their communities.¹⁹¹ The ideal Christian male had the personal fortitude to resist his human sexual desires. The low village clergyman could not afford such restraint.

Medieval interest in sexuality in regard to masculinity is also clear through the various excuses and cures advertised to impotent or infertile men throughout these centuries. Unlike some other masculine qualities – such as ability to speak properly to a woman for the chivalric male (think of Chretien de Troyes' Percival) or to resist sexual temptation for the Christian male – sexual failure automatically destroyed a man's masculinity and branded him as effeminate. As a result, every man lived in constant fear of sexual malfunction. This quotidian man was never safe in spite of his current status. Society's changeable judgment played less of a role in so obvious a symbol of failed masculinity, but its resultant mockery was just as cruel. Curing, or at least justifying, impotence became imperative for the effeminate male. An impotent man could not simply win a jousting match to become masculine again. For the men who did become sexually incapable, philosophers and medical experts strove to explain these problems, giving such answers as physical incompatibility between man and his chosen partner and that a penis could be too long or short for ideal sperm temperature. People offered folk cures, ranging from slightly strange to eccentric and disturbing. In the tail end of the late Medieval era, witches became a popular source of fault. Their lustfulness led them to curse men's genitals as revenge against male rejection of their sexual advances or in order to force the men to copulate with the

¹⁹¹ Thibodeaux, "Man of the church, or Man of Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy."

witches instead of their original or preferred lovers. The problems of impotence entered Church doctrine as theologians attempted to ensure the best possible chance for procreation, even through the dissolution of holy matrimony.¹⁹²

Ultimately, medieval masculinity, while it must be understood in separate categories, is a clearly definable concept. This concept focuses heavily, though is not completely dependent upon, the blatant sexuality that permeated late Medieval England and Normandy. Masculinity helped to separate one man from another, simultaneously creating identifiable groups and a flexible social hierarchy. The different types of masculinity were constantly being recreated in reaction to each other and popular opinion. Thus, the modern historian must see the whole picture of masculinity in the Middle Ages in order to understand one section in depth. The story of King Louis IX cannot be properly analyzed without proper comprehension of the chivalric male, the Christian male, Plato, medieval Church politics, and more. Abelard cannot be seen as the real chivalric ideal male if only viewed in a religious light as could befit his (forced) sexual abstinence, seclusion in a monastery, and years as a religious teacher. All together the chivalric and Christian, the ideal and effeminate, and the quotidian that is every man, compose the plurality of the medieval male.

¹⁹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Section To The Third Part Of The Summa Theologica QQ 58.

Appendix

<http://gh.oxfordjournals.org/content/30/4/493.full>

Figure 1:



Figure 2:



Figure 3:



Figure 4:



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