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## Chapter 4

# Sodom, Bretons, and Ill-Defined Borders: Questing for Queerness with the *Knight of the Tower*

This essay examines queerness in a medieval text where we might least expect to find it: *Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles* (*The Book of the Knight of the Tower for the Instruction of His Daughters*), a French conduct book written by the knight Geoffroy de la Tour Landry in the late fourteenth century. From a modern-day perspective, this work seems profoundly heteronormative. The Knight-narrator assumes that his daughters will marry; to prepare them for this role he focuses on the virtuous behaviors through which they can attract and maintain a husband. While he draws stark distinctions between virtuous and wicked women, his exempla hardly seem queer: both good and bad women desire men; the question is whether they seek that man within or outside marriage. Queerness, however, is not so much absent from the *Livre du Chevalier* as it is represented indirectly; for modern-day readers, the *Livre's* queerness is particularly hard to discern, since, despite caveats to the contrary, we all too often conflate queerness with homosexuality, or, among medievalists who eschew “homosexual” as too anachronistic in its implications, with same-sex sex acts, particularly acts between men which, in surviving medieval records, receive more direct documentation than do sex acts between women.<sup>1</sup> Questing for queerness within this rigidly moralistic conduct

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<sup>1</sup> Surviving medieval accounts of sexuality often present sodomy as one of the most dangerous, socially outlawed forms of sexuality; therefore formulations of sodomy have been of particular interest to scholars of medieval queer studies. While medieval formulations of sodomy are notoriously indirect, some of the clearest surviving accounts of medieval sodomy focus on same-sex sex acts between men; on this see Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 111. Consequently, some important studies of medieval sodomy have focused on same-sex sex acts between men; see, for example, Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) and William Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050–1230* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Not only is it more challenging to locate and identify evidence of same-sex sex acts between women in medieval texts,

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Note: I would like to thank Lynn Ramey for help with translations of Middle French.

book allows us to expand the term beyond same-sex sex acts between men; to consider how female queerness might be formulated *by men*; and to contemplate how queerness might exceed the regulatory contexts within which it is here conceived.<sup>2</sup> I argue that what ends up being most queer in the *Livre du Chevalier* is *fin amor*, a claim counterintuitive to modern-day associations of courtly love with the brave knight and the beautiful lady, with heteronormativity *tout court*. Yet, for the Knight, *fin amor* is an outdated mode of emotional and sexual behavior, and one which his book renders queer in temporal terms. In warning his daughters against *fin amor*, the Knight casts it as a queer practice to which women are particularly susceptible, even as he struggles to resist *fin amor*'s powerful pull.

The *Livre du Chevalier* in fact opens with the *fin amor* longings of the Knight, who appears in a springtime garden, lamenting the loss of the lady love of his youth. The twenty years that have transpired since her death have done nothing to mitigate the Knight's sorrow, nor should they, he claims, for a true, loyal lover always remembers his beloved. Here setting and sentiment locate the Knight within the world of *fin amor*, as does generic form. "[T]he Prologue," as Roberta Krueger observes, "begins not as a prose tract but as a lyric octosyllabic *dit* that has been set into prose."<sup>3</sup> The Knight's musings come to an abrupt halt when his young daughters appear and inspire a different recollection of times past. The Knight recalls the companions of his youth, "beaux langagiers et emparlez" (eloquent speakers), who employed the language of love to seduce and deceive women (Prologue, p. 3).<sup>4</sup> False knights, the Knight fears, continue to circulate and thus pose a risk to his daughters, a risk the Knight counters by

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but it is challenging to recognize other forms of female queerness as well, since many medieval discussions of femininity focused on sexuality as a particular point of female weakness; therefore for women to go against naturalized prescriptions of sexuality was, paradoxically, viewed as part of female nature and would not necessarily be queer. As my essay demonstrates, it is possible to locate queerness within what might seem like normative constructions of female sexuality, and doing so might help us identify pressure points at which those constructions were most volatile or contested.

<sup>2</sup> In formulating female queerness in the Middle Ages, my work draws on that of Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) and Robert Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 248–70.

<sup>3</sup> Roberta L. Krueger, "Intergeneric Combination and the Anxiety of Gender in *Le Livre Du Chevalier De La Tour Landry Pour L'Enseignement De Ses Filles*," *L'Esprit Createur* 33 (1993): 61–72 at 63.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffroy de la Tour Landry, *Le Livre du chevalier de La Tour Landry, pour l'enseignement de ses filles*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon (Paris: P. Jannet, 1854; repr. Nabu Press, 2010). All subsequent quotations of this text are cited parenthetically by Prologue/chapter number and page number.

writing a book of instruction to prepare them for entrance into the larger world. Youthful reminiscence gives way to parental responsibility, and the Knight is propelled out of his garden and forced to recollect *fin amor* differently, as masculine deception resulting in feminine shame. Although the Knight distinguishes himself from his former companions, one cannot help but wonder if they function as the hypothetical friend who screens a guilty speaker. At the very least, these “other men” invite speculation regarding the possibility of the Knight’s own youthful indiscretions, in which case, as Krueger notes, his aim is “to warn his daughters against men precisely like himself.”<sup>5</sup> Notably, the Knight’s solution to the perils of *fin amor* is not that men behave better but that women shield themselves from seduction. Men, the Knight implies, are unable or unwilling to learn from the past. Women, in progressing away from *fin amor* and toward love-based marriage, propel their society toward the present and future.

And yet the emotion from which the Knight so definitively turns at the opening of his treatise reemerges at its end when, after recounting multiple exempla excoriating *fin amor*, the Knight advocates in its favor in a debate with his wife, who here gives voice to the many arguments that the Knight rehearses earlier. The debate provides further fodder against *fin amor* by presenting the Knight’s arguments in a different mode, dialogic, as opposed to narrative, and from a different perspective, a woman’s, as opposed to a man’s.<sup>6</sup> Certainly the Knight’s backsliding from his earlier stance on *fin amor* proves a point from his Prologue: men, on their own, are incapable of abandoning this emotion and require female intervention to do so. While the Knight’s recidivism is performative, I want to suggest that his ongoing investment in *fin amor* is more than a straw man stance. The Knight’s preoccupation with his own youthful love practices opens up a temporal dimension to sexual transgression, and he consequently attempts to distinguish *fin amor* from virtuous marriage using temporal terms, associating *fin amor* with stasis, immaturity, and the past and marriage with progress, adulthood, and the future. By casting *fin amor* as a backward, superseded mode of emotion and sexuality, the Knight also casts it as queer.

The temporal queerness of the *Livre du Chevalier* aligns this medieval French conduct book with recent work in queer theory focusing on sequence and time. If, on the one hand, heteronormative regimes cast homosexuality as a derivative and failed copy of heterosexuality, then, on the other, to quote Heather Love,

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<sup>5</sup> Krueger, “Intergeneric Combination,” 63.

