

Transvestite Knights: Men and Women Cross-dressing in Medieval Literature

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Introduction:

Cross-dressing to deceive was frowned upon in medieval society, and was a topic of Church criticism by some very notable medieval thinkers and churchmen, yet it often found its way into literature. Despite the criticism behind cross-dressing in the medieval period, women masquerading as men and men dressed as women were present in reality as well as in medieval literature. There are tales of transvestite saints hiding in monasteries in order to escape persecution, and men disguising themselves as women for amusement or to get closer to women for sexual encounters. In reality, cross-dressing could be a great sin, but its inclusion in the plot of several medieval texts seems to show a disconnect between the medieval reality and the medieval imagination. Transvestite characters could be lauded and gain honour in their cross-dressing, yet in reality these characters would have been shunned and deemed as sinners, if moral and secular laws are taken into account. By looking at characters in French, German, and one English text from the 12th to the 15th centuries, it becomes clear that there were instances in which cross-dressing could be justified, as long as certain criteria were met. By understanding the medieval views of clothing, of sexuality, and the importance of intent, cross-dressing in medieval literature can be viewed as a positive aspect of medieval life, rather than the negative sin that Church criticism made it out to be.

In this thesis, I will look at mainly French and German texts from the 12th to the 15th centuries which deal with the subject of cross-dressers in the decidedly masculine domain of the knight. There are many tales of cross-dressing, particularly of women, but the concept of men dressing as women while jousting, and women dressing as knights, brings up several questions about the clothes, what it meant to be male and female, and how cross-dressing could be viewed on the tournament field. The texts that will be studied are *In the Service of Ladies* by Ulrich von

Liechtenstein, *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Malory, *Berengier au Long Cul*, *Der Borte* by Dietrich von der Glezze, *Le Roman de Silence* by Heldris of Cornwall, and *Yde et Olive*. All of these texts come from three major parts of Europe, and are either in Old French, German, or Middle English. Church criticism from individuals such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Saint Jerome seems to indicate that the individuals cross-dressing in these texts were sinning against God, but a closer study reveals that there were instances in which cross-dressing could not only be tolerated but result in higher honour for the individual in medieval texts. These texts also reveal more about how clothing in particular was viewed and about the power of clothing to deceive, but also about the importance of intention behind cross-dressing. If the intent is noble, it is more likely that the cross-dresser will be accepted despite his or her actions. There are several other aspects of cross-dressing that arise from the study of these texts, such as the importance of hair and facial features when it came to cross-dressing, as well as the difference between how men could cross-dress as compared to women. Women tended to need more elaborate plots to deceive, and in none of the texts studied did a woman cross-dress to amuse others, but always with the ulterior motive of escaping sin or fixing a marriage. Men, however, could use cross-dressing as a jest and still be lauded with honour. The authors' and narrators' approaches to how the cross-dressed individual is sexed is also an important aspect of these texts, as it reveals more about medieval gender as well as the attributes that are distinctly seen as male or female in the medieval world.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I give a brief introduction to the importance of clothing in the medieval period and discuss how clothing became symbolic of identity, which explains how cross-dressing could be viewed negatively as it was essentially a way to change a person's identity completely. Clothes could indeed make a man due to the importance of their

symbolism. In the second chapter, I will look at certain primary sources that deal with cross-dressing and give an introduction to how it was approached in medieval reality. This also includes historical examples of cross-dressers and how their cross-dressing was viewed. In particular, the criticism of Church theologians such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Saint Jerome will be studied. The historical examples that are brought up in this section include the chronicle of Henry Knighton, an eyewitness account of a joust by Philip of Navarre, documentation of a court case of a cross-dresser, and a brief look at Joan of Arc's trial. The third chapter deals with knights cross-dressing as women in *In the Service of Ladies* and *Morte D'Arthur* and explains how male cross-dressing was achieved and how it was approached. In the fourth chapter, I begin to deal with women who cross-dressed as knights, looking specifically at women who used their cross-dressing in order to fix their marriages, which resulted in a comedic view of cross-dressing that seems closer to the light-hearted way that men often cross-dressed. The texts studied in depth are *Berengier au Long Cul* and *Der Borte*. The fifth chapter looks at women who cross-dressed for an extended period of time in *Le Romance de Silence* and *Yde et Olive*. These two texts approach cross-dressing in a more serious manner than the previous texts, often invoking questions of theology and philosophy as a result of the characters' successes as men despite being woman. In the final chapter I bring up similarities and differences that all the texts have and discuss how comparing them gives insight into the importance of clothing, gender, and intention behind cross-dressing.

Chapter 1

A Brief History of Clothing

The history of clothing throughout the medieval period was varied and rich, and clothing became a focus of Church and secular criticism. This was in part due to the universality of clothing itself, but also to its importance in trade and in society. While clothing was a necessity of existence in most medieval European societies, on par with food and shelter, clothing can easily move from a necessity to a luxury when it becomes more exclusive. Christopher Berry lists clothing as one of the four essential needs, but points out that these needs become a luxury when “wants . . . specialize and particular the need”.¹ High quality fabrics and specialized items of clothing elevated the status of clothing from a mere necessity. From the early medieval period to the end, the rise of the cloth industry and the emergence of what today is called “fashion” had a varied yet dramatic impact on how people dressed, not only throughout the classes but also in different countries. Looking at the history of clothing in the medieval period is a way to understand how clothing permeated many aspects of human life, eventually making it an important plot point in many examples of medieval literature, some of which will be discussed below.

Medieval clothing was at the beginning of the period mostly functional. In the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries, medieval clothing was loose fitting, allowing the wearers to move freely as they went about their daily tasks.² Wool was the most common material for outer clothing due to its warmth and availability, though linen was also quite common. Various accessories and layers were used for functionality. Those working in the fields were more likely to wear layers, as they

¹ Berry, Christopher. *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. P. 10.

² Willett, C. and Phillis Cunningham. *Handbook of English Mediaeval Costume*. London: Faber and Faber LTD., 1969. Pp. 7-26.

could peel them off or put them on if the weather turned hot or cold.³ Women as well as men wore side-less surcoats, so as to be able to reach their belts or money pouches that were on the inside of this garment. These surcoats were also convenient for women, since their loose manufacture allowed for women to wear them even when pregnant, and their large side openings made breast feeding much easier. This loose clothing was more universal than constricting styles as it could fit all body types, either male or female. Loose fitting clothing also fitted the medieval way of clothing manufacture, as only the rich could afford personal tailors, and the poor reused clothing or gave it to others until the clothing was worn out. In the earlier period, outfits such as these surcoats, cloaks, and tunics had similarities across both sexes, but the main difference was that women's clothing was commonly longer than men's clothing. This could even be seen in outfits such as the apron, which was used by the working classes for a variety of tasks. Men's aprons were often knee length, whereas women's aprons reached to the hem in order to cover all of their gowns.⁴



Figure 1. A man with a sowing apron. Notice that his outfit does not reach past his knees, and the apron also proves to be shorter. Image taken from *Dress in the Middle Ages*, p. 44.

³ Piponnier, François, and Perrine Mane. *Dress in the Middle Ages*. Translated by Caroline Beamish. Connecticut: Yale University, 1997. P. 44.

⁴ The length and make-up of the apron also varied for the tasks for which it was used. Special sowing aprons were used that were designed for holding seeds, while leather aprons with a turned up hem were used by goldsmiths to catch errant fragments of gold. See François Piponnier, *Dress in the Middle Ages*, pp. 49-52.

Other than the length of clothing, the main difference between men and women's attire was found in the accessories, such as veils, and how the hair was worn. Women wore their hair long throughout the medieval period, while the style of men's hair varied. Hairstyles and veil styles often indicated rank and even nationality⁵ in some cases. How a veil was worn also indicated more about a person and became an important part of how a person was clothed. Clothing in the medieval period was more than just a covering. It was used to communicate important facts such as social status and occupation, and was therefore taken quite seriously. By the 12th century, young girls were wearing their hair uncovered, showing their unmarried status, whereas wives and widows had their hair covered in order to showcase their status.⁶ In the 9th and 10th centuries, it was common for men to have hair to the neck or shoulders, while in the 11th century in certain localized areas such as Normandy, it was the fashion for youths to have short hair.⁷ Hair and accessories were an integral part of dressing since they also revealed more about the person. In his article on material culture, Jules David Prown lists different characteristics of material culture, and as adornment he lists clothing, hairstyles, and various alterations of the body as important areas of study when it comes to material culture.⁸ Due to the importance of hairstyles and hair coverings in clothing and how the body was presented, these aspects of clothing gained prominence and certain meanings in the medieval period.

The creation of luxury fabric after the 13th century began to develop clothing's ability to become an emblem for the wearers. "Identities were subtly defined as the classes became

⁵ "Nationality" is of course a modern term and does not necessary apply to the medieval period before there were defined nations. In this case I use it to refer to members of different geographical areas and peoples, such as the Franks with their unique hair styles, versus the Italian women with their turned up headpieces.

⁶ Beamish, Caroline. P. 113.

⁷ Willett, C. P. 24.

⁸ Prown, Jules David. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method" in *Winterthur Portfolio* Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring, 1982. Pp. 1-19.

increasingly divided”.⁹ The rise of a wealthy merchant class had made nobility harder to stand out. Clothing became a way to tell the different classes apart, but it did not just identify across class lines. It also indicated occupation, age, and gender. An example of this can be found again in the use of linen. Linen was used universally for undergarments¹⁰ yet when it came to head veils, the rich used expensive linen, setting themselves apart from those who used the cheap and readily available type of linen. This new way of clothing being used to indicate status was a new phenomenon. “The period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries marked a particularly innovative stage of vestimentary development in Europe, a period . . . that attempted to stabilize individual practices of consumption and appearance.”¹¹ Garments were important not just for covering individuals but for what they indicated about a person through their appearance and the use of particular fabrics which had graduated from being mere cloth and had become symbols of stature and gender. “Medieval people were highly skilled at reading the meaning of clothing”¹² and these different fabrics alone could speak volumes about who the person was that was wearing it.

Each group was expected to dress in a certain way, but even Church criticism and sumptuary laws could not convince some people to heed the laws and churchmen’s rebukes. Perhaps contributing to this was the absence of sumptuary laws in France, as compared to areas around it such as cities in Italy, Britain, and Germany which repeatedly enforced strict laws. Only two clothing ordinances were issued in France between 1300 and 1485, and these were not

⁹ Van Buren, Anne. *Illuminated Fashion: Dress in the Art of Medieval France and the Netherlands 1325-1515*. New York: The Morgan Library and Museum, 2011. P. 4.

¹⁰ Burns, E.J. “Ladies Don’t Wear Braies” in *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. Ed. William Kibler. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994. Pp. 152-174.

¹¹ Denny-Brown, Andrea. *Fashioning Change: The Trope of Clothing in High- and Late-Medieval England*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012. P. 2.

¹² Scott, Margaret. P. 9.

strict, instead only referring to certain aspects of fashion.¹³ French tailors were therefore free to make luxurious garments and create new designs, which made Paris the fashion capital, and had an effect on those cities that had the sumptuary laws. These designs became sought by not only the nobility in France but also nobility outside France in areas such as Britain¹⁴ and the Low Countries, which affected what was worn there. The ready availability of new fashions in France made more people want to acquire them, and lay authorities grew worried that this access to new fashions would threaten the social order and economic stability, especially when fashions were imported from outside the country.¹⁵ The fashion change toward shorter and tighter clothing also accounted for people wearing more luxurious garments. The fashion for men's houppelandes¹⁶ became quite short in the 14th century,¹⁷ and this required less fabric, meaning that more expensive fabrics could be purchased for the garment. In a 14th century satire by Jean Froissart, a shepherd finds he cannot afford a luxurious houppelande, so he decides to get a short one.¹⁸ These short fashions could make those wearing these garments seem to be more affluent than they were, and this made those high on the social ladder, even up to people such as Charles VII's advisors, press for a regulation of the fabrics in order to keep luxury clothing for the rich.¹⁹

¹³ Van Buren, Anne. P. 3.

¹⁴ Newton, Stella Mary. P. 86.

¹⁵ Scott, Margaret. *Fashion in the Middle Ages*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011. P. 44.

¹⁶ A houppelande is a medieval garment that became prominent in the late 14th century, due in part to the colder temperatures of some regions. It is an over-garment and requires a large amount of fabric, as it is made to be quite large and then cinched in at the waist with a belt.

¹⁷ Scott, Margaret. P. 44.

¹⁸ Uytven, Raymond van. "Cloth in Medieval Literature of Western Europe" in *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe: Essays in Memory of Professor E. M. Carus-Wilson*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1983. P. 159.

¹⁹ Van Buren, Anne. P. 3.

Despite these regulations,²⁰ fashion continued to be dominant and available for more classes than the nobility thought respectable.

Aside from the length, there were a number of differences that indicated male and female dress, and these differences were what allowed for the idea of “cross-dressing” to exist in the medieval period. Headwear, neckline shapes, sleeves, and style were all different from men and women’s dress.²¹ Though medieval outerwear before the mid- to late-middle ages had subtle sexual differentiation,²² the outfits that were worn by both sexes were worn differently on men and on women which then allowed for cross-dressing to exist. An example is again the houppelande.²³ While it was essentially the same garment in its composition, men had the opportunity to wear it short as was mentioned above, whereas women were required to keep it long. Furthermore, where the belt was arranged indicated whether it was a male or female garment. Women wore their belts high, while men wore the belt around the hips. Sleeves were also quite different for men and women. Women were more likely to have the long hanging sleeves if they were nobility, while men’s sleeves at first were kept buttoned and close to the body.²⁴

²⁰ An example of sumptuary laws not being heeded can be found in Gerhard Jaritz’s article “Ira Dei, Material Culture, and Behavior in the Late Middle Ages: Evidence from German-speaking Regions” in *Essays in Medieval Studies*, Vol 18 (2001). Here he details a German town that is ordered to stop wearing long pointed shoes. However, the town’s nobility believes that they will no longer be set apart from the lower classes and rebel by leaving the town and going elsewhere, resulting in the law being scrapped.

²¹ Newton, Stella Mary. P. 3.

²² Burns, E.J. “Ladies Don’t Wear Braises”. P. 154.

²³ Cunnington, C. P. 82.

²⁴ Ibid. P. 78.



Figure 2. A calendar scene for April from *Tres Riches Heures*, c. 1416. The man to the left wears a typical houppelande, while the lady in the middle also wears a houppelande. Notice the higher belt on the woman and the difference of sleeves. The man's sleeves are dagged while the woman's sleeves are lined with another fabric. See also Joan Evans in *Dress in Medieval France* on her discussion of this scene, her figure 41 in her back pages.

It was in the 11th century when men began to have long flowering bell-sleeves that they were criticized for dressing like women.²⁵ Women also had veils and head coverings, while men, though they did wear hoods, were more likely to go bare-headed as was the style from the 9th to the 13th century.²⁶ Finer fabrics, however, were not associated with women. In fact, it was the men who wore more elaborate garments with embroidery and detailing. In the 14th century, Charles, King of Navarre, had so many pearls adorning his outfits that there were not enough in

²⁵ See below for argument on Saint Bernard of Clairvaux on his "In praise of the New Knighthood", pp. 30-1. See also Joan Evans, *Dress in Medieval France*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952. P. 6.

²⁶ Cunnington, C. P. 24.

Paris to complete the garments of the queen.²⁷ In general, women received fewer and less elaborate gowns than their spouses.²⁸ Though today wearing jewelled garments might seem feminine, in the medieval period it spoke more for wealth and power and was not indicative of gender. It was the smaller details, such as the wearing of a belt and a veil that indicated the female gender. Therefore in order to successfully cross-dress, the way that these garments were worn and what they were worn with indicated male or female dress.

The attitude towards clothing, even if many outfits were unisex, also reveals more of whether it was viewed as uniquely male or female. An example of this is found in medieval literature referring to underclothes. As already mentioned underclothes were made of linen and were the same across the sexes. However, in medieval literature, male heroes such as Tristan and Perceval who are wearing only their chemises are seen as being clothed, whereas women only wearing their undergarments are seen as seductive and nude.²⁹ In “Yonec”, Marie de France reveals the heroine as “aside from her shift she was nude”,³⁰ whereas males such as King Arthur or Lancelot who are still wearing their underclothes are depicted as being fully clothed. These characters are all wearing the same garments, and yet the attitude towards them changes with the gender that is wearing it.³¹ This makes reading medieval clothing more complicated, as it means that the same article of clothing can be saying two different things. Therefore, each account of cross-dressing, whether in primary sources or in literature, must be approached carefully in order to understand how the medieval world would have viewed it.

²⁷ Van Buren, Anne. P. 6.

²⁸ Ibid. P. 7.

²⁹ Burns, E.J. “Ladies Don’t Wear Braies”. P. 163.

³⁰ Marie de France, “Yonec”. Translated Judith P. Shoaf 1993.

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jshoaf/Marie/yonec.pdf> Accessed March 30, 2013. P. 10.

³¹ This will be discussed further when Lancelot and Dynadan wear the same gown in “The Tournament at Surluse” with different reactions. See pp. 64 ff.

By the 15th century, male and female attire was more pronounced, and there were outfits that were specifically male, something that can be seen in the trial for Joan of Arc. Her male attire is specifically recorded in the court documents, and by looking at this list we can see what was seen as male attire, particularly for soldiers, at this time.

Joan . . . had her hair cut round like a page boy's and arrayed herself like a man-at-arms in shirt, breeches, doublet with hose attached by twenty point, thigh boots with cut panels, a short robe to about the knees, a slashed hood, spurs and tight gaiters, a high collar, a sword, a dagger, a lance and other arms . . .³²

Again, hair and accessories are two of the things that set Joan's dress apart as male, but we can still see here the way that clothes that might have been unisex are made gendered by their make. The robe would have been worn by both sexes, but here it is short to about the knees, which would have been a masculine way of wearing it. This short robe then makes the doublet and hose attached, the thigh boots, and the breeches necessary, which would not have been visible under the longer women's robe, therefore making them distinctively male. Weapons were also very masculine. The clothes that Joan is captured in also reveal more about what was seen as masculine clothing by this period:

. . . she has worn male dress, short, tight, and dissolute, in tunic, hose, and other things; and, again following those instructions,³³ she has put on sumptuous and ostentatious apparel of rich cloth of gold, and furs and tabards; and not only is her tunic short, but also her tabard with slashes on both sides of it; and it is notorious that she was captured wearing a huke³⁴ of cloth of gold open on all sides; and the hair of her head, under a cap, was cut in a round like a man's; and generally flouting all womanly modesty, not only did she act against feminine decency, but also against masculine good behaviour, for she adopted all

³² Jones, A.E. *The Trial of Joan of Arc*. London: Barry Rose Publisher's LTD, 1980. Pp. 147-8. This comes from Article 12 as Jones lists it and is from Joan's account of the Vancoluleurs episode, and was part of her trial from February 27th until March 17th, 1431.