<sup>6</sup> As Glenn D. Burger convincingly argues, by advising her husband well, the Knight’s wife is herself an exemplum of new models of virtuous female conduct. See Burger, *Conduct Becoming: Good Wives and Husbands in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 88–104.

“queers have been seen . . . as a backward race. Perverse, immature, sterile, and melancholic: even when they provoke fears about the future, they somehow also recall the past.”<sup>7</sup> Or, as Elizabeth Freeman argues, queers defy “chrononormativity,” a term she coins for “the interlocking temporal schemes necessary for genealogies of descent and for the mundane workings of domestic life.”<sup>8</sup> Societies, Freeman argues, ground themselves in temporality, in the histories and rhythms that establish where a people come from and where they are going, and therefore delineate who a people are. Individuals are expected to synchronize their own movements through time, in terms of maturation, work, and reproduction, with these histories and rhythms, such that “[m]anipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time.”<sup>9</sup> Queers, however, march to the beat of a different drum, or they refuse to move on to a new beat when their society demands it.

Freeman explains this queer recalcitrance through the concept of temporal drag, a play on the familiar queer practice of drag performance to disrupt naturalized regimes. Freeman, however, invites us to consider drag “as a *temporal* phenomenon”; “as an excess . . . of the signifier ‘history’ rather than of ‘woman’ or ‘man.’”<sup>10</sup> Temporal drag, she argues, involves performing outdated, anachronistic versions of gender and sexuality, and therefore constitutes “a counter-genealogical practice of archiving culture’s throwaway objects, including the outmoded masculinities and femininities from which usable pasts may be extracted.”<sup>11</sup> *Fin amor*, in the Knight’s *Livre*, can be understood as just such a cultural “throwaway object,” a set of “outmoded masculinities and femininities” beyond which both the individual knight and the late medieval French nobility have allegedly evolved. Despite the Knight’s best efforts to distance himself and his daughters from *fin amor*, he fails to do so, and his ongoing investment in *fin amor* constitutes a medieval version of temporal drag. The Knight, however, is a reluctant performer, and he attempts to alleviate his own temporal instability through a revision of categories, by reconceptualizing *fin amor* as adultery and sodomy. Sodomy emerges in the conduct book as the negative counterpoint through which the Knight seeks to enforce chrononormativity,

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7 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6.

8 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xxii.

9 Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

10 Freeman, *Time Binds*, 62.

11 Freeman, *Time Binds*, xxiii.

a point I make by focusing the second and third sections of this essay on two of the Knight's exempla: the exemplum featuring Sodom and Lot's wife, and one featuring the bizarre sexual practices of a society of "Galois" (a term I consider in detail in Section 3).

Sodomy, as scholars frequently note, makes only oblique appearances in medieval texts, and must be teased out on a text-by-text basis. Thus, in his study of sodomy and medieval theology, Mark D. Jordan eschews casting a wide net across texts to instead home in on the complex interplay of meanings that a single text offers. Adopting theater as a metaphor, he advocates that "we . . . regard the terms [associated with sodomy] as protagonists in the plots of various classifications, arguments, or persuasions and the texts themselves as performances. We are to learn what kind of character each protagonist has by watching its actions in the performance."<sup>12</sup> Thus, with each new textual construction of sodomy, we must not only "learn anew" the terms for sodomy, but also identify that text's "resources for teaching readers how its central terms are to be used."<sup>13</sup> In her study of avant-garde queer art, Freeman adopts a similar methodology. "Reading closely," she argues, "means fixating on that which resists any easy translation into present-tense terms, any 'progressive' program for the turning of art into a cultural/historical magic bullet or toxin."<sup>14</sup> Like Jordan, Freeman focuses up close, on individual exemplars rather than an archive, "to treat . . . texts and their formal work as theories of their own."<sup>15</sup> In this essay I adopt a similar methodology: to connect my selected exempla to each other and the Prologue, I trace a chain of associations that include emotion (*fin amor*, conjugal love), sexual practices (adultery, sodomy), cultural entities (Sodom, ancient Britons, ducal Brittany), and temporal concepts and terms (looking backward, in the case of Lot's wife, and the term "temps" itself in the story of the Galois). In the first section of the essay, I introduce many of these terms and provide the historical context necessary to connect them. In addition to connections between terms and concepts, I am interested in the fluidity of terms and concepts themselves, how *fin amor* transmutes into adultery and sodomy, for example, or how the term "Galois" translates to both revelers and Bretons.

A key difference, I should note, between the queer artists Freeman studies and the Knight-narrator of the *Livre du Chevalier* is that while the former adopt strategies like temporal drag actively to resist their dominant culture, the Knight writes his conduct book to promote the dominant culture of his own era,

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<sup>12</sup> Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvi.

<sup>15</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvii.

and the resistance his book registers marks moments where his project is beyond his control. I am consequently drawn to a question posed by William Burgwinkle in his examination of accounts of sodomy in high medieval France and England: “Could courtly love texts, which have so often been read as the bedrock of monolithic, monologic heterosexuality, not be read instead as laboratory texts, a failed ideological experiment in imposing seamless models of (hetero)sexuality and gender?”<sup>16</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, the same question can be posed of the seemingly conservative genre of conduct books, in which case conduct books might be just the site for theorizing the late medieval queer.

## Following the Knight’s Chain

In identifying the Knight’s backward glance toward the lost love of his youth as a frame for his pedagogical mission, we might note the centrality of this mission to the French aristocracy more generally, for whom the fourteenth century was a tumultuous era. Wracked by both the Hundred Years’ War with England and political upheaval within France, the aristocracy sorely required renovation as far as their self-perception was concerned, a need by no means lost on Charles V (r. 1364–1380), whose rule coincides with the composition of the Knight’s *Livre*. Charles undertook a two-pronged program to strengthen monarchical authority and centralize his kingdom’s administration; his success on both fronts was partially due to his skillful manipulation of the rhetoric of domesticity.<sup>17</sup> Charles promoted the well-ordered household, which, for him, was not confined to his immediate family but radiated out to include his court and his kingdom at large. Charles’s male subjects were simultaneously the family over which he ruled and rulers over their own families; overseeing an orderly household marked Frenchmen as virtuous emulators of their king. In addition to bolstering Charles’s authority, this program of reform provided opportunities to gentry like the author of the *Livre du Chevalier*, Geoffroy IV of the Tour Landry (died ca. 1402–1406), a knight in the region of Anjou. Surviving records indicate that Geoffroy participated in multiple battles in the Hundred Years’

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<sup>16</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> My account of Charles V and household management is drawn from Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 265–338.