³³ This refers to the instructions that Joan heard from her voices, who told her to cross-dress.

³⁴ A "huke" was a short flowing robe that was open on the sides.

the fashions and clothes which the most dissolute men are in the habit of wearing, and she also carried offensive weapons.³⁵

While here Joan is also judged for not only cross-dressing but also dressing above her station, again her masculine haircut and the shortness of her clothing are mentioned. The “huke” that is mentioned was first worn by women and then adopted by men, but with all her other articles of clothing and the way that her hair is cut, this is again attributed to masculine attire. Though certain aspects of her clothing could be worn by both sexes, the way that Joan wore it and the fact that she had short hair and wore weapons made her attired as a man, and therefore allowed her to be condemned for her choice of clothing.



Figure 3. Here is an example of a woman dressed in armour. This is taken from the Dutch version of “Le conte de la gageure”. See Luc Debaene, *De Nederlandse volksboeken. Ontstaan en geschiedenis van de Nederlandse prozaromans, gedrukt tussen 1475 en 1540*. Antiquariaat Merlijn, Hulst 1977.

As clothing developed into a way for the medieval world to communicate their class and gender, the ability to use clothing to lie also developed. This is most often seen in the way that

³⁵ Jones, A.E. P. 149. This refers to Article 13 as Jones lists it, and also covers interrogation of Joan at her trial from February 27th until March 17th.

people of lower status dressed higher and appeared wealthier, but, as will be discussed in depth here, it also allowed people to lie about their gender. While the medieval period did have unisex clothing throughout, the accessories and how clothing was worn and with what additional outfits or accessories indicated whether the person wearing it was male or female. How clothing was made and worn slowly evolved throughout the medieval period until it became a way for people to pretend to be another gender. It was neither the luxurious fabrics nor the presence of pearls and jewels on the clothing that made it uniquely feminine or masculine. The way that it was talked about in later medieval literature when it was used in order to describe scenes of cross-dressing also reveals more about both how clothing was used to cross-dress, and how these different articles of clothing were viewed.

Chapter 2

Historical Sources

Clothing as Communication

There are a number of examples of cross-dressing found in medieval literature, but cross-dressing also found its way into regular medieval life, though for the most part it was viewed negatively. The Church was very suspicious of cross-dressers, and spoke out regularly against the practice. It was not just the Church, but also sumptuary laws that condemned cross-dressing, and there are court cases in which cross-dressing is brought up and judged. Chronicles, such as that of Henry Knighton,³⁶ also mention cross-dressing in reality, and as will be discussed below, the opinion on cross-dressing often depended on the motive of the cross-dresser, but was most commonly approached by the Church and society as a negative practice. To properly study cross-dressing in medieval literature, it is therefore necessary to study first these cases of cross-dressing in historical sources and try to ascertain how the different groups in medieval society would have viewed it, and whether or not it was a serious offence or light-hearted enough to be taken as a joke, perhaps explaining why it is found in some examples of medieval literature. The Church proved to be the most out-spoken when it came to cross-dressing, but there are also examples found in other records, as well as opinions from the upper class, that shed light on opinions of cross-dressing.

Cross-dressing was not condemned simply for the fact that it went against the norm, against the Church, and against sumptuary laws. How clothing was worn and what was worn was highly scrutinized in medieval society, for reasons other than why clothing might be criticized today. Clothing was highly regulated since it was developed into a sign system that

³⁶ See Henry Knighton, *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. This edition has the original Latin as well as an English translation. See pp. 33-6 for a more in-depth look in this thesis.

communicated important bits of information about the individual wearing it.³⁷ Grant McCracken argues that clothing can be used for a more active, individual, and variable mode of communication, and this idea of clothing can be seen quite readily in the medieval approach to it.³⁸ Clothing became useful in everyday life but also in rituals, which is made apparent by the importance of clothing used in the Church, many traditions that are still in place today. Special colours were used to indicate particular days or ceremonies.³⁹ This also became common in more secular ceremonies such as coronations and marriages in which the clothing that was to be worn was steeped in meaning. By the 13th and 14th centuries, one could often tell a person's occupation and how much money that person had, merely by looking at his or her clothes. For example, fur was only allowed to be worn by specific people, so if someone was wearing fur it was easier to deduce their position in society.⁴⁰ Sumptuary laws and Church criticism existed in order to keep the role and rules of clothing as communication functioning properly. What clothing communicated was an integral part of medieval culture. Therefore, when people attempted to wear unusual items of clothing, they were not just changing their fashions but changing who they were. Hence those who wore the opposite gender's clothing would be seen as attempting to become the opposite gender, which was an unacceptable act to medieval society.⁴¹

³⁷ McCracken, Grant. *Culture and Consumption*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.

³⁸ Ibid. P. 60.

³⁹ The Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto has an example of special shoes from the medieval Church that were used by church officials to indicate the season of lent. This is just an example of the importance of certain vestments in the church, as certain colours of clothing could only be worn on certain days.

⁴⁰ Newton, Stella Mary. *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*. Rochester: Boydell Press, 2002. P. 132.

⁴¹ An example of this would be the court case of Ryekener/Eleanor which is studied in more depth below.

Ryekener/Eleanor used clothes to cross the gender boundaries and be both a male and female, and this was serious enough for him to be brought to court and tried not just for cross-dressing but for sexual crimes as both a man and a woman.

Fashion, or the wearing and creating of unique clothes for personal preferences, did not exist until the late medieval period at best.⁴² Sumptuary laws regulated what particular individuals could wear, even what colours and what kind of fabric was allowed. For example, gold cloth, which was a much admired fabric and very expensive, was reserved for royalty. If anyone other than royalty wore it, it would have been communicated that they were royalty, creating false communication. In the 14th century, Alfonso XI of Spain was very concerned with the limitation of gold cloth, and made a sumptuary law stating that only the heir to the throne could wear cloth of gold, and no man might wear ornaments of gold braid or embroidery of gold.⁴³ These restrictions were used in order to set apart those of higher standing from others by their clothing, though these laws were not always followed. An example of this is found in the case of Philip the Fair and his wife, Joan of Navarre, entering Bruges for a visit at the turn of the 14th century. The bourgeois women who came out to see them were elaborately dressed, and the queen was reported to shout “Je croyais être la reine ici, et j’en vois des centaines!” [I thought I was the queen here, and now I see hundreds of them!]⁴⁴ People dressing above their station can also be found in chronicles when peasants and servants dressed in scarlet or silk in celebration of events, but in doing so believe themselves to be transformed into higher status levels.⁴⁵ This also worked for gender roles, and particular cuts and styles of clothing were allotted to either men or women. Though not always going so far as to include actual words stitched on their clothing,⁴⁶

⁴² See Anne H. Van Buren’s argument in *Illuminated Fashion: Dress in the Art of Medieval France and the Netherlands 1325-1515*, particularly her introduction on “Dress in Late medieval Art: The Historical Conditions”, pp. 2-3. Also see Stella Mary Newton’s *Fashion in the Age of the Black Price*, pp. 1-5. Both authors are dealing specifically with France (and Van Buren also with the Netherlands), but France was the birthplace of fashion due to a number of factors, and therefore can be studied in respect to a larger geographical area.

⁴³ Newton, Stella Mary. P. 132.

⁴⁴ Burns, E.J. *Courtly Love Undressed*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002. P. 36.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* P. 32.

⁴⁶ Charles D’Orleans and his contemporaries often stitched words onto their clothing, such as song lyrics or mottos. See Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*, p. 10.

clothing still communicated quite readily, and it was a major concern of the medieval world to regulate this communication. It was for this reason that sumptuary laws regarding clothing were so common, and also why the Church saw fit to frequently voice its opinion on how individuals dressed and groomed their appearance. This Church criticism was often directed towards women, but towards the 12th century men were also frequently criticized for their choices in attire, and concerns about cross-dressing began to be a specific point for several prominent churchmen. This criticism seems to not simply reveal the opinion of these churchmen on what looked good on their flock, but delves into questions on how the medieval world approached what was communicated as well as their approaches towards the different genders.

Church Criticism

From the angle of gender, the way that cross-dressing was viewed in the medieval period differed depending on the sex that was doing the cross-dressing. The medieval view of the sexes was that women were clearly the lesser sex and therefore inferior to men.⁴⁷ Aristotle's philosophy that women were actually defective men had a large impact on how the medieval world viewed women. Therefore the difference between the sexes was not merely physical, but also spiritual and intellectual. Women were meant to be subject to men, and often control over wives and daughters and the way they acted was an important aspect of masculine identity.⁴⁸ Women were also viewed as weak and more prone to sin, due to the actions of Eve in the creation account in Genesis. This view of women had a huge impact on how cross-dressing was viewed. Since women were inferior, a man cross-dressing was seen as degeneration, and the

Likewise, a bliaut (a medieval unisex garment that laces at the sides) that is currently in the Imperial Treasury of Vienna is dated by a Latin inscription that it was woven at Palermo in 1181 (see Joan Evans, *Dress in Medieval France*, p. 6).

⁴⁷ Phillips, Kim. *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England 1270-1540*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003. P. 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 146.

man was seen as making himself inferior to what he was. Therefore, male cross-dressing was dishonourable and not as readily accepted as female cross-dressing, which was at times tolerated and even praised because of the opposite reasons. Women pretending to be men were attempting to better themselves according to the medieval worldview of gender politics; by attempting to be men they were attempting to make themselves honourable. There are a number of accounts of cross-dressing saints, showing that transvestism in an attempt to further serve God was a legitimate excuse to cross-dress.⁴⁹ However, women who cross-dressed to deceive or who were found out to cross-dress did not enjoy the same positive opinion as the transvestite saints acquired.

The reason for the different sexes engaging in cross-dressing also gained different criticism. Cross-dressing was allowed if the attempt was not to actually deceive when it came to men who cross-dressed. If men pretended to be women in order to deceive, this was greatly frowned upon. There was a fear that men might cross-dress in order to get closer to women who only allowed other women in their presence. This is the case for men pretending to be women in order to get closer to nuns, or for sexual liaisons.⁵⁰ However, when it was women pretending to be men in order to get into a monastery, this was not as horrible, as is discussed with the cross-dressing saints.⁵¹ There are very few accounts, if any, of women pretending to be men in order

⁴⁹ Hotchkiss, Valerie. *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross-Dressing in Medieval Europe*. New York: Routledge, 2012. See in particular Chapter 2, "Female Men of God".

⁵⁰ There are a number of examples of this. One can be found in the *Roman de Silence* in which the queen has a secret lover disguised as a nun. See pp. 105-6 of this thesis for a discussion on this example of cross-dressing. There was also an example of *History of the Franks* in which Chrodiel is accused of having a man in women's clothing in close attendance, and it is implied that she does so for sexual reasons. However, the man is discovered to be impotent. See *History of the Franks* by Gregory of Tours, Section 15. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/gregory-hist.asp> Edited by Paul Halsall December 1997. Accessed March 1, 2012.

⁵¹ See my mentions of Pelagia and Marina on pp. 96-7, 110, and 125-6.

to have sexual liaisons with priests.⁵² This, however, did not apply to the case of Pope Joan, a well-known Catholic myth about a woman pretending to be a man and eventually rising to become a pope. This case of cross-dressing is different, in that Pope Joan did not cast off all of her femininity, choosing to have sexual relations while pretending to be a devout man. She was not cross-dressing in order to be closer to men, but instead she cross-dressed in order to be closer to God, but failed by succumbing to her sexual desires, making her unworthy of the spiritual honour of being pope and therefore condemning her to obscurity. In her case, cross-dressing is condemned since she failed to meet her purpose to use cross-dressing to get closer to God, whereas with other religious women who succeeded, cross-dressing is praised and even awarded with sainthood. Cross-dressing in the medieval world seemed to have its exceptions in where it was allowed and where it was condemned, but each episode in which cross-dressing is done should be examined closely in its cultural context, as the medieval reaction to it reveals more about the medieval reaction to sexuality, gender, and also to the clothing itself.

Clothing criticism came from a variety of different sources. What could be legitimately argued to be the most important source for medieval people was the Bible, which also has a number of references to cross-dressing and how it should be approached. In Deuteronomy 22:5, cross-dressing from both men and women is strictly forbidden: “A woman must not wear men’s clothing, nor a man wear women’s clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.” Although according to gender beliefs in the medieval period it was more acceptable for a woman to cross-dress than a man, it was still seen as a sin due to this condemnation in the Bible.

⁵² In my research I have not come across any examples of women in particular trying to do this. There are tales of monks deceiving women in order to have sex, and tales of nuns getting access to men, but cross-dressing is not involved with them. The story of *Frere Denise* shows a monk deceiving a woman into cross-dressing as a man so that he can have easy access to her in his own order, but this was due to his lust, not hers. See Simon Gaunt’s discussion of this in *Gender and Genre in medieval French Literature* on p. 242. More often it is the priests that are attempting to get close to women and seduce them, as is seen in various examples in literature as well, such as *The Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*.

A more substantial passage that fueled medieval opinion came from Saint Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians. His criticism is regularly quoted by other Church theologians when it comes to their complaints about clothing. Paul writes:

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.⁵³ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved.⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.⁷ A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.⁵³

This passage became a commonly quoted criticism on how men and women should dress. This ties in to the arguments that the Church had towards both clothing and towards gender. It helps set the basis for why women were seen as secondary and men seen as honourable. Again, women were stressed to be slightly inferior. Men were seen as a representative of God, but while women were still seen as positive, they were hierarchically not made in the image of God but in the image of man. This passage also brings up the concept of clothing as communication and how it was worse for a man to cover his head as compared to women. Having a covered head or long hair for men speaks for the man as hiding God's glory according to Paul,⁵⁴ and in this case, what he wears indicates a lack of respect both for his own sex and for God.

Meanwhile, women who refused to cover their heads while praying seemed to reveal a lack of humility. Hair was highly praised and romanticised, and therefore keeping it covered with a veil allowed women to humble themselves.⁵⁵ This became the basis for women wearing veils to keep their head covered, but also indicates why men who cross-dressed in monasteries by keeping

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 11:4-7.

⁵⁴ This shows a change from the Old Testament, in which Samson the Nazarite gets his strength from his long hair. See Judges 13. By Paul in the New Testament, long hair such as this was no longer seen as spiritual, and short hair was now a way to reveal devotion to God.

⁵⁵ Oddly enough, when these head coverings became too elaborate in the later medieval period, women were accused of doing the opposite and finding pride in their head coverings which were originally designed to symbolize their humility.

their faces covered were so reviled.⁵⁶ While most veils only covered the hair and revealed the face, using a veil to hide the face and deceive, especially for a man to hide his face in a place of worship, was seen as going against the apostle Paul's preaching. As Paul's letter was widely read in the medieval period, his words became very important when it came to criticism on clothing, particularly in how men kept their appearance.⁵⁷

Tertullian followed in the same argument, seeing female adornment as evil. In the 3rd century, he preached against the attire of women and their fine clothes as evil and deceptive and clearly against God. Though he did not have much to say about cross-dressing, his arguments did have effects on others, particularly on Saint Jerome. Saint Jerome had a huge impact on how clothing was viewed due to what it communicated, and he had a number of things to say about what women communicated when they dressed, but also had some criticism on certain men. He believed that all women should remain virgins, but recognized that it was a difficult thing and therefore some people might not be able to remain chaste. In his letter to Eustochium, he mentions that many virgins in Rome are lost to the church due to their promiscuity. Saint Jerome condemns the clothing of these virgins, who attempt to use their clothing in order to hide their lesser status of adulteresses, quite scathingly:

“Their robes have but a narrow purple stripe, it is true; and their head-dress is somewhat loose, so as to leave the hair free. From their shoulders flutters the lilac mantle which they call "ma-forte;" they have their feet in cheap slippers and their arms tucked up tight-fitting sleeves. Add to these marks of their profession an easy gait, and you have all the virginity that they possess. Such may have eulogizers of their own, and may fetch a higher price in the market of perdition, merely because they are called virgins.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ A good example of this is the man pretending to be a nun in the *Roman de Silence* who ended up being executed due to pretending to be a woman in order to have sexual access to the Queen. See my discussion on pp. 107-109.

⁵⁷ This will be discussed further below with the discussion on men's hairstyles and the strict criticism that it engineered. See pp. 27-9.

⁵⁸ St. Jerome. "Letter XXII To Eustochium". In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Volume 6: Jerome: Letters and Select Works*. Ed. Philip Scaff and Henry Wace. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers INC, 1995. P. 27.

According to Saint Jerome's beliefs, a virgin was one who walked with humility and ignored men, not wearing clothing in order to gain attention but wearing modest clothes that covered her body completely. His idea of what indicated a virgin or chaste woman shows the importance of the apostle Paul's preaching, since one of the reasons for Saint Jerome's criticism is these women's failure to keep their hair covered. Saint Jerome was seen to approve of women wearing nothing but rags, and therefore this more elaborate dress was disrespectful to him, as well as the fact that these women were attempting to be seen as virgins when they were not. Even in the upper class of Rome, Saint Jerome had a number of female noblewomen who wore nothing but poor clothing and fasted to the point of starvation in order to show their humility, attempting to avoid appearing promiscuous and worldly.⁵⁹ The mark of a true woman was that of plain clothes and covered skin, according to Saint Jerome's teachings.

Saint Jerome's condemnation of women was not just for finery, but he also mentioned specifically the problem of cross-dressing. Despite the wide appeal that the female transvestite saints⁶⁰ had, Saint Jerome did not approve of women's attempt to wear men's clothing:

Others change their garb and assume the mien of men, being ashamed of being what they were born to be— women. They cut off their hair and are not ashamed to look like eunuchs.⁶¹

These women, he claims, do not cross-dress in order to try to legitimately throw off their feminine failings, but to have the appearance of being humble in order to garner respect. He goes opposite to what was seen as the belief of women trying to better themselves, and instead of applauding the women's efforts to become honourable, Saint Jerome sees it as something to be

⁵⁹ Saint Jerome. Letter XXXIX to Paula. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers volume 6*. Ed. Philip Scaff and Henry Wace. P. 49.