War and was eventually awarded the title *chevalier banneret*.<sup>18</sup> He married twice, both times to wealthy women. He composed his *Livre* in the early 1370s, when married to his first wife, Jeanne de Rougé, with whom he had at least two sons and three daughters. For a provincial knight whose fortunes were on the rise, composing a conduct book was doubly beneficial: it not only educates his daughters but also performs the knight's own virtue as a responsible head of household and therefore marks him as a loyal subject who is *au courant* of social practices extending well beyond his home region. Whether Geoffroy consciously had this latter goal in mind when composing his *Livre* is a matter of speculation, but it is worth noting that the book circulated widely. The French text survives in twenty-one manuscripts, and the conduct book was translated into English and German, and printed in French and English.<sup>19</sup>

If the household was central to late medieval French culture, so too was marriage, the institution around which the household was built. At the time Geoffroy composed his book, marriage was rapidly transforming, with virtuous wifeness emerging as a pressing concern.<sup>20</sup> Although marital dynamics remained hierarchical, with a husband ruling over his wife, they nonetheless shifted, so that the conjugal couple was increasingly perceived as a partnership through which spouses negotiated their world together. The virtuous wife did not just obey her husband, she also advised him, although within a private sphere where she did not challenge his public authority. Ideally husbands and wives would consult and communicate with each other and, indeed, love each other; they would care for each other, and take their spouse's best interests to heart. As Burger notes, conduct books of this era departed from earlier constructions of femininity as an inherently deficient gender, one that virtuous women had to transcend to attain a semi-masculine status. Rather, women were imagined to possess gender-specific traits that complemented those of their husbands and could therefore be cultivated to mutually beneficial ends. Wifely virtue was construed as at once spiritual – by this point in history marriage ranked among the Church's sacraments – and practical, as wives were required to assess situations and determine how their behavior might be most beneficial to the conjugal household. In both registers, rote performance failed to suffice. The sanctity of marriage required that a wife's intentions be set toward virtue, that she desire to be not just an outwardly good wife but an inwardly good one as well. And the

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**18** For historical information regarding Geoffroy de la Tour Landry, see Montaiglon's preface to *Le Livre du Chevalier*, vi–xxvii.

**19** Burger, *Conduct Becoming*, 89.

**20** For an overview of medieval transformations in love and marriage, see Burger, *Conduct Becoming*, 1–32.

practicality of wifely virtue required a woman to view herself as her husband's partner, not his servant, and therefore to think deeply about what behaviors would best lend themselves to the greater good of the couple.<sup>21</sup>

If, in the *Livre du Chevalier*, wifely virtue is a cognitive, affective, and performative phenomenon, then its foil is *fin amor*. The Knight's rejection of *fin amor* is at once spatial – his conduct book begins when he exits the garden of *fin amor* – and temporal – he moves beyond the deceased lady of his own past to his present familial situation, complete with a living wife and their daughters, and to the future, as he educates the next generation of nobility. Yet, the rejection of *fin amor* involves more than an exit or reorientation; it also requires careful taxonomic orchestration on the part of the Knight, who must redefine marriage and *fin amor* and revise their intertwined histories. On the one hand, the Knight presents *fin amor* as an overwhelming, uncontrolled passion, but one emptied of the grandeur it accrues elsewhere in medieval literature. Thus, in his negative exempla, wives who are overcome by *fin amor* commit adultery with men specified as less worthy than their husbands; these women lose their marriages, lives, and souls as a result. On the other hand, the Knight casts *fin amor* as a hollow performance of courtliness; its practitioners attend to their fine clothes, eloquent language, and physical beauty in a rote, perfunctory way that fails to take practicality or context into account.<sup>22</sup> For example, the Knight recounts two exempla, the first of a lady, the second of a lord, who both wear clothing that accentuates their beauty but poorly protects them from the winter weather. In both instances the cold transforms their skin to a deadly pallor, and the lovers they sought to impress turn their attentions to warmly dressed alternatives whose ruddy complexions indicate health. As either rote performance or overwhelming passion, *fin amor* becomes a case of either too little or too much. Marital affection represents the perfect balance of practicality, performance, and genuine emotional investment. The narrative drive of the Knight's *Livre* can in fact be summed up as a desire to promote wifely virtue and marital affection over and against *fin amor*, and to redefine precisely what “courtly love” is: for the Knight aristocratic affect is no longer characterized by the passionate throes of *fin amor* but rather by the more thoughtful and controlled emotion of marital affection.

Here, I argue, is where a third concept comes into play: sodomy, which further complicates the intellectual history underlying the Knight's *Livre*. If one strategy the Knight employs to denigrate *fin amor* is to equate *fin amor* with

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<sup>21</sup> See Burger, *Conduct Becoming*, particularly 1–7, 16–26.

<sup>22</sup> On this portrayal of *fin amor* as a form of “rote repetition,” see Burger, *Conduct Becoming*, 98.

adultery, then the Knight advances his attack by adding sodomy to this chain of associations. Certainly, the Knight's strategy is successful insofar as sodomy was perceived as sinful and unnatural, the very worst of sexual transgressions and likely to land its perpetrator in hell. Yet, if the wickedness of sodomy was indisputable, then what constitutes sodomy is notoriously difficult to pin down. Although "sodomia," or sodomy, derives its name from the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis:18–19), the biblical Sodomites were not sodomites; they were guilty of grievous sin ("peccatum . . . adgravatum . . . nimis," 18:20), but the codification of that sin as sodomy only dates back to the eleventh century.<sup>23</sup> In the brief biblical narrative, God sends two angels disguised as men to Sodom to ascertain the residents' sinfulness, upon which discovery he plans to destroy both Sodom and Gomorrah. Arriving at Sodom, the angels are shown hospitality by Lot, who offers them shelter for the night. However, the men of Sodom demand that Lot relinquish his guests to them: "bring them out hither that we may know them" (educ illos huc ut cognoscamus eos [19:5]). Lot refuses, begging the men of the city to take his daughters instead: "I have two daughters who as yet have not known man: I will bring them out to you, and abuse you them as it shall please you, so that you do no evil to these men, because they are come in under the shadow of my roof" (habeo duas filias quae necdum cognoverunt virum educam eas ad vos et abutimini eis sicut placuerit vobis dummodo viris istis nihil faciatis mali quia ingressi sunt sub umbraculum tegminis mei [19:8]). The angels draw Lot back into the house, and the men outside are struck blind. The angels then instruct Lot to gather his family members and depart from the city before God destroys it. Lot, his wife, and their daughters depart from Sodom the next day, under instruction not to look back upon the city, lest they too be consumed. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. As Jordan notes, many contemporary biblical scholars read the story of Sodom as less targeted at a specifically sexual transgression than at arrogance, breach of hospitality, and rebellion against God.<sup>24</sup> In earlier Christian exegetical traditions, however, beginning with the Church Fathers and extending into the Middle Ages, the sin of Sodom was increasingly associated with sexual sin, and was eventually formulated as sodomy.<sup>25</sup>

The coining of this term, however, did not mitigate the ambiguity of the sin. Sodomy can include same-sex sex acts, sex acts involving penetration of

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<sup>23</sup> The edition of the Bible quoted here is the Latin Vulgate; English translations are taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible; both can be found at *Vulgate.org*, *the Latin Vulgate Bible*, <http://vulgate.org>. On the eleventh-century codification of "sodomy," see Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 30–32.