⁶⁰ Accounts of the transvestite women saints started in the fourth to the sixth centuries in tales of Greek monastic communities and were published in Latin and circulated widely in collections of moral tales. See Valerie Hotchkiss in "Female Men of God: Cross-dressing in Medieval hagiography" in *Clothes Make the Man*.

⁶¹ St. Jerome. "Letter XXII to Eustochium". P. 34.

ashamed of. I think Saint Jerome implies it to be a childish attempt at dress-up, and not as a way for women to become closer to God. Perhaps the great criticism is that he believes these women to not be attempting to look like men, but instead eunuchs, which were seen as feminized men. Therefore these women were not trying to rise above their sex at all, but instead become like mutilated men, which was what women were viewed as, due to Aristotle's teachings.

Saint Jerome does not just criticize women's dress, though this was a common theme in his writing. He took the time to also look at how men dressed, and condemned them as well for their finery and for their feminized outfits. It seems he is condemning the clothing of churchmen rather than all men in society. In his letter to her, Saint Jerome warns Eustochium to beware these church men "loaded with chains and wearing their hair long like women, contrary to the apostle's precept".⁶² Again, Paul's theology proves very important, and becomes a major criticism for how men wore their hair and dressed. Saint Jerome goes on about these long-haired men:

Such men think of nothing but their dress; they use perfumes freely, and see that there are no creases in their leather shoes. Their curling hair shows traces of the tongs; their fingers glisten with rings; they walk on tiptoe across a damp road, not to splash their feet. When you see men acting in this way, think of them rather as bridegrooms than as clergymen.⁶³

Though he does not condemn them specifically for cross-dressing, his description shows a very feminized idea of masculinity in how these clergy men dressed, and makes them appear very worldly rather than religious. They care about their status in society, since they are so concerned with how their clothes are and what they wear, but they also pay attention to adornment and how they wear their hair, something that was more commonly attributed to women. Though he does see their way of presenting their appearance as feminine, ultimately Saint Jerome is condemning

⁶² 1 Corinthians 11. St. Jerome. "Letter XXII to Eustochium". P. 34.

⁶³ Ibid. P. 34.

these men because they use their appearance in order to get closer to many women. However, his language in describing their dress also condemns them for the dainty way in which they dress. Though these men are not wearing actual women's clothing, Jerome offers the same criticism on their behaviour that cross-dressing would, accusing men of being feminine and stooping to be like an inferior gender in order to take part in worldly pursuits.

These are some of the major Church criticisms on clothing and cross-dressing that would have been known to some extent to those offering criticism in the 12th century. Some of the themes of criticism in the early Church are repeated by those arguing against men and women's dress in the 12th century. A good example is the subject of long hair that Saint Jerome so condemned in his letter to Eustochium. Hair was also seen as a part of dress, since the way that it was styled also indicated a person's status or hierarchy. The examples of this come from the Merovingians, whose way of wearing their hair symbolized their royalty, to the way that the monk's tonsure indicated their status as a holy man. Hair was therefore part of a person's dress and open to clothing criticism. Saint Anselm's biographer, Eadmer, complained that after 1096, the norm in court was to wear hair long like girls. Saint Anselm himself, in a sermon in 1096 on Ash Wednesday, convinced men in his audience to cut their hair short in order to avoid looking effeminate.⁶⁴ The Synod of Rouen in 1096 commanded all men to allow their hair to be shorn as befitted a Christian.⁶⁵ In 1105, Serlo, the Bishop of Seez, in his Easter sermon, did the same and condemned the king and the court for their devotion to the fashion of long hair in the style of women.

All of you wear your hair in woman's fashion, which is not seemly for you who . . . ought to use your strength like men. . . . Long beards convey the appearance of billy goats, whose filthy viciousness is shamefully imitated by the degradations of fornicators and sodomites, and they are rightly abominated by decent men for the foulness of their vile lusts. By

⁶⁴ Barlow, Frank. *William Rufus*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. P. 103.

⁶⁵ Orderic Vitalis. Vol. 22.

growing their long hair they make themselves seem like imitators of women, and by womanly softness they lose their manly strength and are led to sin. . . . They refrain from shaving their beards for fear that the short bristles should prick their mistresses when they kiss them. . . . The perverse sons of Belial . . . deck their toes with the tails of scorpions, revealing themselves to be effeminate by their softness and serpent-like by their scorpion sting.⁶⁶

His sermon was convincing enough to have the king get his hair cut in the church in order to remedy this feminine appearance.⁶⁷ It was also argued by Orderic that the short hair of the king and his knights is what resulted in their victory over Normandy.⁶⁸ In 1130, Bernard of Clairvaux also condemned this manner of men wearing hair like a woman, asking “why do you blind yourself in feminine locks of hair?”⁶⁹ In 1140, this argument is repeated again by Orderic Vitalis, who said that young men grew their hair long not just like women but like “harlots”, giving examples of the preachers who had already spoken out against this effeminate fashion.⁷⁰ It was dangerous for men to appear too much like women, and the fashionable long hair was a way in which the church believed that men were becoming too effeminate. These attacks against long hair were often followed by references to the men’s clothing and how it closely resembled women’s clothing.

This condemnation against appearing like a woman using long hair is particularly of interest, since it shows a disconnect between what the Church thought to be a sin and what the medieval populace believed to be wrong. The Church’s criticism continued through the entire 12th century, showing the court’s resilience to the preaching. Long hair was fashionable, and

⁶⁶ Translation taken from Warren Hollister’s “Courtly Culture and Courtly Style in the Anglo-Norman World” in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring, 1988), pp. 1-17. P. 10.

⁶⁷ Barlow, Frank. P. 107.

⁶⁸ Hollister, Warren. P. 10.

⁶⁹ Clairvaux, Bernard. Chapter 2 in “Liber ad milites Templi: De laude novae militiae”. Translated by Conrad Greenia from *Bernard of Clairvaux: Treatises Three*, Cistercian Fathers Series, Number Nineteen, © Cistercian Publications, 1977, pages 127-145 (without notes). . <http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/bernard.html>. Accessed March 5th, 2013.

⁷⁰ Orderic Vitalis. *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*. Edited and translated by Marjorie Chibnall. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973. Pp. 189-191.

must not have been seen as effeminate according to these individuals. Men were very involved with their reputations for their masculinity, and to be seen as effeminate was a great insult. Had it been seen as truly effeminate by the noblemen, it would probably have been a very short-lived fashion statement. However, long hair continued throughout the 11th until the end of the 12th century, or at least was a way of hair-styling that continued to come back decade after decade.⁷¹ The Church may have seen this as a way for men to dress themselves more in the manner of women, but the men who wore their hair this way did not, or they would not have continued to do so at the risk of damaging their reputations.

Long hair is only one aspect in which men began to dress more like women, according to the criticism at the time. The fashions in Paris were continually changing from the 12th and 13th century, as more tailors began to try and create something new in order to get the king and his court to buy new clothing.⁷² Clothing went from very loose to very tight, and this was also seen as men dressing in women's clothing. Orderic Vitalis argued that the tight clothing departed from the idea of the typical male body, and anything other than male was seen as female.⁷³ Another common criticism was the long trains and sleeves that became a fashion. Dagged sleeves became a fashion in the late 12th century, and ironically, though they were only worn by men or prostitutes,⁷⁴ the wearing of these particular sleeves was seen as overtly feminine.⁷⁵ This argument arose due to the immobility of the hands that these cumbersome sleeves caused. This was one of Bernard of Clairvaux's main concerns with the dress of men in his time. "Are these

⁷¹ Barlow, Frank. P. 107.

⁷² Van Buren, Anne. P. 3.

⁷³ Orderic Vitalis. P. 189.

⁷⁴ Piponnier, François, and Perrine Mane. See Chapter 8.

⁷⁵ Long sleeves in particular were worn by both sexes, but the dagged sleeves, sleeves with slashes on them, were particularly cumbersome.

the trappings of a warrior, or are they not rather the trinkets of a woman?”⁷⁶ Bernard saw these types of fashions as blurring the gender lines, and therefore these men’s fashions were accused of actually being the fashions belonging to women.

Bernard’s *Liber ad milites Templi: De laude novae militiae* stressed many things that he thought important to being a knight, and it is telling to look at his views of clothing, as they were a direct reaction to the new emerging fashions. In Chapter Four, he speaks about how knights ought to present themselves in public, particularly in their dress. Bernard stresses the lack of excess and the importance of wearing functional clothes, being armed with steel rather than gold. This is in direct contrast to his criticisms against knights who wear what he saw as womanly outfits. He did not think that these “trinkets of a woman” would help the knights in their war pursuits. Therefore, Bernard’s argument against wearing what he believes to be woman’s dress is not just to avoid the sin and shame of cross-dressing, but for functionality purposes. Women’s clothes did not make a better warrior, and the excess did not help a knight’s position on the battlefield. However, this argument could be taken further. In comparing the two knights, the effeminate knight in “feminine” armour in Chapter Two and knights of the temple in Chapter Four, the effeminate knights rush to ruin with folly, while the knights of the temple are viewed as efficient, victorious, and so worthy of God that they could be called monks just as readily as soldiers.⁷⁷ There would have been no difference between these two sets of knights aside from their clothes and their apparently efficient versus inefficient weapons, as they would have had the same training and followed the same leaders, so why is there such a vast difference? Bernard is attributing womanly characteristics to the effeminate knights, accusing them of folly and emotional responses as well as vanity, vices attributed to women as the weaker sex in the

⁷⁶ Clairvaux, Bernard. Chapter Two in “*Liber ad milites Templi: De laude novae militiae*”.

⁷⁷ Clairvaux, Bernard. Chapter Four.

medieval period. Bernard therefore stresses the medieval view that wearing certain clothing made a person into something different, in this case, making knights into women. His writings on praising the new knighthood were a plea to avoid effeminate dress and therefore avoid making soldiers into lesser beings, or in other words, women.

Pope Innocent III, when he was Lothario Dei Segni, also had a number of opinions on the topic of the same dress that Bernard of Clairvaux was condemning, though he did not condemn it for being feminine. This was written at the close of the 12th century, when this criticism about effeminate dress was, as argued above, often repeated. It is therefore interesting that Innocent III does not mention at all the idea that this way of dressing was more feminine than masculine. “What is a man adorned with gems but a whited sepulcher outside and full of rottenness within?”⁷⁸ Innocent III did not see this excessive dressing as a sign of femininity, but rather of pride and avarice. He also criticises both men and woman for partaking in this fashion, rather than the above Church theologians that mostly criticised men for wearing this kind of dress.⁷⁹ In his argument, woman who wear finery are more likely to have violence done to them, as are men.⁸⁰ However, Innocent III does acknowledge the power that this kind of clothing gives, but he does this in an attempt to criticize those who allow clothing to rule them. His example is of a philosopher wearing “mean clothing” who is not admitted to a prince’s palace until he changes his clothes. Innocent III then laments that “more honour is given to clothing than to virtue, more honour to charm than to righteousness”.⁸¹ Innocent III understood the power of clothing, and

⁷⁸ Dei Segni, Lothario. *On the Misery of the Human Conditon*. Ed. Donald R. Howard. Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1969. P. 61.

⁷⁹ Of course, women were repeatedly criticized for their excessive dress. This study looks closer at the criticism geared towards effeminate dress, which at some point became synonymous with women’s clothing.

⁸⁰ Dei Segni, Lothario. P. 62.

⁸¹ Dei Segni, Lothario. P. 64.

unlike the other Church thinkers that criticized clothing, he acknowledges it, but he still spoke out against it.

Church criticism in the medieval period often built on itself, and while the same ideas as outlined here do come up repeatedly, such as in references to men and women's hairstyles and head coverings, it seems that criticism evolved just as clothing did. As clothing became more luxurious and more differentiated between the sexes, it needed to be further regulated and the Church attempted to do so through its sermons and writings. Important figures such as Saint Jerome and Saint Bernard affected how clothing was viewed in the medieval world. Though it appears that their criticism was not always heeded, as the medieval people continued to make certain condemned styles popular, it would have had an effect on how clothing was viewed, and therefore it is important to understand the opinions of figures in the Church in order to understand how clothing might have been viewed by the populace both in reality and in medieval literature.

Secular Historical Sources: Chronicles, Trials, and Eye Witness Accounts

There are a few historical sources that mention specific incidences of cross-dressing that show actual reactions of medieval people to cross-dressing. Chronicles and eyewitness accounts as historical sources can be problematic as they are subject to author's bias and the medieval tendency to elaborate on the truth, but they prove to be valuable resources on what people in the medieval world might have done and how others would have reacted to cross-dressing. There are a few primary sources that mention cross-dressing in particular, and therefore it is important to look at these and compare them for their opinion on whether cross-dressing was hated, was admired, or was treated with suspicion. There are also court cases that deal with cross-dressing. Joan of Arc's court case would be an excellent source, but there is another that deals more

intimately with cross-dressing, that of John Rykener/Eleanor, that shows how cross-dressing in reality was approached and how it was punished.

Henry Knighton's chronicle depicted a number of important events in England, being written in the tumultuous 14th century. He writes in particular about a tournament where a number of women dressed up in non-appropriate attire:

Nota de dominabus in hastiludiis. Illis diebus ortus est rumor et ingens clamor in populo eo quod ubi hastiludia prosequebantur, quasi in quolibet loco dominarum cohors affuit, quasi comes interludii in diuerso et mirabili apparatus uirili, ad numerum quandoque quasi .xl. quandoque .l. dominarum, de speciosioribus et pulcrioribus, non melioribus tocius regni, in tunicis partitis scilicet una parte / de una secta, et altera de alia secta, cum capuciis breuibus et liripiis ad modum cordarum circa capud aduolutis, et ꝑonis argento uel auro bene circumstipatis in extranuerso uentris sub umbilico habentes cultellos quos daggerios wlgaliter dicunt, in powchiis desuper impositis. Et sic procedebant in alectis dextrariis uel aliis equis bene comptis de loco ad locum hastiludiorum. Et tali modo expendebant et deuastabant bona sua, et corpora sua ludibriis et scuriosis lasciuiis uexitabant, ut rumor populi personabat. Et sic nec Deum urerebantur, nec uerecundam populi uocem erubescabant, laxato matrimonialis pudicie freno.

[*A tale of women at tournaments.* In those days a rumour arose and great excitement amongst the people because, when tournaments were held, at almost every place a troop of ladies would appear, as though they were a company of players, dressed in men's clothes of striking richness and variety, to the number of forty or sometimes fifty such damsels, all very eye-catching and beautiful, though hardly of the kingdom's better sort. They were dressed in parti-coloured tunics, of one colour on one side and a different one on the other, with short hoods and liripipes⁸² wound about their heads like strings, with belts of gold and silver clasped about them, and even with the kind of knives commonly called daggers slung low across their bellies, in pouches. And thus they paraded themselves at tournaments on fine chargers and other well-arrayed horses, and consumed and spent their substance, and wantonly and with disgraceful lubricity displayed their bodies, as the rumour ran. And thus, neither fearing God nor abashed by the voice of popular outrage, they slipped the traces of matrimonial restraint.]⁸³

⁸² Liripipes are the long, narrow hats that were common in the 14th and 15th centuries. They were often normal headpieces, such as a hood, that had an elongated peak or "tail" that reached far down the body. Sometimes these "tails" were wound around the hood but were often also left loose.

⁸³ Henry Knighton, *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396*. Edited and translated by G. H. Martin. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. P. 92-95. The translation and the Latin text used is that of G.H. Martin's in his edition.

What is of interest here is two reactions that Knighton has to this particular incident. First, he is revolted by this display. This act of cross-dressing is not seen as a carnival mentality, though the tournament was often a place for wearing different outfits and pretending to be someone else. Rather, these women are judged as if they were wearing men's clothing more regularly, as he mentions that this happened at "almost every place". However, aside from Knighton, there is no evidence available that the practice of women cross-dressing at tournaments was wide-spread at this time, so we cannot be sure that this was indeed a common occurrence. This brings up the second criticism that Knighton has; this particular incident is seen as something more sinister, as a larger movement. Knighton claims, though there is no evidence further given,⁸⁴ that this has become commonplace at tournaments. He implies that women all over have been coming to the tournaments dressing and acting like men. They even wear daggers hanging protruding from their lower bellies, a fact Knighton thought significant enough to include.⁸⁵ However, this reaction seems contrary to how cross-dressing was viewed by others. These women were not meaning to deceive or, such as the transvestite saints, trying to actually become men. I think that this display can be seen as more of a show of support for the tournament, getting into the "team spirit" so to speak. This could be similar to Toronto Maple Leaf fans painting themselves blue and white for the games. It does not mean that they are trying to tell the world that they wish their skin was a different colour, but merely enjoying the show of the event and contributing to it. Knighton does not view these women as coming to the tournament to get into the spirit of things, but rather sees this as a revolt of women attempting to change their dress and become like men.

⁸⁴ Henry Knighton. See page 94 footnote 1. Knighton does not give other examples of women cross-dressing at tournaments.

⁸⁵ Women often had knives in their belts for convenience, as it was a major tool. However, these would not have been daggers but knives useful around the house, so the importance of daggers shows that they were wearing knives more commonly used by men.

There is a similarity in Knighton's chronicle to Joan of Arc's trial in that, while these women are chastised for cross-dressing, the mention of wearing higher class garments is also mentioned. Knighton mentioned that these masculine clothes were of "striking richness and variety" and that their horses were "well-arrayed". Though it is clear that Knighton's main concern is that these women are wearing inappropriate clothing to their gender, he also seems to imply that their clothing is possibly inappropriate to their class. However, these women could very well be of a class that would be allowed to wear rich clothing, but Knighton does not seem to think so because of their actions, since he condemns their actions and his words do not depict them as proper women. It seems that, as with Joan of Arc, when cross-dressing with women in mentioned, the idea of women cross-dressing in very fine clothes is also important enough to note.