<sup>25</sup> Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 34–44.

any orifice other than the vagina, autoeroticism, or sex acts in which a woman assumes an “active” position or the man a “passive” one. As this list suggests, sodomy was construed as a violation of gender roles as much as a performance of illicit sexuality; consequently, medieval sodomy encompassed any number of acts, both same sex and otherwise, believed to disrupt a binary construction of gender that promoted an idealized masculinity over and against an inferior femininity.<sup>26</sup> Sodomy, in short, imperils masculinity; therefore, when in the twelfth century sodomy emerged as a source of moral panic and a highly punishable offense, charges of sodomy, whether legal or literary, were most commonly leveled against men. However, with the emergence of a new model of femininity in the later Middle Ages, one that construed femininity not simply in terms of deficiency, it makes sense that sodomy might also imperil virtuous femininity, as is the case in the Knight’s *Livre*.

To link sodomy, adultery, and *fin amor*, the Knight must revise *fin amor* discourses by highlighting some conventions while altering or omitting others. Certainly, a connection between *fin amor* and adultery is not hard to draw; the most famous literary *fin amor* affairs, those of Lancelot and Guinevere and Tristan and Isolde, were adulterous and non-procreative and therefore opposed to the institutions of marriage and inheritance on which nobility was based. The Knight’s next step, equating *fin amor* with sodomy, is a bit more challenging; when *fin amor* first emerged in the twelfth century, it did so in contradistinction to the equally new discourse of sodomy. “Sodomy,” as Burgwinkle argues, “surfaces as a charge and category at the very moment when heterosexual love becomes an essential theme and obligatory step in the development of exemplary knighthood.”<sup>27</sup> Emphasis on distinct gender roles and idealized heterosexual coupling in *fin amor* discourse aligned it with another discourse to which it was frequently opposed: marriage.<sup>28</sup> Even as secular romance authors positioned sodomy as a threat to the heterosexual pairings of *fin amor*, the Church promoted marriage as a means to avoid sodomy and condemned sodomy for the danger it posed to marriage and procreation.

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26 On this point, see in particular Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 177–227. As Lochrie notes, “there would have been no medieval sodomite without certain medieval pathologies of femininity” (180).

27 Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law*, 4.

28 I use the term “heterosexual” advisedly, in light of concerns regarding whether such modern terminology can be usefully applied to premodern formulations of gender and sexuality. Here I follow Sarah Salih, who argues that the historical investigation of premodern gender and sexuality “leaves room to discover forms of heterosexuality other than modern heteronormativity” (“Unpleasures of the Flesh: Medieval Marriage, Masochism, and the History of Heterosexuality,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 [2011]: 125–47 at 126).

To detach *fin amor* from marriage and idealized versions of gender and sexuality, the Knight must also revise the chrononormative narratives that, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, underpinned these connections. Central to these narratives are the biblical account of Eden and the relationship of Adam and Eve, which was construed as proof that marriage was instituted by God and formed part of his plan for humanity. Theologians largely agreed that Adam and Eve had sex before the Fall but believed that they did so in a wholly virtuous fashion. The Fall thus marks a before and after for marriage and sexuality, with their postlapsarian versions constituting a poor copy or derivative of their prelapsarian state. This was true of even the most tolerable versions of postlapsarian sex – between husband and wife, in the right position, and for procreative purposes – and was doubly true of sinful versions: sex for pleasure, outside marriage, or sodomitical. Thus, as Burgwinkle notes regarding twelfth-century constructions of sodomy, “the sodomite is associated with things ‘new’ and modern.”<sup>29</sup> This strategy, of projecting ideal sexual practices and gender roles into a glorified past from which the world has since fallen away, is one that *fin amor* discourses appropriate. In the *Roman de la Rose*, for example, *fin amor* has its own Eden; Jean de Meun borrows from Ovid’s account of a Golden Age to locate *fin amor* in an originary, lost epoch characterized by virtuous love and equality between the sexes. The advent of artificial social practices, marriage in particular, signals a falling away from *fin amor* and the idyllic state it here represents.

If, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, ideal versions of love, sex, and marriage were projected into the past, then, by the late fourteenth century, when the Knight was composing his *Livre*, we find different temporal configurations. These differences largely result from the increasing prominence of sacramental marriage within European societies. On the one hand, marriage continued to draw cultural capital from its status as a venerable institution decreed by God. Biblical relationships, including Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, Esther and Ahasuerus, and Joseph and Mary, all exemplify the virtues of marriage and provide proof of its long history; it is therefore no surprise that the Knight includes them in his book. On the other hand, developments in sacramental marriage that have their roots in the twelfth century gained significantly in social prominence and intellectual theorization in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These developments led to the sense that marriage in the fourteenth–fifteenth century “now” was different from past formulations of the institution, that marriage was in some way modern and new. Such formulations require a history of

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<sup>29</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law*, 52.

progress rather than decline, and one strategy to establish such a history is to construct the modernity of marriage vis-à-vis an outdated and undesirable version of *fin amor*. This strategy is the impetus for the framing of the Knight's *Livre*, as the *fin amor* practices of his own past give way to the virtuous conjugal relations of his present and, he hopes, of his daughters' future.

## Lot's Wife

The Knight's concern with *fin amor* and its backward pull becomes evident in chapter 54, "De la femme Loth" (Lot's Wife), a retelling of the sins of Sodom with a particular focus on female transgression. As this chapter constitutes one of the Knight's many biblical exempla drawn from the thirteenth-century *Miroir des bonnes femmes*, some commentary on the Knight's adaptation process is useful. John L. Grigsby notes that this process can include "cop[ying] an entire chapter almost verbatim"; "expand[ing] his source material" and "continu[ing] a chapter] by inserting some personal anecdote or an *exemplum* from another source."<sup>30</sup> That the Knight employs the strategies of expansion and continuation in his chapter on Lot's wife allows us to pinpoint late-fourteenth-century concerns regarding femininity and *fin amor* that differ from those of the earlier *Miroir*. Close reading here proves a powerful strategy; to adapt Freeman, this chapter models the "'progressive' program" that the Knight advocates for his daughters even as it "resists any easy translation into present-tense terms."<sup>31</sup>

I begin by taking stock of the contents of the chapter, and noting which elements derive from the *Miroir* versus those which do not. Like the *Miroir*, the Knight interprets the backwards glance of Lot's wife toward the destruction of Sodom both literally, as an example of female disobedience, and allegorically, as the recidivism of a sinner who, despite receiving God's forgiveness, returns to past sins. The Knight expands and alters the *Miroir* exemplum as follows: 1) He compares the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to the destruction of Erbanges, a city in the region of Nantes allegedly destroyed through the intervention of St. Martin of Vertou (527–601 CE) for crimes identical to those of its infamous biblical counterparts. 2) The Knight specifies the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah as sexual acts committed outside the marriage bond. 3) The Knight

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<sup>30</sup> John L. Grigsby, "A New Source of the *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*," *Romania* 84 (1963): 171–208 at 198.