Knighton also condemns them on a moral level. After describing these women, he claims that they were often rained off by God himself. His condemnation that they were fearing neither God nor society also seems to imply that he did not see the cross-dressing as merely part of a show, but perhaps thought it led to something more. He leads into this by first saying that these women were not "of the kingdom's better sort", which brings doubts to their morals in his chronicle. He then mentions the rumour that they took off their clothes to display their bodies. It is hard then to understand what he actually finds the most revolting in these incidents, as he levels many accusations against them. He spends the most part of his description focusing on their cross-dressing, particularly what they were wearing and how they paraded around. Later in the text, Knighton brings up God's judgement, claiming that God sent rain to dispel these women's "wantonness" and "vanity". So, did Knighton condemn the women simply for cross-dressing or for using the cross-dressing as a spectacle in order to expose themselves and to

engage in adulterous actions? Knighton's account also calls into question the intent of these women. It could be argued that these women were either prostitutes or adulterers, and were using their elaborate display to get sexual partners. However, it cannot be entirely clear from Knighton's words whether or not these women were just participating in the fun of the tournament, or were there to get clientele for illicit acts. All that can be decided for certain from his writings is that he believed this to be a large movement, and that the use of cross-dressing for women at tournaments was an affront to God himself as well as to society and these women's husbands.

Philip of Navarre's eye-witness account⁸⁶ also describes events at a tournament, but he is depicting an instance of male cross-dressing. In 1286, he recorded the events of Henry II's coronation as King of Jerusalem, and the joust held in his honour took place as follows:

Et fu la feste la plue belle que l'on sche, ans a, d'envissures et behors. Et contrefirent la table reonde et la raine de Femenie, c'est saver chevaliers vestus come dames et jostent ensemble; puis firent nounains quy estoient avé moines et beordoient les uns as autres; et contrefirent Lancelot et Tristan et Pilamedes, et mout d'autres jeus biaux et delitables et plaissans.⁸⁷

[The feast was the most beautiful one in one hundred years of feasts and tournaments, and they imitated the Round Table and the reign of Femenie, that is, knights dressed as ladies, and they jousted together. Then they played nuns that had with them monks and they jousted with each other; and they impersonated Lancelot and Tristan and Palamedes, and played many other splendid, delectable, and pleasant games.]

In this account, cross-dressing is beautiful and splendid. Not only did knights dress up as women, they were also dressing up as nuns and monks and were jousting with each other. Henry II must have enjoyed it, since there is no mention of his outrage at cross-dressing at his coronation, and Philip of Navarre also mentions that it was the most beautiful tournament of the

⁸⁶ See Ad Putter's description of this account in "Transvestite Knights in Medieval Life and Literature" in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler. New York: Garland Publishing INC, 1997.

⁸⁷ Quoted from Ad Putter's "Transvestite Knights in Medieval Life and Literature".

century. This is a very high opinion of something that had warranted so much criticism from the Church and from someone such as Henry Knighton.

Looking at both of these chronicles together, conclusions as to why the opinions towards cross-dressing were so varied arise. They are both from the late medieval period, but both might show different opinions due to different geographical areas. The English sumptuary laws were very strict in regards to clothing, and included specifics as to what certain classes could wear and where fabrics were allowed to be bought from. Edward III created a number of sumptuary laws to limit the amount of foreign cloth coming in to England, while in France sumptuary laws were less strict and referred mostly to the cost of fabric rather than to what kind of fabric it was.⁸⁸ The difference of opinion comes further than just the clothing worn, however, since there is a difference between the reaction to men cross-dressing and women cross-dressing. Philippe of Navarre sees it as an important part of the joust, making the coronation stand out and be more extravagant. The cross-dressing also fits into the theme of the reign of Femenie. With Henry Knighton, the women who are cross-dressing are not part of the tournament itself, and there is no theme that would excuse their wearing of men's clothing. Whereas with the account of Philippe of Navarre, the cross-dressing adds to the event, with Henry Knighton's chronicle, the act of cross-dressing takes away from it and draws more attention to the women, which he implies is why they were cross-dressing in the first place. They are not supporting the spirit of tournament, but rather rebelling; something that Knighton argues has been happening all across England and must be stopped.

Cross-dressing does not only appear in eye-witness accounts, but can also be found in some court documents. The case of John Rykener/Eleanor is one of the few examples of

⁸⁸ Van Buren, Anne. P. 3.

someone being charged with cross-dressing that has been found in the medieval period. While there are more cases in which cross-dressing happened, since they are mentioned in chronicles, few resulted in charges. An example is of the abbess Chrodiel being accused of having a male cross-dresser in her abbey, but the court does not focus on the male but instead on her as allowing the male to cross-dress with the potential of the ulterior motive of sexual access.⁸⁹

With the case of John Rykener/Eleanor, the charges brought against him were both for prostitution but also for his use of wearing a woman's clothing to deceive:

. . . Johannes Rykener, se Elianoram nominans veste muliebri detectus. Qui quidem Johannes Britby inde allocutus fatebatur quod ipse per vicum regium de Chepe die dominica inter horas supradictas transiens, dictum Johannem Rykener vestitu muliebri ornatum, ipsumque mulierem fore suspicantem fuerat assecutus, petens ab eo, tanquam a muliere, si cum ea libidinose agere possit. . . Quesitum fuit ulterius a prefato Johanne Rykener quis ei docuit dictum vitium exercere et quanto tempore, in quibus locis, et cum quibus personis masculis sive feminis illud actum libidinosum et nephandum commisit. Qui in animam suam sponte iuravit et cognovit quod quaedam Anna, meretrix quondam cuiusdam famuli domini Thome Blount, primo docuit ipsum vitium detestabile modo muliebri exercere. Item dixit quod quaedam Elizabeth Brouderer prius vestivit ipsum veste muliebri; quae etiam conduxit quandam Aliciam filiam suam diversis hominibus luxuriae causa, ipsam cum eisdem hominibus in lectis eorum noctanter absque lumine reponens et eandem summo mane ab eisdem recedere fecit, monstrando eis dictum Johannem Rykener veste muliebri ornatum ipsum Alianoram nominantem, asserens ipsos cum ipsa sinistre egisse.

[. . . John Rykener., calling [himself] Eleanor, having been detected in women's clothing. . . In a separate examination held before the Mayor and Aldermen about the occurrence, John Britby confessed that he was passing through the high road of Cheap on Sunday between the abovementioned hours and accosted John Rykener, dressed up as a woman, thinking he was a woman, asking him as he would a woman if he could commit a libidinous act with her . . . Rykener was also asked who had taught him to exercise this vice, and for how long and in what places and with what persons, masculine or feminine, [he] had committed that libidinous and unspeakable act. [He] swore willingly on [his] soul that a certain Anna, the whore of a former servant of Sir Thomas Blount, first taught him to practice this detestable vice in the manner of a woman. [He] further said that a certain Elizabeth Bronderer first dressed him in women's clothing; she also brought her daughter Alice to diverse men for the sake of lust, placing her with those men in their beds at night without light, making her leave early in the morning and showing them the said John Rykener dressed up in women's clothing, calling him Eleanor and saying that they had misbehaved with her.]⁹⁰

⁸⁹ *History of the Franks* by Gregory of Tours, Section 15. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/gregory-hist.asp> Edited by Paul Halsall December 1997. Accessed March 1, 2012.

⁹⁰ "The Questioning of John Rykener, A Male Cross-Dressing Prostitute, 1395" from *The Internet Medieval Sourcebook*. Ed. Paul Halsall May 1998. This document was brought to light by Ruth Mazo Karras and David

The encounter that John Britby had with this Eleanor stresses the fact that he believed this to be a woman, and that he was completely deceived. The document stresses the fact that Rykener/Eleanor used the cross-dressing in order to complete sex acts as a woman and get money. The accounts of cross-dressing that have already been mentioned are not linked to any conclusive sexual misconduct, while in this case a very grave sexual misconduct has taken place. Rykener/Eleanor goes on later to say that he preferred to sleep with nuns and priests, since they gave better payment. Cross-dressing that was not done to deceive and achieve a certain end appears to have just been sharply criticized by Church officials and those who are observing, but when it is used to deceive others and engaging in forbidden sexual activity, it becomes a charging matter.

This account differs greatly from the other examples of cross-dressing. The Church criticism was about men wearing effeminate clothing not as an attempt to deceive or to even appear womanly, but to keep up with the fashions of the time. Men were not wearing their hair long in order to go against the Bible or attempt to be feminine. Likewise in the chronicles and eyewitness reports, cross-dressing was used for spectacle and was never intended to deceive. Rykener/Eleanor was cross-dressing to order to appear as a woman and to deceive. The account also shows him and Elizabeth Bronderer using his dress in order to get money out of men even when Rykener/Eleanor had not taken part in a sex act. Unfortunately, the court case does not give a sentence to Rykener/Eleanor, so it is unknown whether he was punished. It is also unfortunate that there is no known court case⁹¹ of someone only participating in cross-dressing in

Lorenzo Boyd in 1995. Though Karras and Boyd have their own translation, the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* created their own translation in order to gain access to the materials.

⁹¹ No known case as far as I have found in my research.

order to be seen as the opposite sex rather than to also gain access to sexual partners.⁹² But the fact that he was brought to trial and questioned reveals the opinion of his acts. The wording in this particular account is quite scathing, particularly for his acts that he performed as a woman.

The wording in this case, particularly when referring to his gender, should also be stressed. The court case goes back and forth from Rykener/Eleanor being male and female, depending on what he was wearing. In the case of John Britby, it is mentioned three times that Rykener was wearing women's clothes and was acting as a woman. Perhaps Britby himself, since he was acting as a witness, was in the court stressing the fact that he indeed thought Rykener to be Eleanor at the time, trying to avoid being charged of willfully committing sodomy. The document goes on later to stress when Rykener is acting as a man and when he is a woman. At Beaconsfield he, "vir concubuit cum quadam"⁹³ with a woman named Joan, but then later had relations as a woman with two Franciscans. It is hard to conclude whether he is seen more as a woman because of the sex act that is being performed on him or because of what he was wearing, since in the medieval mindset either could be true. Because of the restrictions placed on clothing and how it acted as a communicator, wearing woman's clothing seriously rather than in jest, such as at tournaments, could make a man into a woman, as shall be discussed when it comes to the medieval literature. However, medieval sexuality approached sex differently than it is approached today, and sex was seen as something done by someone to someone else, rather than seen as being participated in by two partners. The passive role was occupied by women, and therefore men acting in the passive role during sex made them into

⁹² The transvestite saints were never discovered soon enough to be brought to trial, and in the case of Chrodiel, she was the one brought to trial rather than the cross-dressing man in her midst, and even then we do not know of this from court records but rather from *The History of the Franks*.

⁹³ "had sex as a man"

women.⁹⁴ So Rykener could have made himself into a woman either by merely dressing as a woman, or by engaging in the sex acts as he did. It is unfortunate that the text does not allow us to determine whether it was indeed the clothes that made the woman, or the actions or Rykener himself. What we can conclude is that he was at times in this court case referred to as a man and at times referred to as a woman. His gender was fluid and due to what he communicated either with actions or appearance, he was able to fashion himself as a woman.

The historical sources of the medieval period show a varied view towards cross-dressing, but can also reveal more about what these sources can say about both the medieval world and about the literature that also addresses cross-dressing. Church theologians showed some similarity in opinions in their critique of clothing from the late 11th to the 12th and 13th centuries, speaking out against the effeminate dress that seemed to make woman out of men. The importance of the Biblical passages that speak out against cross-dressing also are repeated, helping shape medieval opinion about cross-dressing in reality. However, as can be seen in the fact that the Church criticism continued and needed to be repeated, and by looking at the first-hand accounts of people cross-dressing, it becomes apparent that even though it was frowned upon, this way of dressing was still done. Men still wore their hair long like “harlots” and wore excessive dress. Looking at wardrobe accounts and how much fabric the courts and nobles ordered also stresses that excessive dressing and particularly fashions still prevailed.⁹⁵ Therefore, the historical records show medieval opinion appearing divided, either over whether cross-dressing was evil and a sin, or whether it was fun, or even whether it was even cross-dressing at all. What the Church saw as cross-dressing, making men into woman, was not viewed by the courts as such, or the men would have avoided such fashions. Cross-dressing for

⁹⁴ Karras, Ruth. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*. New York: Routledge, 2005. P. 23.

⁹⁵ See Stella Mary Newton’s *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince* for a discussion of court excess. See in particular pp. 53 ff.

play, such as in the chronicles, was more tolerated than cross-dressing to deceive, such as the case of Rykener/Eleanor, but there appears to have been a divided opinion of this small aspect of medieval life. This becomes more complicated when we look at medieval literature and how cross-dressing was approached in the medieval imagination.

Chapter 3

Cross-dressing Knights; Men

While cross-dressing females were quite common in medieval literature, as will be discussed further in this thesis,⁹⁶ cross-dressing men were also present in medieval literature with different reasons behind their cross-dressing. In literature these men were very rarely diminished in their reputations, as men who cross-dressed in reality might have been. As has already been discussed, the medieval world viewed men as the ultimate being and women as secondary,⁹⁷ and therefore to dress as a woman and hide God's creation was an affront to God. However, this was not the case in the chronicles and eyewitness' report at tournaments as was discussed earlier,⁹⁸ and was not the case with knights who cross-dressed in a number of examples in medieval literature. The transvestite knight in Ulrich Von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*, translated in English to *In the Service of Ladies*,⁹⁹ as well as the character of Lancelot in a number of the Arthurian legends, create a different view of cross-dressing in medieval culture that must be discussed in order to understand how society viewed it. As Ruth Karras says, "literary sources can be among the most useful sources for the history of sexuality because . . . imaginative literature gives us the most vivid examples of actual medieval life- or so it seems."¹⁰⁰ Sexuality and cross-dressing were not common topics in historical sources, but in literature these subject were often broached, and by studying these texts we can get, if not a completely factual view of cross-dressing, a study of how it was approached and how the characters that cross-dressed were viewed. While these sources should still be approached with caution as they are not typical examples of medieval life in all cases, they do give a glimpse into the medieval mental world

⁹⁶ See Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

⁹⁷ See Chapter 2 of this thesis, specifically pp. 20-23.

⁹⁸ See Chapter 2 of this thesis, specifically pp. 33-7.

⁹⁹ Thomas, J.W. *The Service of Ladies*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

¹⁰⁰ Karras, Ruth Mazo. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*. New York: Routledge, 2005. P. 10.

that can reflect how the people of that time lived, or at the very least how they thought.

Medieval literature about these transvestite knights can reveal how they functioned in their fictional tales and how they were viewed.

The male gender in the medieval period was viewed as the superior sex, and therefore they had a responsibility to act as was suitable to this position. “The medieval male body . . . is caught between production and representation. It stands, in many ways, for the larger world; but it is also responsible, in part, for producing and maintaining that world.”¹⁰¹ In order for the medieval world to function, there was a script for which men had to adhere to so that society could be maintained. However, there were always those that did not attempt to maintain this representation of the male gender. According to Judith Butler, there is the regular body and the queer body, and queer bodies are more readily banished.¹⁰² The regular body would be that of the regular male, but the cross-dressed male would not fit the idea of the male body. Society, according to Butler, would then more readily banish this queer body without a thought. However, the queer bodies of transvestite knights were not banished in medieval literature. In the stories in which they appear, they are often celebrated and rewarded. Does this then imply that in these cases of medieval literature, the cross-dressed body was not the queer body that Butler is describing, but was instead still viewed as distinctly male? These stories must be viewed closer, as they not only reveal more about how the body was represented through clothing, but also how gender was viewed in the medieval period.

¹⁰¹ Smith, Vance. “Body Doubles” in *Becoming Male In the Middle Ages*. Ed. Cohen, Jerome and Bonnie Wheeler. New York: Garland Publishing INC, 1997. P. 5

¹⁰² Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Pp. 223-242.

While the study of cross-dressing men will here be reserved to the area of the joust and tournament, it is important to also note that medieval literature involved men cross-dressing in all different areas.¹⁰³ Often the cross-dressing man was in disguise in order to achieve an end, and usually the plot involved the importance of a man's weapon. A famous example of this is in the *Thrymskvitha* in which Thor's hammer is stolen and he must dress as a woman¹⁰⁴ in order to retrieve it from the giants.¹⁰⁵ However, though Thor is able to succeed in his disguise as a woman through Loki's cunning, his masculinity is very apparent even when he is dressed as a woman and missing his hammer, the source of his power and also a symbol of his masculinity. Thor's reputation even in front of enemy giants is not diminished since he is still obviously a male. Though outside any masculine displays of prowess in war, this tale still firmly shows Thor's position as the epitome of masculinity despite being in female dress, and he fails at his disguise by his excessive display of masculine eating and drinking and is only able to complete his quest through Loki's lies to the giants.

Another example outside the masculine world of the battlefield is in the Arthurian romance *Meraugis de Portlesquez*, in which a weapon is also the source of revealing a female to be a male despite feminine attire. Meraugis and Gawain are imprisoned by a lady on an island. Meraugis takes the lady prisoner, masquerades as her by disguising himself as a woman, and gets past the sailors who are keeping them on the island.¹⁰⁶ However, even in disguise, and though he

¹⁰³ The idea of cross-dressing in tournament as compared to everyday life will be discussed further below. See pp. 63-64.

¹⁰⁴ The giants desire Freya as a bride in exchange for Thor's hammer, but Freya refuses to go. Thor then is recruited to wear her clothes and pretend to be her in order to find out where the hammer is and steal it back.

¹⁰⁵ Bellows, Henry Adams. *The Poetic Edda*. Evinity Publishing INC. Accessed online at sacred-texts.com on March 16, 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Raoul de Hodenc. *Meraugis de Portlesquez*. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1975. Reprint of Halle edition: M. Friedwagner, ed. Halle: Niemeyer, 1897. Print. See lines 3335-64, pp. 129-30.

makes himself up “prettier than a little doll,”¹⁰⁷ Meraugis is so masculine that he cannot keep the disguise up for long. When he comes on the boat, his great weight is apparent, and the sailors are aware that something is wrong. Meraugis then reveals his “sword” under his dress. The sword is a reminder to the readers of Meraugis’ manliness.¹⁰⁸ Despite putting on the clothes, Meraugis and Thor never intend to be women, but were merely trying to trick. Since their attempts to become feminized fail even in these scenarios, these two men do not become queer bodies, but only reassert their position as men through the fact that even when they try to be female in order to reach a certain end, they fail in being completely convincing.

The elements that stories of male cross-dressing have in common are their traces of humour and the use of jest and laughter within the text. This is an example of Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival, where there is spectacle without needing a stage.¹⁰⁹ The tournament was a space in which knights could perform their masculine deeds but could also wear costumes and present themselves as different characters. This leads to humorous episodes in these texts in which sexuality and gender become a source of laughter. Meraugis and Thor provide a space for laughter in their cross-dressing because of their masculinity and their attempts to mask it. The same is true for Lancelot and Ulrich in the two texts that will be discussed in this section. While they are participating in more serious pursuits, Ulrich in the art of serving ladies and Lancelot in displaying knightly prowess, they open the possibility of laughter in the way that they cross-dress and the way that they are perceived. The texts do not bring theology or gender issues into discussion since the masculinity of these knights is never really in question to the audience or to the readers. Their masculinity, as displayed in their abilities in the joust, is always apparent, but

¹⁰⁷ Putter, Ad. P. 289.

¹⁰⁸ Weisl, Angela. “How to be a Man, Though Female: Changing Sex in Medieval Romance”. *Medieval Feminist Forum* 45, no. 2 (2009):110-137. P. 116.

¹⁰⁹ Vice, Sue. *Introducing Bakhtin*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988. P. 149.

their feminine attire is cause for amusement, something that was participated in by other characters in these texts and was most certainly a source of laughter for the reader.

It is the men who think they have succeeded in masking their masculinity and convincing people that they are indeed female that are of the most interest here. In the joust, there are a number of examples, including the two historical accounts that have already been discussed,¹¹⁰ that mention cross-dressing in tournaments. As they existed in reality, they also existed in medieval literature, and warrant being read in order to understand a number of aspects in these medieval texts. First, how were these men respected if they could pass off as females in a society in which females were degraded and seen as inferior? While the above examples show two men that failed at veiling their masculinity, Ulrich von Liechtenstein and Lancelot convinced spectators that they were indeed of the female sex, even if for a short period.¹¹¹ Despite this, afterwards they did not suffer any repercussions. But this also questions how they were able to masquerade as women jousting, when women were not allowed to participate in the joust or even carry weapons. Joan of Arc, as also mentioned above,¹¹² was tried specifically for having carried weapons, which was included as part of her cross-dressing. Women were seen as improper if they were seen holding a naked sword.¹¹³ It seems odd then that the two examples of literature show two knights convincing people that they were women jousting successfully and still having the spectators believe that they were women. Lastly, these two texts seem to reveal more about how gender and sexuality were approached by how these two knights go about women's clothing and how they react to how and why it is worn. All of these questions must be asked of these

¹¹⁰ See this thesis, Chapter 2, pp. 33-7.

¹¹¹ Lancelot does so very briefly and is soon discovered by his jousting abilities, but Ulrich tricked people for a much longer period over a number of weeks.

¹¹² See pp. 14-5 of this thesis.

¹¹³ See Ad Putter's argument on page 290 in "Transvestite Knights" in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*. He argues that the naked sword is the property of men and as a phallic object should not be associated with women.

texts not only to understand the literature itself, but also to understand a society which believed that a man pretending to be woman was sinful, and that even dressing in a womanly fashion with long hair and flowing sleeves was an affront to God himself.

In the Service of Ladies

Ulrich von Liechtenstein's text *In the Service of Ladies* was written in the 13th century as a chivalric tale of Ulrich's attempt to win a lady.¹¹⁴ It was written as a true account, but though there is evidence for the true Ulrich von Liechtenstein existing, this text must be taken as fictional medieval literature that is about a factual character. Very little is known about Ulrich except what he writes about himself, and therefore historians cannot approach this text with credibility as to its factuality.¹¹⁵ What we do know is that he was born around 1200 in Styria which is in present-day Austria, and was well-educated due to his nobility.¹¹⁶ Being born into a peaceful century also meant that the importance of the joust and the tournament were very prevalent, and Ulrich's writing attests to this. With the lack of war for a young knight to prove his mettle, the tournament became the place to gain honour. Other than this and knowledge of some of his minor political roles, what is known about Ulrich comes from his writings, which were quite popular.¹¹⁷ Despite its lack of credibility, *In the Service of Ladies*, particularly the narrative about the *Venusfahrt*, has much to say about how cross-dressing was viewed and approached.

Ulrich's text shows him trying to win the love of a noble woman, despite both of them being happily married. Ulrich does many things in order to win her affections, such as fixing his

¹¹⁴ There is only one manuscript of *In the Service of Ladies* available, but Ulrich as an author wrote many texts on knightly exploits. This manuscript can be found at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

¹¹⁵ Thomas, J.W. P. xiii, footnote 1.

¹¹⁶ Introduction of *The Service of Ladies* by Kelly Devries. P. vii.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* P. ix.

hare lip¹¹⁸ and wearing her colours to his many tournaments. He even loses a finger for her in order to show his loyalty.¹¹⁹ After this, Ulrich comes up with a plan to further show his devotion to his courtly maiden, by planning what he calls the *Venusfahrt*.

Ich wil in einer vrowen wis/ durch si serben umbe pris,/ der süeze got müeze mich bewarn!/ Ich wil wit ritterschelfte varn,/ hin ze Beheim von dem mer,/ gegen mir kumt ritter wol ein her./ Ich wil mich von dem lande stein,/ min vart vor allen liuten heln/ (daz sol bi disem winder sin)/. . . Und wil mich da bereiten wol,/ reht als ein küneginne sol./ Vil wunneclichiu vrowencleit/ die werdent da an mich geleit;/ nu merche reht, waz ich dir sage:/ ich wil mich nach sande Georien tage/ an dem andern morgen heben/ (got müeze mir gelücke geben)/ Von dem mer ze Meisters her./ Swelch ritter mit mir danne ein sper/ verstichet durch die vrowen sin,/ dem wil ich geben ein vingerlin/ von golde, daz sol wesen guot. . . / Bot, ich wil die vart so varn,/ daz ich daz trouwe wol bewarn,/ daz iemen wizze, we rich bin;/ dar an kere ich gar minen sin./ Ez sol min hoch gemuoter lip/ gechleidet sin reht als ein wip./ Min vart diu muoz also geschehen,/ daz mich sol nimmer man gesehen.¹²⁰

[I'll take on women's dress and name/ and thus disguised will strive for fame./ Sweet God protect me and sustain!/ I'll travel with a knightly train/ up to Bohemia from the sea./ A host of knights shall fight with me./ This very winter I shall steal/ out of the land and shall conceal/ my goal from everyone but you. . .¹²¹/ I'll carefully remain unseen/ but deck myself out like a queen;/ it should be easy to acquire/ some lovely feminine attire/ which I'll put on/ – now hear this last – / and when St. George's day is past,/ the morning afterwards, I'll ride/ (I pray that God is on my side)/ from the sea to Mestre near/ by Venice. He who breaks a spear/ with me to serve, by tourneying,/ His lady fair will get a ring/ of gold and it will be quite nice./ . . . Messenger, I'll make the trip/ so there will never be a slip/ and no one possibly can guess/ whose form is hid beneath the dress./ For I'll be clad from head to toe/ in women's garb where'er I go,/ fully concealed from people's eyes./ They'll see me only in disguise.]¹²²

Ulrich firmly believes that this will help to win his woman's affection, and that doing so will prove his love. This is how he plans to serve his lady further and prove that he is a worthy knight.

¹¹⁸ Thomas, J.W. P. 18.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. P. 42.

¹²⁰ Ulrich von Liechtenstein. *Fraudienst*. Translated by Franz Viktor Spechtler. Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1987. P. 102-3. All German quotations are taken from this text.

¹²¹ Sir Ulrich is referring to his faithful servant who is the only one, besides his lady, who knows Venus' true identity.

¹²² Thomas, J.W. P. 46. Stanzas 458-63.

Before he begins, Ulrich sends out an itinerary of his *Venusfahrt* which lists where he will be, who he, or rather Queen Venus, is, and how other knights can participate:

Diu werde kuneginne Venus, got- tinne über die mine, enbiutet al den rittern, die ze Langparten und ze Friul und ze Kernden und ze Stir und ze Oester- rich, ze Beheim gesezzen sint, ir hulde und ir gruoze und tuot in kunt, daz si durch ir liebe zuo in varn wil, und wil si leren, mit wiegetanen dingen si werder vrowen mine verdienen oder erwerben suln. Si tuot in kunt, daz si sich hebet des netsten tages nach sande Georien tage uz dem mer ze Meisters and wil varn unz hin ze Beheim mit sogetanen dingen. Swelch ritter gegen ir kumt und ein sper wider si enzweie gestichet, dem gibt si ze miet ein guldin vingerlin; daz sol er senden dem wibe, diu im diu liebest ist. Daz vingerlin hat die kraft, swelher vrowen man ez sendet. . . Si wil uf der vart ir anlüte noch ir hende niemen lazen sehen, si wil ouch wider niemen lazen sehen, si wil ouch wider niemen ein wort sprechen . . . Si hat ir herberge dar umbe alle an geschriben, daze in islich ritter wize, wa oder wenne er gegen ir kumen sül, da ez sic him aller beste füege.¹²³

[The noble Queen Venus, Goddess of Love, sends to all of the knights who reside in Lombardy, Friuli, Carinthia, Styria, Austria, and Bohemia her good wishes and her greeting and announces that, because of her love, she will journey to them and will teach them with what sort of things they should earn to win the love of noble ladies. She announces to them that the day after Saint George's Day she will rise from the sea¹²⁴ at Mestre and will travel as far as Bohemia on this mission. Whichever knight comes against her and breaks a spear in two against her she will reward with a golden ring which he is to send to the lady whom he loves most. The ring has the power to make the lady to whom it is sent all the more beautiful and to cause her to love faithfully him who sent it to her . . . On the journey she will let no one see either her face or her hands; she will also not say a word to anyone. . . She has listed all of her stopping places that each knight may know where or when he may come against her, so that it may be most convenient for him.]¹²⁵

As well as the itinerary on when knights can joust with Queen Venus, Ulrich also lists his days off and what happens if knights are unhorsed. This letter was then sent out to German knights so as to make sure that there would be opponents for Queen Venus to joust and to give both the knights and Ulrich time to prepare.

The purpose of this itinerary would have shown the knights of the area in which Ulrich wishes to hold his *Venusfahrt* what kind of joust this was meant to be, as well as giving them

¹²³ Ulrich von Liechtenstein. P. 106-7.

¹²⁴ This fits with the myth that Aphrodite was born from the sea foam. Ulrich uses this part of the legend in order to start his quest. His attention to detail would have made other knights view him a reincarnation of Venus.

¹²⁵ Thomas, J.W. P. 50. Stanza 479.

plenty of opportunity to joust against Queen Venus. The purpose of these knights to joust was not just to show their skill, but to gain favours with the ladies that they love. Ulrich sets up his *Venusfahrt* as a way to honour all ladies, not just his own lady. He is not merely helping his own case in winning his courtly lady, but he is helping other knights as well. Ulrich also gives plenty of opportunities for the knights to joust with him, as each stopping point is listed so that knights could know his route and find a way to joust with him wherever it was convenient. Whether he wins favour with this lady through this feat or not, Ulrich is sure of winning honour as the time and planning behind this event is very elaborate, but also helps other knights in their quests for their ladies. The *Venusfahrt* is a way to instruct all knights, not just Ulrich, on how to win a lady. It is an enterprise for love as a whole, not just the love of one woman.

A number of things arise from Ulrich's plan to cross-dress in order to prove his love. First, he does not see any issues with pretending to be the goddess of love and jousting in this disguise. He believes that even being a woman in "dress and name" can win him fame. This questions whether or not it was common to see women jousting. If jousting and war were a man's domain, how would this have been done, and even if it was, could it have been common enough for Ulrich to do it without making others suspicious? Since he is more than just a woman but is masquerading as a goddess, this would have been viewed as a game, but Ulrich is counting on not being recognized despite others viewing his cross-dressing as a performance. Ulrich seems to believe that he can go on this joust without people suspecting the true form under his garb. He is fully concealed and takes great precautions to not be viewed under his female clothing. It is not until he has given away all his clothing and appears again as a knight that he lets people know who he is. It is unknown from the text whether he was already known to be a man, or if the knights did indeed think him to be a woman. When he goes to meet the governor after he has

put off his disguise, the governor says “God greet you, queen,”¹²⁶ revealing that the governor knows him to be the Queen Venus, but does not indicate if he knew before or if he is just now realizing who Ulrich was. Ulrich also has a wonderful feast with the knights who jousted with him, and does not mention the fact that he had to wear women’s clothing for a number of days. His masculinity never seems to be in question with the knights after his cross-dressing days are over, and this was not something that Ulrich seemed to worry about.

Ad Putter in his article on “Transvestite Knights” argues that knights who voluntarily dress up as woman are not feminized.¹²⁷ This implies that in medieval literature as well as in reality, the reason behind the cross-dressing is important. Knights who put on feminine attire voluntarily do so in a way to prove beyond a doubt that they are not damsels but far better. Even masquerading as a woman, their masculinity shows through in their prowess in battle. Like in the accounts with Thor and Meraugis, they attempt to disguise themselves but fail due to their manly attributes. However, in the case of Ulrich, it can be argued, especially by his own voice in the narrative that he did not fail to disguise himself. It appears that he was able to convince everyone during the duration of the *Venusfahrt* that he was indeed a woman. Using Putter’s argument I can argue that, since he did it voluntarily, then this does not cross the boundaries of gender and allows him to still remain a man while pretending to be female. However, most men in medieval literature or in medieval reality that cross-dressed did it voluntarily,¹²⁸ and yet in society it was often looked down on. John Rykener/Eleanor also put on women’s dress voluntarily and yet Ulrich’s wearing of medieval dress is accepted while Rykener’s is not. The

¹²⁶ Thomas, J.W. P. 113.

¹²⁷ Putter, Ad. P. 286.

¹²⁸ When discussing the Tournament of Surluse, I will discuss Dynadan who did not wear women’s dress voluntarily and was disgraced while wearing it. See pp. 66-70 of this thesis.

true difference lies in the fact that Rykener put on women's dress voluntarily and then acted like a woman, while Ulrich put on a dress and still acted like a man by jousting. It is not just in the way that the dress is put on, but the actions that are done while dressed in the opposite gender's clothing that reveal more about how it was viewed and whether it was deemed acceptable.

One of the advantages in the text of *In the Service of Ladies* is that though it is seen through the bias of Ulrich von Liechtenstein, he gives several other reactions to his *Venusfahrt*, as well as his reactions to other people, which gives an idea of how different groups of people would have viewed his unique plan to win his courtly lady. These reactions are also layered by whether people realized that there was a man beneath the skirt or if they thought he was indeed a woman. Ulrich in his autobiography describes servants, women, knights, and noblemen reacting to his appearance, as well as the general populace, and looking at each instance can reveal a little more about how cross-dressing and how the different genders were approached in medieval society.

Women in particular react to Ulrich in several different ways, starting with the woman that he is doing this all for. Her reaction is as follows:

Und ist, daze r die vart getuot,/ als du mir sagest, si ist im guot,/ im wirt dar umbe ein
sölher solt,/ daz im die biderben werdent holt./ Ob ez im gegen mir niht enfrumt,/ an lobe
ez im ze staten chumt.¹²⁹

[This trip, if I have understood/ you¹³⁰ right, will surely do him good/ and he will win a rich
reward/ in praise from many a lady and lord./ Whether it helps with me or not,/ from others he
will gain a lot.]¹³¹

His courtly lady answers him with two opinions, judging how the world will view his little feat
and how she will view it. She does not see any problem with it, and also does not think it will

¹²⁹ Ulrich von Liechtenstein. P. 104.

¹³⁰ This "you" refers to Ulrich's trusty messenger, who he often sent to his lady with news of his exploits.

¹³¹ Thomas, J.W. P. 47. Stanza 467.

ruin his reputation at all, thinking instead that he will get praise. This does not give any indication of what has already been discussed regarding medieval views on sexuality. As mentioned above,¹³² dressing as a woman was a way to be shunned and disrespected, but here it is believed that cross-dressing will gain him fame. However, at the same time the lady expresses her opinion on it, and though she tells him to go ahead with his plan, she does not seem overly enthused by it, and does not give him hope that he will be able to win her love in this way. This contributes to what Lisa Perfetti sees as the main humorous aspect of this text. Ulrich, as a faithful minnesinger, must woo his lady whether she says yes or no.¹³³ Ulrich selectively hears what the distant lady is saying, and hears her admittance that he will probably gain honour as a sign that she approves, while seemingly ignoring the fact that she admits it is not a sure way for him to win her. Perfetti argues that Ulrich's insistence on serving the lady despite what she says is a source of comedy, making Ulrich into an ineffective servant to ladies despite the title of his text. Though his lady knows that he is doing this solely to win her love, she does not encourage him for this sake, but instead tells him to go ahead solely for the attempt to get praise and fame from others, and yet Ulrich still insists that he is accomplishing the *Venusfahrt* for the purpose of his lady's love.

Ulrich also gives the reaction of the women who are spectators either of his joust or of jousts put on in honour of Queen Venus. After Ulrich jousts with knights, they often put on their own jousts for Queen Venus to watch, so that he could participate as a lady should, on the sidelines watching knights try to gain honour. In this way, Ulrich ends up further masculinizing the knights that he has just jousted against, as his role as Queen Venus was to give her gaze and

¹³² See this thesis, pp. 21-22.

¹³³ Perfetti, Lisa. *Women and Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. P. 148.

inspire the knights to perform great acts of knightly daring.¹³⁴ He is participating in a female role alongside the other ladies that would have cheered him on if he had been participating.