<sup>31</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvi.

closes his chapter with an anecdote about a wife who runs away with her lover but is tracked down by her brothers and killed.

To a modern reader, focusing on Lot's wife as the primary sinner in the biblical account of Sodom might seem an odd choice, given the infamy of the Sodomites' sins. In medieval contexts, this focus makes more sense: for the Church Fathers and later medieval exegetes, the Sodomites are guilty of an abominable sexual transgression, frequently imagined in the Middle Ages as sex acts between men. Lot's wife is guilty of gender transgression; she literally refuses to follow her husband. Since sodomy was construed as a violation of the gender binary, Lot's wife's transgression is a logical extension of the sins of Sodom; just as a sexually penetrated man allegedly takes on a passive, feminine role, a self-determining wife takes on an active, masculine one. Furthermore, an association between wifely disobedience and sodomy, the most heinous of crimes, makes strategic sense in a conduct book for women. The Knight, however, expands this association well beyond what he finds in the *Miroir*; for him, wayward femininity is sodomy, an equivalency, I argue, that functions as a projection of his own ambivalence toward *fin amor*.

As noted above, once the Knight exits his garden and determines to educate his daughters regarding the dangers of *fin amor*, he directs his energies toward disparaging erotic desire, a goal achieved in several exempla by reconfiguring *fin amor* as adultery. Notably, in the chapter of Lot's wife, he also defines sodomy as adultery. After excoriating the sins of the Sodomites as foul, polluting, and unnatural – all predictable enough in medieval accounts of Sodom – the Knight less predictably directs his readers to interpret the story as follows: “Si est bel exemple comment l'en se doit garder du feu de luxure fors du fait de mariage, qui est commandement de Dieu et de sainte Eglise” (This is a good example of how one ought to keep oneself from the fire of lechery outside of marriage, which is a commandment of God and holy church [chapter 54, p. 114]). Some manuscripts of the *Livre* follow this sentence with the phrase: “Car aultrement que en mariaige on peche griefment” (Because otherwise than in marriage one grievously sins).<sup>32</sup> The closing anecdote of the chapter, the story of an adulterous wife, provides further evidence that the Knight equates sodomy and adultery and demonstrates the lengths he will go to when establishing this point. As noted above, this anecdote is an addition to the *Miroir* exemplum, one through which the Knight connects adultery to the disgust that the Sodomites inspire, as well as

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<sup>32</sup> This line is cited by M. Y. Offord in his notes to William Caxton's fifteenth-century translation of *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*: Geoffrey La Tour Landry, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, ed. M. Y. Offord, trans. William Caxton, Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 220.

to their harsh punishment.<sup>33</sup> When the lady's brothers catch up with their sister and her lover, they cut off his genitals and throw them in her face. They then place the two lovers in a sack weighed down with stones and throw them into a pond, where the two drown, a just punishment, from the Knight's perspective, "car c'est un pechié qui convient que une fois soit sceu ou pugny" (because it is a sin that is best punished immediately upon discovery [chapter 54, p. 115]).<sup>34</sup> The phrase "c'est un pechié" – it is a sin – is worth pausing on, for its construction suggests that the wife's crime has already been specified, yet it hasn't been. Clearly she is guilty of adultery, but, coming on the heels of the destruction of Sodom, which the Knight repeatedly attributes to "le pechié" of its inhabitants, the phrase "c'est un pechié" also appears to refer back to "le pechié" of Sodom, in which case the Knight does not just associate adultery and sodomy but appears wholly to conflate the two.

By reading this anecdote in terms of the Knight's larger mission to discredit *fin amor*, we can more closely connect it to the Knight's own attachment to the emotion as professed in the Prologue, an attachment that in turn ties the Knight to Lot's wife. The Knight's personal history constitutes a missing link between Lot's wife and the wayward lady, and Lot's wife can in fact be interpreted as a projection of the Knight's initial desires. As Robert Mills notes, "Lot's wife stealing a nostalgic glance toward the sins of Sodom, is stopped in her tracks and petrified . . . she is effectively essentialized by her transgression, transformed into the very embodiment of the backward glance that kills her."<sup>35</sup> The Knight also looks back, toward the desires of his youth, and, like Lot's

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**33** The exemplum of Lot's wife in the *Miroir* concludes much more logically; after providing the allegorical interpretation of Lot's wife as relapsed sinner, the *Miroir* author ends with the statement: "Je vouldroie que vous seussiez le conte de la dame qui perdi ennour pour ce qu'ele ne se voust garder de la compaignie a une personne dom ele avoit esté blamee aucune foiz" (I would like you to know the story of the lady who lost honor because she would not avoid a man whose company had frequently resulted in her censure). Quoted in John L. Grigsby, "Miroir des bonnes femmes – a New Fragment of the *Somme le roi* and a *Miroir des bonnes femmes*, a Hitherto Unnoticed Text," *Romania* 82 (1961): 458–89 at 470. This closing sentence convincingly demonstrates how the allegory of Lot's wife might apply to the women readers of the *Miroir*, who, like her, might likewise be drawn back to past sins. The Knight's anecdote makes no such connection, as the adulterous wife does not appear to be a recidivist.

**34** The use of the conjunction "ou," usually translated as *or*, seems odd, since clearly the knight does not intend discovering and punishing sodomy as alternatives but rather as a progressive event: when one discovers sodomy, one should punish it. This is the sense in which the fifteenth-century English translator William Caxton takes the phrase, which he translates as "it is a synne that nedes [needs] must at the last be known and punysshed [known and punished]" (de La Tour Landry, *Book of the Knight of the Tower*, 80).