These “fellow” ladies of the court enjoy the presence of Queen Venus from the beginning when they convince the magistrate to allow the first day of the *Venusfahrt* to occur.¹³⁵ Throughout the jousting they are often thronging to see Ulrich as Queen Venus, and go with him to church at every opportunity that they can. Ulrich mentions enjoying their presence, but gives an interesting account in his text that occurs when he is entertaining himself with ladies at Sir Kadolt’s castle:

Do ich sis ach her gegen mir gen,/ ich wolt durch zuht niht langer sten,/ ich gie vil blide gegen in dar./ Des smielten al die vrowen gar,/ daz ich ez also blide an vie/ und ouch in wibes chleidern gie/ und also schoene zöpfe truoc/ des wart gelachet da genuoc. . . / Ir einer ich min chüssen bot,/ diu wart da von gar rosen rot,/ einer andern ichz do truoc,/ diu wart vor scham ouch rot genuoc.¹³⁶

[I saw they coming toward me thus;/ to wait would not be courteous/ so I approached with manner mild/ But gay, and all the ladies smiled/ that I should walk so merrily/ with pretty women’s clothes on me/ and lovely braids down to my hips./ I met a lot of laughing lips./ . . . I offered one of them a kiss/ and she turned rosy red at this;/ I kissed another standing by/ who blushed, for she was also shy.]¹³⁷

The women enjoy this spectacle, yet they blush when they are offered a kiss from Queen Venus. It is impossible to know if they blushed and laughed because they knew it was a man, or because they thought they were getting a kiss from a woman, but Ulrich finds it important to note their reactions, and is amused himself by it. Whether they know or not, these ladies do not reveal it, though there is one lady that does. While Ulrich is in church passing on the kiss of peace, he

¹³⁴ L’Estrange, Elizabeth. “Gazing at Gawain: Reconsidering Tournaments, Courtly Love, and the Lady that Looks”. *MLQ* 44.2 (2008): 74-96. P. 74.

¹³⁵ Jousting had been banned in the area, but the ladies are so keen to see Queen Venus jousting that they personally go the magistrate to get him to lift the temporary ban. Thomas, J.W. P. 55.

¹³⁶ Ulrich von Liechtenstein. P. 184-5.

¹³⁷ Thomas, J.W. P. 107. Stanzas 933-4.

goes to a countess who catches a glimpse under his veil and reveals a non-judgemental view of men cross-dressing as women:

Diu schoene lachen des began,/ si sprach: “Wie nu, ir sit ein man?/ Daz han ich kürzlich wol gesehen;/ was danne? Der kus sol doch geschehen./ Ich wil durch elliuguten wip/ iuch kussen, sit daz iwer lip/ hat vrowen chleit an sich geleit,/ des sol min kus iu sin bereit.”¹³⁸

[The charming lady then began/ to laugh and said, “Why, you’re a man!/ I caught a glimpse of you just now./ What then? I’ll kiss you anyhow./ From all good women everywhere/ I’ll give a kiss. Because you wear/ a woman’s dress and honor thus/ us all, I’ll kiss for all of us.”]¹³⁹

While the Church viewed men cross-dressing as degrading to them, this woman reveals that she sees it as a way of honouring women, and she rewards Ulrich with the kiss. She also does not judge him despite the fact that he is in a church during a worship service, which is directly against the apostle Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians. For some reason, Ulrich escapes criticism for his stunt, though he does not record any accounts of churchmen reacting to his *Venusfahrt* after it is accomplished and they know what he has done. Women are very accepting and honoured by Ulrich’s actions of cross-dressing, and believe that he does them honour by doing so.

Women reacted positively to Ulrich’s *Venusfahrt*, and the men in the text were no different. There are a number of examples of the knights’ reactions to Ulrich, both while he is jousting and when he is merely dressed as a woman. They treat him as a woman when he is off the field, putting on tournaments to amuse Queen Venus,¹⁴⁰ yet when they joust with what is being presented to them as a woman, they do not hold back, jousting quite fiercely and even injuring Ulrich at one point.¹⁴¹ From the text, Ulrich is convinced that he has been so cunning

¹³⁸ Ulrich von Liechtenstein. P. 117.

¹³⁹ Thomas, J.W. P. 60. Stanza 538.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 59.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. P. 86-7.

that no one knew that he was indeed a man, yet it would not have been common for women to joust. It is also unlikely that people actually believed that Queen Venus had come to joust with them, especially in a Christian society. The fact that the pagan Queen Venus was allowed into church also solidifies this view. So this again brings into question whether these knights believed Queen Venus to be a man or they were just enjoying the theatrical performance and were playing along. When Ulrich finally reveals himself at the end, knights display disbelief that he was so quickly a woman who then became a man, and many knights come to see who was so bold as to dress as a woman to joust.¹⁴² Their reaction clearly shows that Ulrich did not lose any respect for his extended period of cross-dressing, but rather was exalted and seen as very bold to do such a thing.

Perhaps their reaction to reading Ulrich's account might change their view of him just from observing his actions as extra-masculine and bold, since Ulrich's reaction to the clothes that he wears and how he acts when choosing his outfits could be taken as quite feminine. Ulrich seems to have great fun playing dress-up and being fashionable. His braids for his outfit are the "prettiest they could devise,"¹⁴³ and he dresses himself and his retinue all in white. He takes great pride in a number of his outfits:

Zwen zöpfe brun, groz und lanc/ ich fuorte, daz ir lenge swanc/ vil vaste über den gürtel
min,/ die muosten ouch mit perlin sin/ bewunden meisterliche wol,/ min herze was hohes
muotes vol./ Ein röcklin daz fuort ich an,/ daz vrowe bezzers nie gewan./ Ich fuort ein
hemde, daz was planc,/ ze mizzen als daz rockel lanc,/ dar an zwene vrowenarmel guot,
ich was vil ritterlich gemuot./ Hantschuohe von siden wol gewohrt/ ich fuort, min lip der
was unervorht;/ sus huob ich mich da von dem mer,/ bi mir was liute wol ein her.¹⁴⁴

[The braids I had were thick and brown/ and were so long that they hung down/ below my sash,
just like a girl's./ they too were richly decked with pearls/ and in a most artistic way./ My heart

¹⁴² Thomas, J.W. P. 113.

¹⁴³ Ibid. P. 48.

¹⁴⁴ Ulrich von Liechtenstein. P. 109.

had seldom been so gay./ Nobody ever owned before/ a fairer skirt than that I wore./ I had a white and glossy shirt/ which was as long as was the skirt/ with woman's sleeves of quality/ that made me proud as I could be./ My gloves were silk and finely made.]¹⁴⁵

He emphasizes his skirt, braids, sleeves, long shirt, and silk gloves in particular, articles that would have been uniquely feminine or would at least hide any traces of his masculinity. The first day he goes to church with the ladies, he also finds pride in his attire.

Ich legt an ein hemde blanc,/ chleine, ze rehter maze lanc,/ da muosten an zwen ermel sin;/ daz nim ich uf die triwe min,/ daz ich nie bezer han gesehen,/ des muoz ich von der warheit jehen./ Dar nach leit ich ein röckel an,/ daz was cleine, wiz als ein swan,/ daz vrowe bezzers nie getruoc,/ daz muoste sin doch guot genuoc . . ./ Mit einer risen, diu was guot,/ verbant ich mich: ez was min muot,/ daz an mir iemen solde sehen/ iht anders wan der ougen brehen./ Sus wart gekleidet mir der lip/ in vrowen chleit: reht als ein wip/ ich satzt uf einen phabenuot,/ der was von hoher koste guot./ Zwene hantschuohe an den henden min/ ich truoc, die muosten ouch guot sin;/ vil hohes muotes ich do gie,/ da mich manic roter munt enpfie.¹⁴⁶

[I put a shirt on, gleaming white/ and rather long, just as was right,/ and after that a pair of sleeves;/ no one who's looked at them believes/ that he's seen others just as nice/ or prettier at any price./ A lovely skirt I then put on/ which was as white as any swan./ I'm sure no lady ever had/ a better one, and that's not bad . . ./ A heavy veil concealed my face/ for I took care that not a trace/ of me should show and none should spy/ more than a glimmer of an eye./ Thus like a woman I was dressed/ and all I had was of the best./ The peacock feathers on my hat/ were rather dear, I'll tell you that./ I had a glove on either hand/ the best that money could command.]¹⁴⁷

Again, Ulrich emphasizes the feminine aspects, such as the long shirt “as was right”, the pretty sleeves, white skirt, and his headgear. Ulrich also seems to like looking at the clothing, and indicates that he enjoys the cross-dressing immensely. At one point, he has some time and decides to check on all his female clothing, “without a care, my heart was light, my spirit gay.”¹⁴⁸ Ulrich was attempting the *Venusfahrt* to win fame, but it is apparent from the text that how he approaches women's clothing and how he wears it, that he enjoys this charade.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas, J.W. P. 52. Stanzas 488-9.

¹⁴⁶ Ulrich von Liechtenstein. P. 115-6.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas, J.W. P. 59. Stanzas 526-31.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 71.

It could be argued from the text that it is not just women's clothes that Ulrich likes, but fine clothes in general. He describes his own clothes several times throughout the *Venusfahrt*. He does not just get regular women's clothes for his particular joust, but makes sure that they are extremely fine and the best that could be had. He could have been doing this in order to keep up the idea that he was dressed as Queen Venus, who as a goddess of love would have only the best clothes. But Ulrich also rejects clothes that he receives as gifts, which might be done for a number of reasons. First, he had a specific image for his *Venusfahrt*, and had clothing made in a particular way. It is possible that the clothing he receives as gifts, though he admits them to be of very high quality¹⁴⁹ do not fit his vision. Another reason could be that both times he receives clothing as gifts it is from women, which might jeopardize this joust as being done for his courtly lady.¹⁵⁰ Despite refusing them, Ulrich cannot help but admire them, as he also admires other knight's clothing throughout the joust. In particular, he enjoys looking at the finery as well as the armour that knights wear, and comments on individuals such as the knights at Scheifling show how Ulrich admires their attire.¹⁵¹ He associates their good clothes as indication of their true knightly nature, as he signals out one knight as having "clothed him[self] very well/ as any courtly noble must/ who knows good manners and can joust."¹⁵² Ulrich might reveal a feminine side by delighting in pretty women's clothing, but he counter-acts this by his continued appreciation of men's clothing at his jousts and his view of their clothes as a sign of their noble status.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas, J.W. P. 71.

¹⁵⁰ Ulrich mentions how she becomes convinced that he has found another lady during the *Venusfahrt* and becomes quite upset with him.

¹⁵¹ Thomas, J.W. Pp. 79-80.

¹⁵² Ibid. P. 80.

Though Ulrich might admire these fine clothes, it is still interesting that he rejects quite scathingly the gifts of fine clothes that he receives. It seems odd that he is angry at these gifts, but he may be justified in his reaction. Had they been from a man, they would have made his cross-dressing inappropriate, as it would have meant that he had deceived a man into trying to win his love with a courtly gesture. These clothes reveal him as a powerless recipient of unwanted advances, which would have been another aspect of laughter in the text, as the audience sees Ulrich being forced into being the courtly love object when he is undertaking this in order to please his own object of courtly love.¹⁵³ These gifts are both from a woman instead of a man, so they might appear to be upholding Ulrich's masculinity, but in fact they are still a threat. First, the woman is giving a knight a gift outside of the tournament field, which is odd.¹⁵⁴ In general, it was the man who gave such gifts to the woman to win favours, while the women gave men tokens to wear on the joust. Ulrich cannot wear this while jousting, since he already has a lady for whom he is showing his devotion, and to receive a token and wear it would make the purpose of the joust null and void. A final reason to refuse to accept these outfits might be that it takes away the voluntary nature of Ulrich's cross-dressing. As long as he makes the plans and controls the *Venusfahrt*, he is cross-dressing on his own terms. Having clothes given to him makes him cross-dress because of someone else, making it less voluntary. In order to keep his masculinity from being questioned, Ulrich has stayed in control of his cross-dressing, and he must continue to do so by refusing these gifts. He may admire the fine clothes as much as he admires the

¹⁵³ Perfetti, Lisa Renee. See Chapter 4, "The Performance of Genre and Gender in Ulrich Von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*". P. 145.

¹⁵⁴ Aside from giving articles of clothing or colours for a knight to wear, usually it was the knight that gave women gifts, either as betrothal presents or in order to woo her. Common gifts were combs, mirrors, or caskets. See Elizabeth L'Estrange in her article "Gazing at Gawain: Reconsidering Tournaments, Courtly Love, and the Lady that Looks".

masculine clothes of the other knights, but he must refuse them in order to show that he will only dress as a woman when it suits him and not to please anyone else.

Not all of the knights' clothing is admired by Ulrich, and there is one knight that gets Ulrich's wrath for the outfit the knight wears. At Feldkirchen, he sees a knight wearing a big monk's cape and a wig with a tonsure over his helmet.¹⁵⁵ Ulrich refuses to joust with him there, and again at St. Veith¹⁵⁶ until at last he is coerced by other knights to joust with the "monk". It seems hypocritical for Ulrich, being in disguise as a woman, a group unlikely to joust, to refuse to joust with a knight disguised as a monk, giving the reason that monks do not joust.¹⁵⁷ This knight upsets Ulrich, and when he does joust with him he makes sure to hit him in the head.¹⁵⁸ His anger seems unjustified, unless this knight by dressing as a monk is doing so to insult Ulrich. The wearing of a costume shows that this knight sees through Ulrich's costume, and by dressing as a monk he could be showing that he is aware of Ulrich's false persona. The fact that it is the costume of a monk also seems significant. Ulrich seems to think that he is fooling everyone into thinking he is a woman. But this knight, himself appearing in disguise, is not only stealing Ulrich's fame by also wearing a costume but also broadcasting that he believes this joust to be one in which the knights dress up as people unlikely to joust. This is putting emphasis on the fact that Ulrich is not who he is pretending to be, drawing attention to Venus as fiction. Whether this is a rude awakening or a direct insult, Ulrich reacts harshly to this fellow knight in disguise and punishes him with a hard blow.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas. J.W. P. 74.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 76.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 74. Ulrich states that chivalric sport is not "for people of that sort".

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. P. 78.

At the end of the *Venusfahrt*, Ulrich abandons his women's dress and it ends up being given to minstrels at the suggestion of the governor.¹⁵⁹ Ulrich vanishes for a few days and leaves his clothing and horses with his servants, who then are discovered bemoaning the disappearance of their "lady". While Ulrich seems to have enjoyed dressing up as a woman, he does not keep his fine garments or even give them to his courtly lady or his wife. This ridding himself of the garments is a definite end to the joust of Queen Venus, but also further distances Ulrich from the cross-dressing. This might also have been done to help his reputation in showing that he only dressed as a woman for this joust. He makes sure the clothes are discovered instead of just disappearing so the fact that he is no longer Queen Venus is very obvious, and the governor is amongst those that discover Venus' attire, insuring that this discovery of Venus' clothes will not go unnoted. These knights and the governor are those that Ulrich makes sure that he reveals himself to later, to show his "altered state".¹⁶⁰ This again seems to be an attempt to end the *Venusfahrt* and reassert himself as a man that no longer has women's clothing. Though he seemed to take pride in his alternate clothing and did not hide his feats, Ulrich does distance himself from his time as a cross-dresser so that he can rejoin the male world.

Ulrich's text gives a detailed account of cross-dressing, but has many complexities that make it difficult to fully understand. At a number of times in his text, he indicates that he does not seem to encounter any backlash from authorities and the church. In a time when clothing was heavily regulated and Church criticism about cross-dressing was firmly stated, Ulrich is able to not only break these rules but also gain fame. Despite being dressed as the pagan goddess Venus, he is permitted in the church and allowed to take part in religious rituals such as the kiss

¹⁵⁹ Thomas, J.W. P. 112.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. P. 113.

of peace, yet the countess who lifts his veil knows him to be a man and regardless lets him proceed. Ulrich also did not limit his cross-dressing to the jousting field, but continued to dress as a woman and impersonate Venus on the sidelines, in church, and at public functions at the homes of his hosts. This is taking the pageantry of tournament to a great extreme, but Ulrich not only sees nothing wrong with it, but those around him also applaud it. In a period in which cross-dressing was shameful and against the dominant religion, Ulrich used it to gain fame and respect.

Like the knights in Philip de Navarre's eye witness account, Ulrich uses cross-dressing to make the tournament a more theatrical and dramatic affair. However, he goes further in his pageantry of the joust by extending it to his outings as Queen Venus even off the jousting field. While the events are tied into his plan for the *Venusfahrt*, he is one of the rare examples of a man who cross-dressed in regular society and even in church and received no reprimands that we know of. However, Ulrich is not preoccupied by actual church officials in his text, as he interacts with nobles, knights, and most importantly, women. He used female dress to gain honour and he also in turn gets closer to the other sex, joining them at the sidelines. Unlike men who cross-dressed to get closer to nuns,¹⁶¹ Ulrich does it not to get close to these women for sexual advances, but to eventually get closer to a woman who is not even present during his cross-dressing. He is trying to win sexual favours from her, and he is using cross-dressing in order to endear himself to her in order to get what he desires. His insistence on his loyalty to her might have made his readers see him as something other than a detestable man who was trying to get access to a woman through trickery, but instead he tries to build himself up to be a knight

¹⁶¹ This will be discussed further in my section on the *Roman de Silence*. See Chapter 5.

using cross-dressing for the worthy pursuit of courtly love.¹⁶² It is unknown whether it is this reason, his persistence in courtly love, that makes his cross-dressing permissible, but it is clear from his account and the historical records that exist about Ulrich that his time pretending to be Venus in no way diminished his honour as the Church criticism of his time warned that it would.

The Tournament at Surluse

Another example of a cross-dressing knight can be found in Sir Lancelot, particularly in “The Tournament at Surluse” from *Le Morte D’Arthur*.¹⁶³ Though this text was written two centuries later than *In the Service of Ladies*, its approach to using cross-dressing as pageantry in tournament, as well as using it outside of the jousting field, offers an interesting comparison to Ulrich’s work. In it, one knight gains honour by cross-dressing while another knight is disgraced by the same outfit. Dynadan and Lancelot both wear a woman’s dress in the last day of the Tournament at Surluse, but while Lancelot’s cross-dressing wins him honour, Dynadan becomes the focus of a joke. The way that the clothing is worn and the context in which both knights are dressed reveal an instance where the same article of clothing can be used to say very different things.

This part of “Le Morte D’Arthur” from the Tale of Sir Tristan tells of Lancelot reacting to a jest by Dynadan at the feast following the sixth day of the tournament. Dynadan refers to Lancelot as “the devil himself”¹⁶⁴ due to the inability of any other knights to win a prize while Lancelot participates in tournament. While this is a jest, it is a very serious one, as Dynadan has both insulted and complimented Lancelot at the same time. He refers to his great skill at the joust, but he implies that it must be due to demonic interference. Lancelot responds by wearing

¹⁶² Though the fact that he believes the fruition of courtly love is in the eventual sexual encounter makes him seem less noble, and his lady reprimands him by tricking him when he threatens to take what he wants from her.

¹⁶³ Baines, Keith. *Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur*. London: Signet Classics, 2001. Pp. 286-95.