**35** Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, 176.

wife, risks being stopped in his tracks, essentialized as a *fin amor* lover, a risk underscored by the garden setting and lyric mode of the Prologue, both of which suggest stasis. In Freeman's terms, we might say that both Lot's wife and the Knight experience temporal drag and refuse the forward march of the family. For Lot's wife, this march is quite literal, as she refuses to follow her husband out of Sodom and toward a genealogical, chrononormative future. The Knight is spared a similar fate when his daughters rouse him from his reverie and redirect him toward the conjugal household. The chain of associations in this exemplum – sodomy leads to adultery leads to *fin amor* – suggests that the Knight, in looking back to his own "Sodom," could have been – perhaps almost was – Lot's wife, in which case she functions not only as an example of wifely disobedience for his daughters but also as a projection of the Knight's own temporal drag onto a figure from whom he is safely distanced. Nudging this interpretation a bit further, we might note that in the closing anecdote of the adulterous wife, the wife is married to a "moult bel chevallier" (very handsome knight [chapter 54, p. 114]). Might this married knight also be the Knight's double, in which case the Knight imagines himself as a virtuous victim (and a very handsome one at that)? And might such an identification be facilitated by the projection of the Knight's anachronistic desires onto the figure of Lot's wife?

## The Galois and Galoise

If wayward women provide a means for the Knight to distance himself from his nostalgic leanings toward *fin amor*, then a second strategy for doing so is to project these desires upon an entire people, as happens in the exemplum of the "Galois" and "Galoise" – men and women "Galois," a term I return to below. Satan fans the flames of excessive, foolish love in these people, inspiring them to enact "une ordonnance moult sauvaige et desguisée contre la nature du temps" (a very barbarous and bizarre ordinance against the nature of the seasons [chapter 122, p. 241]). This ordinance requires the Galois to behave in summer as if it were winter; despite the summer heat, they wear heavy clothes and light fires in their homes. Conversely, in winter they behave as if it were summer, wearing light clothing and lighting no fires. The ordinance further endorses and regulates adultery; when a Galois visits the home of a married couple, the husband must leave the home so that the visiting man can sleep with the wife. Such unnatural behavior reaps its just reward, from the Knight-narrator's perspective at least, when the inappropriately clad sinners succumb

to the elements and freeze to death, many of them with their adulterous lovers, and subsequently burn in hell.

Before turning to the unusual sexual practices described here, I begin with what might seem like a simple question: Who precisely are the “Galois” and “Galoise”? The term can be defined as a joyous person, reveler, or pleasure-seeker, a definition which the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* illustrates by citing the *Livre du Chevalier*.<sup>36</sup> The *DMF* also notes that “Galois” can mean “Welsh,” or refer to the region of Haut Bretagne, “Upper Brittany,” the eastern region of the duchy where the romance language Gallo was predominantly spoken, as opposed to the western region of Bas Bretagne, Lower Brittany, where the people spoke Celtic. These two meanings are likely interrelated; the *DMF* quotes Gaston Paris’s commentary on the appearance of “Galois” in a later Middle French text: “One most frequently finds this word in the plural form, suggesting the idea of a society. One can connect it here to the foolish brotherhood of ‘Galois’ mentioned by the Knight of the Tower Landry . . . as for this brotherhood, it was given its name because it aspired to revive the joyous and brilliant customs of Arthur’s court.”<sup>37</sup> I want to keep in play the possibility that the “Galois” of the Knight’s exemplum might reference both the Britons and the Bretons, the people of Brittany, a duchy to which the Knight himself was connected.

The duchy of Brittany was the site of multiple conflicts during the latter part of the fourteenth century. When Duke John III of Brittany died childless in 1341, two scions of Breton nobility, the Penthièvres and the Montforts, laid claim to the duchy. Their dispute resulted in a twenty-five-year civil war (1341–1365), which served as a proxy for the war between France and England, each of which backed a claimant. As Shannon Godlove notes, “the civil war divided the nobility of Brittany between the pro-English Montforts in the western Celtic-speaking areas . . . , and the pro-French Penthièvres in the south and east, the regions closer to the kingdom of France.”<sup>38</sup> John of Montfort, son of the deceased duke, eventually succeeded his father, although the political situation within the duchy and its foreign relations to England and France remained rocky for decades afterwards. These events were of some significance

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<sup>36</sup> *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, s. v. “Galois,” <http://www2.atilf.fr/dmf/>

<sup>37</sup> This is my translation of the French quotation appearing in the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, s. v. “Galois”: “Ce mot . . . , on le trouve surtout au pluriel, et emportant l’idée d’une société. On peut le rattacher à la folle confrérie des *Galois* dont parle le chevalier de La Tour Landry (ch. cxxii, p. 241), . . . Quant à cette confrérie, elle s’était donné ce nom parce qu’elle prétendait faire revivre les moeurs gaies et brillantes de la cour d’Arthur.”

<sup>38</sup> Shannon Godlove, “‘Engelond’ and ‘Armorik Briteyne’: Reading Brittany in Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*,” *The Chaucer Review* 51 (2016): 269–94 at 274.

to our knight, Geoffroy de la Tour Landry, whose lands in Anjou bordered on Brittany.<sup>39</sup> Notably, one document recording Geoffroy's service specifies that he fought in the king's wars over the land of Brittany ("ses guerres du pays de Bretagne").<sup>40</sup> Geoffroy's ties to Brittany were also more personal in nature; between 1352 and 1360, when the Breton civil war was fully under way, Geoffroy married Jeanne de Rougé, herself a Breton from a prominent pro-French family.<sup>41</sup> Jeanne died sometime between 1383 and 1391, and was therefore Geoffroy's wife at the time he composed his *Livre*. While we have no record of Geoffroy's personal feelings toward the Bretons, he likely partitioned them along similar lines to those that divided the duchy itself.<sup>42</sup> From a monarchical perspective, or, we might add, from the perspective of a provincial knight seeking to better himself and his line by espousing monarchical aims, there were two types of Bretons: good Bretons who aligned themselves with the French crown, and bad Bretons who did not.

It is through this latter category that I suggest we view the "Galois et Galoise" of the Knight's exemplum, which invites such association on a number of counts. If, as Paris suggests, "Galois" frequently indicates a "society," one characterized by the brilliance and revelry of King Arthur's court, then the term would likely recollect the Britons, over whom Arthur allegedly ruled. After the civil war, Duke John IV (John Montfort) certainly drew on longstanding associations between the Britons and Brittany to promote the autonomy of the duchy in relation to England and France. As Godlove notes, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* proved central to this aim; not only does Geoffrey provide the Britons with an illustrious genealogy that includes King Arthur and the Trojans, but he also establishes the Britons as a distinct cultural entity with their own customs, laws, and institutions.<sup>43</sup> In the *Livre du Chevalier*, the Knight similarly portrays the "Galois" as a society that sets itself apart from others and establishes its own laws, although he presents these as acts of hubris rather than patriotism; if

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39 See Montaiglon, *Livre du chevalier*, preface, vii–viii.