¹⁶⁴ Baines, Keith. P. 294.

women's clothing in the tournament to disguise himself, and going out of his way to defeat Dynadan while pretending to be a woman. At the conclusion, Lancelot is applauded while Dynadan is forced to put on woman's clothes at the feast and he becomes the butt of the joke for that day of the tournament. While Dynadan does not seem insulted, the position that he is put in is not positive to his honour and the calibre of his masculinity.

Dynadan's unpleasant cross-dressing experience will be discussed further,¹⁶⁵ but first it is important to look at Lancelot's successful cross-dressing to put Dynadan's into context. Like Ulrich von Liechtenstein, Lancelot is participating in the tournament and using it as a theatrical platform. As it was common for knights to put on shows at tournament, whether wearing their finest clothes or a costume,¹⁶⁶ Lancelot is not over-reaching in his cross-dressing. Unlike Ulrich, he does not go out of his way to choose a certain kind of women's dress, nor does he specify what he decides to wear. He simply "put on a maiden's gown above his armour."¹⁶⁷ Lancelot does not show any particular fancy for his feminine wardrobe, but approaches it in a businesslike manner, making it clear that the dress' only purpose is to make Dynadan's defeat more comical.

Lancelot's actions while in female dress also firmly cement the integrity of his character. Again, like Ulrich, Lancelot jousts well in female dress. While Ulrich seems to think that people do not know whether he is a male or a female despite his prowess at jousting, Lancelot clearly dominates the field. He does not fool everyone, since when Dynadan says in the text that he sees a maid coming at him, he suspects Lancelot immediately.¹⁶⁸ Thus Lancelot is still seen as a knight, but he is identified in the joust by women's clothing, as in other tales where he is the

¹⁶⁵ See below, p. 66.

¹⁶⁶ As we have seen in Philip de Navarre's eye witness account in Chapter 2, and in Ulrich's accounts of tournaments above. See p. 36 and p. 62-3.

¹⁶⁷ Baines, Keith. P. 294.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. P. 294.

knight with the woman's sleeve.¹⁶⁹ Lancelot seems to be able to get away with cross-dressing because, like Thor and Mergauvis, he is unable to fully succeed as a woman due to his masculine qualities and his prowess at the joust. Before he jousts he appears to be a woman on the field, but the moment that he begins participating in the masculine domain of the joust, he reveals his true gender. He is the best knight on the field even when pretending to be a maid, and his masculinity, despite his clothes, is never really in question.

Dynadan's masculinity, however, is under attack in this text, even if it is meant as a joke by Lancelot and is approached comically by Dynadan himself. He is dishonoured twice by female attire due to the actions of Lancelot. While Lancelot gains honour by defeating Dynadan despite pretending to be female, Dynadan is defeated by someone who is presented as female. In doing this, I think that Lancelot is dishonouring him by implying that Dynadan could not win even against a woman. This is a very devious plot, as it puts Dynadan in a "lose-lose" situation. If he defeats Lancelot while he is dressed as a woman, Dynadan gets little honour for defeating a woman who would have been seen as having no prowess in battle. However, if he loses, which he does in this case, he is defeated by what appears to be a woman. Lancelot is very coy in setting up this dilemma in the text, and I believe he does this in order to insure that Dynadan will fail, therefore letting Lancelot get vengeance on Dynadan for his previous jest and to defeat him not only in tournament but also in comedy. Dynadan's joke was humorous but very short-lived and required no theatrical performance, whereas Lancelot went out of his way to produce an elaborate set-up in order to mock Dynadan. Therefore, Dynadan being the joker at the tournament is again causing the court to laugh, but this time at his own humiliation.

¹⁶⁹ Burns, E. J. *Courtly Love Undressed*. P. 4.

Lancelot and his fellow knights do not stop there to humiliate Dynadan. It is not enough to have him defeated in tournament by a “woman”, but immediately after the tournament is over and it is no longer as permissible to wear woman’s clothing, Dynadan is forced into a woman’s garment, the same one that Lancelot wore to defeat him. This is a clear example of the same article of clothing being used to state two entirely different things. Though both times it is used in order to play a joke on Dynadan, the dress is used in different ways. When Lancelot wears it in order to joust with Dynadan, his clothing is implying that Dynadan can be defeated even by a woman. On the outside, this is how the other knights would have viewed this display, and therefore Lancelot is using it to play on Dynadan’s lack of skills against him in the joust. Once the same dress is put onto Dynadan later, it is humiliating Dynadan not for his lack of jousting ability, but for his feminine qualities. Dynadan is unable to refuse to put on the dress, and once it is on it accents his position as a “female” at the feast. As Molly Martin argues, these two incidences of cross-dressing bring Dynadan’s “gender identity to the stage and push it beyond its liminal position”. Dynadan’s gender becomes the joke.¹⁷⁰ One dress is able to identify Dynadan as easily beaten by women and as a feminized man. His inability to defend himself against Lancelot’s joke makes him the entertainment for the last day of tournament.

Outside of the tournament, Dynadan cannot find a way to perform manly displays of courage and prowess to counteract the feminine attire he is forced to wear and to prove himself against Lancelot’s knightly actions in the tournament. The fact that he is forced into it also doubles his disgrace. As Putter mentions in his article on “Transvestite Knights”, men who voluntarily put on woman’s attire were more likely to be accepted.¹⁷¹ Here, Dynadan has no choice but to put it on because of the other knights, showing his inability to defend himself both

¹⁷⁰ Martin, Molly. *Vision and Gender in Malory’s Morte Darthur*. Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010. P. 91-2.

¹⁷¹ See my argument on pp. 52-53.

on and off the tournament fields. He becomes a source of amusement for the other knights as well as Lancelot, and that, along with his female attire, accounts for his disgrace. Furthering his disgrace, he is brought before Sir Galahalte, the High Prince hosting this tournament, so even those in a higher social standing than him are party to this joke. Dynadan is no match to Lancelot's joke, and though he does laugh at himself for these actions, I interpret that he is being seen as less of a man than Lancelot.

The location where he is stripped and put into women's clothes is also interesting, since it is done in a forest beside the field for the tournament which was already notorious during this joust. On the fifth day of tournament, Sir Palomides had killed Sir Corsabyrne after the latter had called a halt and then used the pause to strike Palomides. The moment that Palomides beheaded him, a "foul smell" came from the body, which was immediately buried in the forest.¹⁷² Sir Corsabyrne is mentioned to be a "heathen", and I believe this to be the reason that there is a foul stench, as it is after the foul stench comes from his body that he is emphasized to be a non-Christian. This is further accentuated by the insistence of Sir Galahalte that Sir Palomides take the foul stench into account and "yourself become baptized".¹⁷³ By burying such a vile and non-Christian corpse in the forest by the tournament field, the knights are making it a place where unseemly things are done. It is not holy ground or a graveyard where Sir Corsabyrne is buried. This same place where he is buried then becomes the place in which Dynadan is stripped and forced to put on women's clothes. He is in fact "dragged" into the forest.¹⁷⁴ This inclusion in the text must be of some importance. Lancelot was not mentioned to be in a particular place when he put on the lady's gown; he was arming himself and then

¹⁷² Baines, Keith. Pp. 292-3.

¹⁷³ Ibid. P. 293.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. P. 294.

proceeded to put on the dress. It then seems odd that Dynadan cannot be forced into ladies' dress on the field as well, but must be taken to another place that has already been disgraced with a heathen's foul corpse, and put into the gown. The author is emphasizing Dynadan's disgrace by specifying where he is forced to become a cross-dresser while not making Lancelot's putting on of women's clothes so fantastic.

Ad Putter's argument about voluntary cross-dressing in "Transvestite Knights in Medieval Life and Literature"¹⁷⁵ and its evidence in medieval literature seems problematic when presented with what is supposed to be the dominant medieval opinion on cross-dressing at the time. The modern versus medieval theories should be viewed in the context of Dynadan's and Lancelot's cross-dressing. Men who cross-dressed were seen as disrespecting their own glorious gender to become lesser beings, which was anti-Biblical. It would seem that men who were forced to cross-dress would then not be seen as more dishonourable. They were not choosing and did not want to present themselves as the lesser sex. However, this instance in *The Tournament at Surluse* seems to imply that they were just as detestable and in fact were more dishonoured. Dynadan proves himself to be a lesser being by being defeated by Lancelot and then by succumbing to others and putting on female dress. He loses honour because he is unable to prove himself as a good example of a man. Even without wearing women's clothing, Dynadan is already a disgrace to his gender, and the woman's clothes he is forced to put on only makes this easily identifiable. Dynadan was seen as no better than a woman the moment he allowed himself to be defeated by someone dressed as a woman. This is then further emphasized by the fact that he is forced to wear women's clothes. Whether he voluntarily cross-dressed or not, Dynadan had already identified himself as lesser than a true man like Lancelot who proved

¹⁷⁵ Putter, Ad. P. 286. See also my argument on p. 52-53.

by the same clothes how vastly masculine he was. If Dynadan had been able to defeat Lancelot, he might have been able to avoid losing his honour and not being the butt of a joke, but he was unable to prove his masculinity on the field by the joust, and so he is further dishonoured by being feminized off the field through clothing. In this way, Putter's argument holds up, while medieval beliefs about cross-dressing at the time seem to be confused in this tale by the outcome of Dynadan's disgrace.

The reactions of others behind the cross-dressing occurring in this text also show how men dressing as women could be viewed. Lancelot, in his woman's dress, needed to be seen and recognized for his actions by his comrades in order for his cross-dressing to gain him honour. Other men and their reactions are extremely important in this text, as has already been seen in *In the Service of Ladies*. In both instances, Ulrich and Lancelot make sure to cross-dress in front of a crowd, and they also make sure that they do so in an area in which their masculinity will still shine, that is, in the tournament. Both knights were aware of their prowess in the joust and were confident that they could still dominate while pretending to be female. The cross-dressing only further ensured that others would see them and therefore take note of their superiority in the joust. Without these watching eyes of their peers and their peer's acknowledgement of how well they joust, instead of gaining honour both Ulrich and Lancelot's cross-dressing would have made them lose honour much like Church criticism warned them against.

It is also the outside reaction to Dynadan's forced cross-dressing that amplifies Lancelot's honour and re-enforces Dynadan's defeat. Those who observed Lancelot's victory over Dynadan recognized that he symbolically emasculated Dynadan with his wearing of woman's clothes. They therefore did what they could to accentuate this by emasculating Dynadan themselves outside the joust by forcing him into woman's clothing. This would also

have drawn attention to how Lancelot had defeated Dynadan, in case anyone at the celebration had failed to see it. Just as Lancelot was entertaining his fellow knights by wearing women's clothes in the joust in order to fight against Dynadan, his victory is recognized by making Dynadan a mockery. Dynadan becomes Lancelot's mirrored opposite due to the actions of Lancelot's peers; Lancelot is the victorious cross-dresser, masculine even in his femininity, while Dynadan is forced to acknowledge his defeat, which is an example of his failed show of masculinity, signified by his wearing of a dress. The other knights add to Lancelot's victory by further shaming Dynadan themselves in a way that refers back to Lancelot's joust.

At the end of it all, this is intended as a joke, but Lancelot goes to great lengths and at the possible risk of his own reputation in order to achieve the success of this joke. Dynadan has both insulted and complimented Lancelot, referring to Lancelot's success in the tournament as so spectacular that he must be the devil. Lancelot does not seem too offended by it at the dinner, yet he completely humiliates Dynadan the following day with his cross-dressing ruse. On the flip side, Dynadan also does not seem too insulted by this, yet the entire company is laughing at his questionable gender in this case. There is no attempt to reference anything positive about Dynadan in this jest, unlike how his jest referred to Lancelot's abilities. This was something that should have been highly insulting in medieval society, and yet here cross-dressing and implying that someone is feminine enough to be forced into a dress is used to amuse. Ulrich also uses his cross-dressing to amuse, and while he is also using it for the manly pursuit of the acquiring of a woman, Lancelot is mostly using cross-dressing to accentuate his success at tournament. It is Dynadan who is stuck with cross-dressing with only the purpose to amuse, as he cannot turn the joke around to show that he is still a worthy knight. This is another way that Lancelot succeeds in cross-dressing while Dynadan does not, since he is able to successfully make a joke while

cross-dressing, while Dynadan can only remain the butt of the joke. While it all seems to end in good fun for these knights, it is curious how Dynadan was not insulted more by this display.¹⁷⁶

These two texts both give an example of cross-dressing being used to gain fame for knights, and while there are a number of similarities, the differences also prove to be very obvious. Lancelot contains his cross-dressing to the joust, and when it is not done in the context of the tournament, it results in a loss of honour, as was seen with Dynadan's forced cross-dressing. Ulrich, in a major contrast, keeps up his cross-dressing. While he resists people trying to coerce him to cross-dress, he still keeps it up outside of the joust in which his masculine abilities are obvious. However, he is part of a greater event, and his *Venusfahrt* is for an extended period of time, which might have excused his cross-dressing outside of the jousting. His actions off the tournament field fueled the success of his façade of being Queen Venus, which added to the importance of his joust. Lancelot was participating in a tournament over a few days, and his cross-dressing did not depend on an elaborate backstory such as Ulrich's. His was a quick incident used to poke fun at a fellow knight and further disgrace him after defeating him on the field. Cross-dressing off the field of tournament would not have helped his situation any more, perhaps proving why Ulrich continued to cross-dress off the field and Lancelot did not.

These differences in how cross-dressers are viewed off the field of tournament are also shown by the characters of Ulrich and Dynadan. Ulrich, as mentioned above, willingly cross-dressed at feasts and in church, even planning to do so in advance by working these events

¹⁷⁶ Sir Dynadan is seen as a comedic character. In "The Joyous Gard", he is called "one of the best knights, and certainly the wittiest in the realm". See Keith Baines, p. 302. He is the butt of other jokes as well, being deceived by Tristan.

outside of tournaments into his itinerary.¹⁷⁷ Dynadan did not want to, and was forced into women's clothes. He was not able to fight for his honour on the tournament field, and he was unable to fight for his dignity in the social sphere off the field. Ulrich was confident that he would gain fame when he impersonated Venus, showing his confidence in his own masculinity. Dynadan's masculinity had been shattered by Lancelot's actions, and he knew that this would be accentuated if he wore women's clothing. Therefore, in the text he tries to avoid this, but is unable to assert his authority and not be forced to do something that will draw attention to his lack of prowess in jousting. Both men approach cross-dressing differently, and the dresses they wear result in different endings in these two texts.

In the Service of Ladies and "The Tournament at Surluse" give two different examples of manly "ladies" jousting, and both give a hint as to the medieval view of both cross-dressing and sexuality. Both show the pageantry behind tournaments and accentuate the fact that men could and did wear costumes while jousting. Whether these costumes were of kings, peasants, monks, or women seems to have made no difference in the knight's honour as long as he josted well. It appears that there was a bit of the rule of "carnival"¹⁷⁸ here, where things regularly frowned upon were applauded and admired in certain spheres. Mikhail Bakhtin believed that medieval people existed in two worlds; one the official, rule-regulated world of the Church and law, and the other the unofficial world characterized by parody, role reversal, and laughter.¹⁷⁹ How Ulrich not only escaped criticism while cross-dressing in forbidden spheres such as at public events and even at church, but gained fame through it, is problematic and seems to only be excused due to his

¹⁷⁷ Thomas, J.W. P. 50.

¹⁷⁸ See Sandra Hordis' "Unity, Genre, and Subverting the Absolute Past: The Case of Malory's "Tournament at Surluse" in which she discusses Dynadan in the idea of carnival and the idea of "world turned upside down". Found on the Medieval Forum <http://www.sfsu.edu/~medieval/Volume4/Hordis.html> Accessed March 30, 2013. Editors: George W. Tuma, and Dinah Hazell. Hosted by the English Department, San Francisco State University.

¹⁷⁹ Vice, Sue. *Introducing Bakhtin*. P. 150.

elaborate plans and the importance of these events to make his *Venusfahrt* successful. Dynadan, however, appeared without these excuses and therefore found himself dishonoured through cross-dressing. In this, he fits Bakhtin's theory, in that degradation is a typical aspect of the grotesque.¹⁸⁰ The joke is in Dynadan's degradation despite the fact that in reality he is an honourable knight as a member of the Round Table.¹⁸¹ Here he is defeated and degraded, and those around him enjoy this immensely.

Masculinity, even as seen through a veil so-to-speak, is also on display here. Both texts give a glimpse of what the authors saw as true masculinity. Even when shrouding their gender, true men were still recognized by their ability in battle. Both Ulrich and Lancelot succeeded in disguising themselves, but their true masculine personas of victorious knights were always on display. With Ulrich as well, the idea of the courtly knight as a sign of masculinity is always obvious, since he does all of this to serve his lady and win her favour. The desired end of his cross-dressing is a very masculine one, that of sex with a woman.¹⁸² The male underneath the dress may be able to convince onlookers of his disguise, but he could escape criticism from medieval society if he continued to participate regularly and succeed in the masculine role that society accepted, that of the man proficient in arms. What criticism they might receive from the cross-dressing was negated by a true masculine display of might. As Dynadan failed at this, his masculinity was not obvious under his dress, resulting in his disgrace.

¹⁸⁰ Vice, Sue. P. 155.

¹⁸¹ Dynadan, though often the source of amusement, does joust and participate well in tournaments at other occasions. He appears several times in "The Book of Tristram" in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, though he is often the one that is apprehensive about jousting at greater odds or venturing into dangerous situations.

¹⁸² Ulrich does not achieve his end, even though he threatens to force the lady at the end of his tale. His lady refuses sex, and he eventually drops her as his courtly love interest and finds another.

These texts give us three examples of men in women's dress, and by showing us at least two types of men and several different reactions to cross-dressing, they present an explanation of the fact that while men in society could not cross-dress, men in the joust could still do so and escape a loss of honour, as long as their prowess in battle ultimately let them fail as women. Ulrich may have thought that he fooled his spectators, but his excellent jousting skills allowed him to escape criticism and still be worthy of wearing men's clothes after the *Venusfahrt* was accomplished. Lancelot never tried to convince spectators that he was indeed a woman, but he could still have gained some dishonour had he not defeated Dynadan. Dynadan had failed at being a man even before donning a skirt, and his dress only signifies that he was already viewed as a lesser man. Though the two texts above show many dissimilarities in cross-dressing, people's reaction, and the importance of the joust to the cross-dressing accounts give an idea of how cross-dressing in the medieval world was viewed as well as giving instances of the circumstances, at least in literature, under which it could be allowed.