40 Montaiglon, *Livre du chevalier*, preface, xvi.

41 Jeanne's father, Bonabes de Rougé, viscount of la Guerche, was a close associate of King Charles V, whom he served as counselor and chamberlain.

42 According to Michael Jones, "the Civil War of 1341–1364 reopened and sharpened the division between Bretagne-Gallo or Haute-Bretagne, the area under Penthievre influence, the region of the great seigneuries, and the Bretagne-Bretonnante or Basse-Bretagne, the area which was prepared to acknowledge Monfort's claim, the region of the lesser *noblesse*. It was a division which was recognized by the ducal administration even after the war" (*The Creation of Brittany: A Late Medieval State* [London: Hambledon Press, 1988], 12).

43 Godlove, for example, notes that "The Breton author of the fourteenth-century *Chronicon Briocense* . . . used Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* as a source for his people's early history and

Brittany chafed under the rule of the French king, the Galois revolt against their heavenly ruler, and, in what is perhaps an oblique warning to their counterparts, pay an eternal penalty as a result. In his portrayal of the Galois, the Knight may also parody renewed Breton interest in legendary histories of the Britons by homing in on their less flattering details. The Knight's "Galois" parodically recollect the gallantry associated with the Arthurian court through their elaborate rules of love. Like the *fin amor* lovers whom the Knight upbraids elsewhere in his *Livre*, the Galois practice adultery, dress inappropriately in cold weather, and contemptuously look down upon those who do not follow their laws. *Fin amor*, I want to suggest, is the true target of the Knight's contempt, as he evokes but rejects the conventions that elevate lovers in other contexts. In a particularly smug statement, he doubts that the Galois achieve martyrdom for their love but instead surmises that these sinners who died from the cold will burn forever in hell. Even in comparison to most other sinners in the Knight's *Livre*, the Galois come across as particularly vile, and in fact bear the most resemblance to the sinners of Sodom, who likewise constitute a community of sexual transgressors.

If, in the account of Sodom, the Knight presents the unspecified transgressions of the Sodomites as adultery, then, in this later exemplum, he suggests that the Galois' adultery constitutes sodomy. The two exempla are linked through language, specifically the Knight's claim that the sins of the Galois and the Sodomites are against nature, a frequent circumlocution for sodomy in the Middle Ages. The Knight's description of the Galois law as "barbarous," "bizarre," and "against the nature of the seasons" evokes sodomy, as does the law's pairing of adultery with a willful perversion of the natural order. And we can add one more link to this chain of associations: the alleged sexual practices of the Britons, who were frequently accused of sodomy. This accusation has a long history, as attested to in works extending from Greco-Roman antiquity to

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as a rallying point for the newly articulated Breton 'regional identity' promoted by the court of Duke John IV in opposition to both the English and the French" ("'Engelond' and 'Armorik Briteyne,'" 285). Geoffrey's *History* was particularly useful to this enterprise because he notes the Britons' diaspora from insular Britain to continental Brittany; as Godlove notes, many Briton characters in the *Historia* move back and forth between Wales and Brittany ("'Engelond' and 'Armorik Briteyne,'" 284). On Geoffrey's account, too, Brittany becomes the center of Briton culture after the Britons are defeated and exiled by the English. In Godlove's words, "Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* thus explains how the Britons came to be seen (and, in part, saw themselves) as what Ingham calls 'a doubled people'" ("'Engelond' and 'Armorik Briteyne,'" 284; the phrase "a doubled people" is taken from Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001], 41).

medieval texts like Gerald of Wales's *Journey through Wales*.<sup>44</sup> Of particular note is, once again, Geoffrey's *Historia*, in which Cadwallo, the penultimate king of the Britons, explains his people's defeats by citing their indulgence in "sexual excesses such as had never been heard of among other peoples."<sup>45</sup> Here the oblique rhetoric and alleged foreignness of the transgression almost certainly indicate sodomy. Again, the Knight is likely drawing on the very histories cited by the Montforts to bolster claims of Breton autonomy, but to different ends. Evidence that, for the Knight, the Bretons and sodomy are metonymically linked also appears earlier in the *Livre*; as noted above, the Knight compares the crimes and destruction of Sodom to those of Erbanges, a town he locates near Nantes, which in turn was the administrative hub of ducal Brittany under the Montforts.

To summarize thus far, in the story of the Galois the Knight further develops his associational chain to establish two, interrelated points: first, to imagine Bretons who resist the French crown as a community of sinful, sexual transgression similar to Sodom; and second, to reconfigure *fin amor* as adultery, and then, to go one step further, as sodomy. Unlike in the exemplum of Lot's wife, in which Lot's wife operates in part as an avatar for the Knight's own pull toward the past, in this exemplum the Galois are fully foreign, and, through their designation as a people or society, safely contained. Construing the exemplum of the Galois as a further revision of the earlier exemplum of Lot's wife, we can trace a linear progression for the Knight, as he pulls away from the *fin amor* sentiments characterizing his personal and cultural past. Along these lines, it is notable that the sexual transgression of the Galois is portrayed as both a social and a temporal disorder. Their sinful law is "contre la nature du *temps*," against the nature of the *temps*, a word with several meanings in play in the Knight's exemplum, including the "season," "weather," and "time" itself. The problem that unites the Galois, Lot's wife, and *fin amor* lovers is that they resist chrononormativity, that they "prefer to elaborate ways of living aslant to dominant forms of object-choice, coupledness, family, marriage, sociability, and self-presentation and thus out of synch with state-sponsored narratives of belonging and becoming."<sup>46</sup>

Taken together, the exempla of Lot's wife/Sodom and the Galois also expand upon the idea of what constitutes virtuous versus wayward femininity. By

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<sup>44</sup> On attributions of sodomy to the Britons, or Celts, see Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law*, 22, 25–26.

<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 273.

<sup>46</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, xv.

recasting *fin amor* as both adultery and sodomy, the Knight teaches his daughters that unfaithful, disobedient wives commit the most grievous of sins. Yet, if women like Lot's wife and the adulterous woman with whom her exemplum concludes demonstrate the dangers of wayward female agency, then the exemplum of the Galois demonstrates that too little female agency is equally problematic. Agency is of course a key concept in medieval constructions of gender and sexuality: according to Alan of Lille's influential metaphors, sexually active men are hammers and women or men who allow themselves to be penetrated are passive anvils.<sup>47</sup> Passivity extended even to women who seek out sexual pleasure, for while masculine activity was imagined as purposeful, the effect of rational decision-making, women were constructed as incapable of such thought processes and therefore slaves to their whims and desires.<sup>48</sup> The male sodomite, who burns with passions he cannot control, is likewise rendered passive and therefore effeminate. Precluded from rationally motivated action, the best a woman could do was to follow rote instructions laid out for her by those who *did* possess the capacity for ethical deliberation – that is, men.<sup>49</sup> Most of the Knight's exempla portray women who, while passively in thrall to their wayward desires, are nonetheless agential insofar as they pursue those desires. In the Galois community, however, we encounter a different mode of female passivity, one portrayed less as an attribute of female nature than as a deviation from idealized femininity. This mode of female passivity appears in the sinful ordinance of the Galois, which stipulates that adultery be practiced as follows:

Et . . . estoit ordené entre eulx que dès ce que un des Galois venist la où feust la Galoise, se elle eust mary, il convenist par celle ordenance que il alast faire penser des chevaux au Galoys qui venus feust, et puis s'en partit de son hostel sans revenir tant que le Galoys feust avecques sa femme; et cellui mari estoit aussi Galois et alast veoir s'amie, une autre Galoise, et l'autre feust avecques sa femme, et feust tenu à grant honte et deshonneur se le mary demourast en son hostel, ne commandast ne ordenast riens depuis que le Galois feust venu, et n'y avoit plus de pover par celle ordenance. (chapter 122, p. 242)

And . . . it was decreed among them that as soon as a Galois man came to there where the Galois woman was, if she was married, it was necessary according to the ordinance that the husband attend to the horses of the Galois who had just arrived, and depart from his home without returning as long as the visiting Galois was with his wife; and if this departing husband was also Galois and went to see

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<sup>47</sup> Alan of Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), prose 5, 155–56, 164.

<sup>48</sup> On women, ethics, and rational decision-making in the Middle Ages, see Holly A. Crocker, *The Matter of Virtue* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 10–12.

<sup>49</sup> Crocker, *Matter of Virtue*, 11.

his girlfriend, another Galois woman, and she was with her husband, it was considered a great shame and dishonor if that husband remained in his home, he could not give an order or oversee anything while the visiting Galois was there, and the husband no longer had any power, according to this ordinance.

In this description, it is men who undertake the activity of adultery, as they move from one house to another, or vacate their home to accommodate a male visitor; consequently, the ordinance foregrounds *men's* social negotiations, agency, and pleasure. What the Galois women desire appears to be beside the point. The women's lack of desire, however, does not make them any less guilty of sexual transgression, in the Knight's eyes, at least. As a result, this negative exemplum points toward a configuration of virtuous femininity that, while still subordinate to masculinity, nonetheless requires agency.

We find a positive example of this configuration in the Knight's wife, who, immediately following the exemplum of the Galois, engages in a debate with her husband over *fin amor*. By championing marital fidelity, the Lady of the Tower distinguishes herself from adulterous women; by arguing against the Knight, she distinguishes herself from the passive Galoises. For modern readers especially, the Lady's address of the Knight is surprising, both in that she opposes her husband and that she privileges her own opinions and perspectives in doing so: "je vueil debattre contre vous le mien advis, et feablement, selon mon entendement" (I want to present in opposition to you my opinion, and to do so sincerely, according to my understanding [chapter 124, p. 247]). We might be tempted to view the validation of some form – *any* form – of female agency as a boon, a step forward in a Western history that charts progress in terms of liberalism and the lifting of restraints upon the individual's will. In her historical context, however, the Lady's stance looks a bit different. While it would be a mistake to claim that *fin amor* had vanished from the landscape of late medieval France, we can nonetheless identify the Knight's era as one of significant cultural transition and speculate that men like the Knight struggled to commit to marital modernity while maintaining a nostalgic investment in bygone modes of gender and sexuality. If, for our Knight-narrator, *fin amor* is a superseded construction of noble masculinity that he just can't quit, then our backwards-looking Knight himself requires rescue by his more ideologically up to date wife.

This historically contextualized interpretation of the Lady of the Tower is important not just in what it tells us about late medieval Northern Europe, but in the perspective it offers on Western liberalism today. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, progressive, celebratory histories of women and queers have come under increased scrutiny, as has the notion that promoting voluntarism is the panacea for all instances of oppression that women and queers suffer. Feminist and queer

philosopher Sara Ahmed has recently devoted attention to what it means to exercise one's will, homing in on the processes by which an individual's will is conditioned and oriented.<sup>50</sup> Insofar as the will functions as "a technique," she argues, "a way of holding a subject to account, it could be understood as a *straightening device*" that does less to promote feminist or queer impulses than to "correct" them.<sup>51</sup> The willful opposition of the Lady of the Tower can be read in these terms: she "straightens" both her daughters and husband in orienting their wills toward marital affection and away from *fin amor*. This reading reveals the powerfully agential woman to be a surrogate for the Knight's perspective as expressed elsewhere in his *Livre* and a means to provide him with a developmental narrative (youth to maturity, *fin amor* to marriage) that is off limits to women, who, should they participate in *fin amor*, are irrevocably tarnished.

Despite this reading of the Lady of the Tower, I want to conclude by suggesting that her agency exceeds the conduct book's didactic program in ways that destabilize the concept of the good wife and might therefore render her queer. As noted above, late medieval wives were expected to exert agency, but to do so within hierarchical structures: the good wife, as Burger notes, willingly submits to her husband.<sup>52</sup> This willing submission results in a mix of active and passive that simultaneously points toward new models of gender and sexuality and disrupts longstanding ones. In her debate with her husband, the Lady of the Tower champions marriage as the institution toward which women should direct their efforts and through which to organize their emotions and ethical decision-making. In orienting herself, and the daughters whom she instructs, toward marriage, the Lady of the Tower ironically pits herself against her husband, who argues in favor of *fin amor*. In their debate, the Lady is less a subordinate helpmeet than a virago-esque saint of hagiographic tradition, a Cecilia or Catherine who rhetorically overpowers her male interlocutor. She nonetheless claims a female perspective, which she pits against the perspectives of both her husband and men more generally, whom she addresses as "vous hommes" (you men [chapter 124, p. 147]). Moreover, the Lady speaks from a position of

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<sup>50</sup> In addition to Freeman's *Time Binds* and Love, *Feeling Backward*, see, for example, Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Empire of Love* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Catherine Rottenberg, "Neoliberal Feminism and the Future of Human Capital," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42.2 (2017): 329–48; and Amia Srinivasan, "Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex?," *London Review of Books* 40. (March 22, 2018): 5–10.

<sup>51</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Burger, *Conduct Becoming*, 5.

female experience – she herself was, in youth, the object of *fin amor* overtures – and female vulnerability: the Lady repeatedly notes the penalties a woman must pay for participating in *fin amor*, including the loss of marriage prospects and her good name – penalties which appear not to apply to men. In sum, the activity of the Lady of the Tower renders her a hybrid figure, one whose agency is oriented in multiple directions – to her husband, her daughters, and to women more broadly – and who both upholds and queerly challenges gender dichotomies.

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