Chapter 4

Comedic Female Cross-dressing Knights

The men are not alone in cross-dressing exploits when it comes to medieval literature. Examples of females cross-dressing in the medieval period prove to be more abundant than those of men cross-dressing, and they fall into a number of categories. Although many texts take cross-dressing women seriously, there are a number of tales that approach it humorously. In this way they prove to be the closest to the stories of male transvestites, which have an element of humour to them. Ulrich's tale is very light hearted and meant to amuse while instructing the audience how to serve ladies, while Lancelot's cross-dressing, though it humiliates Dynadan, also has a great deal of mirth to it. Likewise even the stories of men using cross-dressing in order to escape or right a wrong, such as was the case with *Thrymskvitha* and *Meraugis de Portlesquez*, also include an element of humour, particularly in the double entendre of the weapon as a sign of the male. It is due to this that tales such as *Berengier au Long Cul* and its adaptations as well of Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Borte* can be more readily linked to the stories of men cross-dressing than those of women. As will be discussed in the following section, tales of female cross-dressing were often reserved to dramatic or serious subject matter, but *Berengier Au Long Cul* and *Der Borte* are light-hearted tales about women using cross-dressing to keep their marriage as it should be.¹⁸³

Berengier au Long Cul

Berengier au Long Cul is a French tale written in the mid-13th century that exists in three manuscripts.¹⁸⁴ Some of the social aspects of the time, such as the wealthy bourgeois class marrying into families with noble blood, are apparent and become a main plot element in this

¹⁸³ See Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁸⁴ Two of these three manuscripts can be found in the Bibliotheque nationale de France, and the third is in Bern in the Burgerbibliothek.

tale. It follows a woman from a noble, knightly family who is married to a usurer to whom the knight owed money. After ten years of marriage, she begins to begrudge the fact that her husband does not fight and do knightly deeds, but is instead content to remain in the house. Her husband then concocts a scheme to go out every day and claim to fight other knights, when in reality he is only going to the middle of a nearby forest and breaking his shield and lances himself. He returns disdainful and begins to treat his wife with disrespect since he is now a valiant knight himself. The wife grows suspicious when she sees that his mail shirt and horse remain in good condition, so she dresses as a knight herself one day and follows him into the woods. When she sees how he is deceiving her, she rides out and threatens to joust with him. Her cowardly husband refuses, so she demands that he kiss her naked behind. He sees her female genitalia but still does not realize that she is a woman, instead thinking that this man has a very long ass.¹⁸⁵ The wife returns home, and begins to dominate her husband, scaring him by threatening to get her friend, Berengier au Long Cul, to teach him a lesson if he doesn't do what she says.

There was also a German version of this particular text that was written in the 15th century. *Ritter Berengier* sees a knight named Berengier behaving in the same manner as the knight in the 13th-century version. However, both the knight and his wife are of the same class, so the class politics are not apparent in this particular adaption. Furthermore, the wife does not use her ruse to catch her husband in a lie so that she can later dominate the relationship, but simply uses it to make him improve his behaviour. Berengier, the husband, also comes back from the encounter completely changed and refuses to lie to his wife anymore. While in the 13th-century French version the wife comes off as condescending and manipulative, in the German version she is depicted as a good wife who uses trickery in order to improve upon her husband.

¹⁸⁵ He perceives both of her orifices as one long one, hereby causing his confusion.

The two versions show various differences in how the wife reacts and how the story ends, but the cross-dressing scene remains exactly the same.¹⁸⁶

Though at its core the cross-dressing is used in order to reform a husband, it is also seen as a humorous plot point. The wife reverses the gender roles and takes the situation into her own hands in order to confront her husband in the lie and get him to change his ways. In the 13th-century version, the wife becomes the dominant person in the relationship and uses the opportunity to have extra-marital affairs with her husband's knowledge, always threatening to involve her friend, Berengier au Long Cul, if her husband has a problem with it.¹⁸⁷ The husband is seen as a clueless cuckold and never catches on to who Berengier actually is. He is punished for his lies with another lie that he is not smart enough to see through, and due to this his wife is able to gain the upper hand and force him to change into the husband she wants him to be, which in this case is a submissive person that lets her have liaisons with men of the same class as her. In the French version, that husband is a submissive fool who has no power over his wife's unfaithfulness, whereas in the German version the husband becomes wiser and more attentive to his wife, agreeing to her wishes.

What is perhaps the most fascinating thing about these two texts is the exposure that is involved in the middle of the act of cross-dressing. Usually in cross-dressing accounts, characters are obsessed with not being found out. Ulrich went to great lengths in order to not be recognized as a man, and Lancelot dressed in private in order to not be recognized as who he was in the tournament, though it was quickly figured out due to his skills. As will be seen in *Le Roman de Silence*, Silence is also very aware of being exposed as a cross-dresser, and she goes

¹⁸⁶ Hotchkiss, Valerie. *Clothes Make the Man*. P. 99.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* P. 98.

to huge lengths and endures many troubles in order to avoid being found out. Yet here, the wife is more than willing to show her body, which should immediately identify her as female, to her husband, who of all people should know it very well.

La dame dit: “Se Deus me gart,/ Vos parleroiz d’autre Renart,/ Car je vos partirai un jeu:/ Ainz que vos movoiz de cest leu,/ Comment que vos jostoiz a moi;/ Et je vos creant et otroi,/ Se vos cheez, ja n’I faudroiz:/ Maintenant la teste perdroiz,/ Que ja n’avrai de vos pitié!/ Qu je descendrai jus a pié,/ Devant vos m’iré abaissier:/ Vos me vandroiz o cu baissier,/ Tres o mileu o par delez./ Prenez lo quell que vos volez/ De cez jeux, ice vos covient!”¹⁸⁸

[The lady said, “As God’s my shield,/ Before you’ve parted from this field,/ You’ll change your tune. Now stop this noise./ I’m giving you an even choice./ Either you joust with me right now/ (If so, you have my solemn vow/ If you’re unhorsed, you will not fail/ To lose your head - - it’s won’t avail/ To beg for pity or remorse),/ Or let me get down from my horse/ And I’ll bend over on the grass/ And you can come and kiss my ass/ Right in the middle, if you please./ Just take whichever one of these/ That suits your inclination. Choose!”¹⁸⁹

This part of the story could have been easily avoided if the wife had so desired. She could have, instead of exposing herself, gotten her husband to kiss her feet, or even her horse’s behind.

Instead she seems very willing to humiliate her husband with her own body. This eagerness to expose herself makes the cross-dressing odd in that she is willing to risk, quite literally, being exposed to her husband and having her little plot fall through. Usually cross-dressing is not revealed until it is no longer necessary in the story or has been found out, but here the cross-dresser reveals her cross-dressing while still in the act. Despite this, she suffers no repercussions.

The fact that the husband in neither version catches on to who the knight opposing him is also speaks for the power of clothing. The wife is dressed as a knight and behaves in a knightly

¹⁸⁸ “Berengier au Long Cul – Texte Critique” in *Nouveau Recueil Complet Des Fabliaux – Tome IV*. Edited by William Noomen and Nico van den Boogaard. Pp. 247-277. P. 275, lines 215-229. For all original quotations, I will be using this edition, but for the translations I will be using John Duval’s 1977 dissertation.

¹⁸⁹ Duval, John Tabb. “A Modern English Verse Translation of Five Old French Fabliaux with a Critical Commentary”. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*; 1977; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT). P. 5.

manner, and so the husband is led to believe that this is indeed a man. Even when he sees clear evidence that this is in fact a woman, he still believes in the lie of the clothes and comes up with an odd excuse for what he is seeing. The fact that his wife is so eager to risk humiliating her husband in this particular way might also show that she did not believe him to be smart enough to understand in the first place. Valerie Hotchkiss argues that the wife is able to get away with exposing herself by making her genitalia part of the persona of her false character, *Berengier*.¹⁹⁰ E.J. Burns also agrees with this idea, as she sees the husband's misperception of his own wife's genitalia as an example of a man trying to cast a phallic look on the vagina. Whether the husband was indeed this gullible or whether the wife was actually that convincing is not entirely clear from the text. It does reduce the husband by humiliating him while elevating the wife. Her husband perceives her as male, and she responds by becoming the new authoritative head in the relationship.¹⁹¹ The cross-dressing allows for the desired end to be reached for the woman, and she receives no repercussions for her cross-dressing, despite exposing herself willingly in the midst of it. Rather, she is rewarded, able to trick and scare her husband into giving her what she needs in the relationship, and continuing with the lie whenever her husband seems to be ready to revert back to his old ways. Her reference back to her own sex during the cross-dressing might also be what allows it to be acceptable, much like with Thor and Meraguis who had references back to their masculinity even in the midst of cross-dressing. Meraguis also exposes his sword, which was a marker of his gender just as much as the wife's actual genitalia were. The wife in *Berengier* is not trying to cross-dress too convincingly, which would have made her more acceptable to the audience. The joke in *Berengier* is that the husband should know the difference

¹⁹⁰ Hotchkiss, Valerie. P. 100.

¹⁹¹ Burns, E. J. *Bodytalk*. Philadelphia: University Pennsylvania Press, 1993. Pp. 42-3.

between male and female genitalia, but is unable to know a woman's body.¹⁹² She is trying to deceive but gives her husband the opportunity to see through the deception; the fact that he is not smart enough to do so is not necessarily a fault of hers.

One aspect of women that was a key indicator of their sex was their hair, and yet in this text it is not mentioned. Instead, the importance of the disguise rests mainly on the way that the wife presents herself, and her armour itself. Ulrich relied heavily on his long thick braids, which he seemed to be very proud of in the text. Historical characters such as Joan of Arc were also specifically mentioned as cutting their hair and therefore being an affront to their sex. In this comedic text, the wife does not go so far as to make her cross-dressing more permanent. This is almost certainly due to the temporary situations in which she is cross-dressing. Ulrich was to remain cross-dressed for a number of weeks and therefore having long hair would have helped with his disguise. As will be discussed with *Le Roman de Silence*, Silence also remained cross-dressed for an extended period of time, making it necessary for her to cut her hair like a man. In this tale, the wife does convince her husband that she is a man but it is not in her best interest to do it for a long period of time. Once she gains her objective, gaining the upper hand in her relationship, she no longer needs to appear masculine. Cutting her hair short would have taken a long time to repair. This would have worked out negatively as, though the husband is clueless with other things, noticing her with short hair would have possibly made him realize what was going on. Furthermore, due to the temporary nature of her cross-dressing, the wife could simply wear a helmet in order to hide her feminine locks. Had she had to cross-dress longer, wearing a helmet at all times might have started to look suspicious.

¹⁹² Gaunt, Simon. *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. P. 256.

The fact that her husband is unable to actually guess her identity in this tale might also account for her being able to escape repercussions. Though she does only cross-dress in front of a one-man audience, thereby limiting her chance of being discovered, and though she still exposes herself, her secret identity as a woman dressing as a man is never found out. She also attempts to avoid the need to cross-dress. When she is suspicious of her husband, she asks her husband to take witnesses at one point in order to find him out.¹⁹³ His refusal makes her need to discover the truth of her husband's lies for herself, and she therefore goes by herself to get some armour and a horse and follow her husband. No one sees her go, and as her husband is clueless when she encounters him, no one knows what she has done in order to find out if her husband is lying. Unlike all the male cross-dressers discussed so far, the wife in *Berengier* is not in a public setting and her cross-dressing remains a secret. Her husband will not tell since he is ashamed at being humiliated by this *Berengier au Long Cul*, and she has no need to tell since she knows that she was not discovered by anyone. Her cross-dressing remains outside the worldly sphere, though it was still public since her husband was a witness to it, whether he was able to understand or not. *Berengier* then proves to be the only cross-dresser in the texts studied in this thesis that does not cross-dress to more than one person. She seems reluctant to resort to cross-dressing by her actions of finding her husband out with an alternate plan, and when she does indeed cross-dress, she makes sure that she is seen by only her husband, and creates a situation in which he would be unlikely to ever tell anyone about his experience.

One thing that arises here and will arise with discussions on other female cross-dressing knights is the ability of these females to be convincing at the joust. Though her husband is cowardly, the wife in *Berengier* is able to show up in proper armour and scare him into thinking

¹⁹³ Duval, John Tabb. P. 4.

that she will attack him and defeat him at the joust. She also gives him the option to fight with her, making it seem that she either knows that he will not fight with her, or that she is confident that she will do well enough at the joust that she will win. The reason given in the French version hinges on her position in a knightly family. The wife, unlike her husband who is low-born, knows what chivalry and knightly behaviour is, as she has grown up with it. Her husband does not, as he does not care for the knightly codes that his wife upholds. Using her knowledge and what is seen as her noble blood, she is then able to put on a charade and convince her husband that she is a mighty knight. Noble bloodlines seem to make better knights, since as the author says, “Ensi lo bon ligance aville,/ Et dechiet tot et va a honte,/ Que li chastelain et li conte se marient bas por avoir. . ./ Li chevalier mauvais et vil/ Et coart issent de tel gent,/ Quie miauz aiment or et argent/ Que il ne font chevalerie.”¹⁹⁴ [That’s how the good blood thins down to water,/ How counts and earls and all their race/ decline and finish in disgrace. . ./ From those who cover silver and gold,/ more than nobility, a race/ of foolish, good-for-nothing, base/ and chicken-hearted knights descends./ Thus chivalry declines and ends.]¹⁹⁵ Though the husband is a man and is knighted, he is not from noble blood and therefore the wife, though being a woman, can more easily succeed as a knight than he can. She has true chivalry running in her veins, and this is the reason that she is attested to be able to convince her husband that she is a valiant, successful knight. As he is not, he does not accept the knightly code and refuses to joust valiantly, instead submitting himself to the humiliation that his wife forces onto him.

Valerie Hotchkiss, in her text *Clothes Makes the Man*, brings up the concept of *Berengier au Long Cul* and links it to another German text, *Der arme Bäcker* by Hans Folz, written in the early 15th century. As Hotchkiss notes, the humiliation scene is the same, in that the wife, cross-

¹⁹⁴ “Berengier au Long Cul” in *Recueil Complet des Fabliaux Tome IV*. P. 270-1, lines 24-33.

¹⁹⁵ Duval, John Tabb. P. 1.

dressing as a male, reprimands a poor baker on her property and insists that he kiss her behind. However, in this version Folz plays on the intelligence of the male doing the kissing, as the baker does not remain clueless to the female identity of what has appeared to be a male.¹⁹⁶ Here, the disguise breaks down, and because of this the wife is punished, sodomized later by the baker in humiliation. This tale can be used to see where in *Berengier* the cross-dressing succeeds, but in *Der arme Bäcker* it does not. In *Berengier*, the wife is being used and lied to, justifying her need for action, though at the end she seems less likeable after fooling her husband in order to be unfaithful. In *Der arme Bäcker*, the wife is going on a power-trip, dressing up as her husband just to annoy the baker. While both wives prove to be adulteresses, as the wife in *Berengier* reveals her lover at the end, in *Der arme Bäcker* the wife has no justifiable reason to be cheating on her husband. In *Berengier* the wife seems to be redeeming her blood, since she dallies with a knight of some repute, since her husband has proven to be a coward. Cross-dressing, as has been mentioned before, needs to have certain intentions in order to be allowed. In *Der arme Bäcker*, the wife had no good reason for cross-dressing, whereas in *Berengier* the wife tries to avoid it at first, but then does it in order to find out her husband's lie.

Dietrich Von der Glezze's *Der Borte*

Cross-dressing in order to redeem a woman has also been a major plot point in a number of medieval texts, and in some cases is approached seriously, but in some texts, as in *Der Borte* which will be discussed below, there are comedic elements. It should be briefly mentioned how other texts approach this plot element seriously in order to understand the comedic elements that

¹⁹⁶ Hotchkiss, Valerie. P. 100.

are apparent in *Der Borte*.¹⁹⁷ One of the most famous examples of this trope that approaches it seriously would be the *Decameron* on the 2nd day, 9th story. A wife is falsely accused of adultery and cross-dresses in order to escape her murder and uncover why she was so wrongfully accused. However, her husband was tricked into believing that his wife was unfaithful, and therefore her faithfulness as well as the great lengths that she goes to in order to redeem herself are admired. This tale is repeated in literature, and is believed to be the source for Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. However, these stories often fail to have humour as a major element. This seems to then set *Der Borte* apart from *Berengier* and *Der arme Bäcker* as it becomes more of a moral lesson than that of a wife getting the better of her husband, or a baker putting a woman in her place. However, not all tales that follow this particular plot, of a wife being redeemed and reconciled to her husband, do so in a very moral and serious way. Dietrich von der Glezze's *Der Borte*, in which a woman is accused of adultery and must cross-dress in order to reunite herself with her husband, has an elaborate scheme that mocks a husband and validates his wife in the end. This late 13th-century German narrative delves into a number of issues and includes female cross-dressing as a major plot point in which the wife uses her male persona in order to reunite with her husband through trickery. The text shows a degeneration of the courtly love tradition by involving transvestism, homosexuality, and prostitution.¹⁹⁸ She sets up a plot to humiliate her husband in

¹⁹⁷ An argument can be made as to whether *Der Borte* is indeed meant to be taken in a light-hearted account rather than seriously. It brings up the serious topics of adultery and homosexuality. Whether the husband Conrat's willingness to commit a homosexual act would have been seen as horrifying to the medieval audience, or whether the wife's trick and her ability to prove herself as better than her husband would have been seen as comical to the medieval audience is debatable. After my reading of the text, I recognize that it does have serious elements, but the wife's elaborate scheme at the end and the way that she deceives her husband can be seen as comedic. There are also two instances of her mocking the men that she feels she has bested in honour. She has a noble reason, but she uses a very over-the-top method, much like *Berengier*, in order to fix her marriage. This opinion is shared by Martin Blum who points out that it follows the tradition of the humorous comic tale. See Blum's Chapter in *Queering the canon: defying sights in German literature and Culture*.

¹⁹⁸ Hotchkiss, Valerie. P. 101,

private, much like the wife in *Berengier*, though she does so in order to remain with her husband rather than to allow herself to have more power in the relationship.

Der Borte tells the story of a wife who is praised for her faithfulness until another knight comes along with a number of magical and precious items. She recognizes that acquiring these items will help her husband, Conrat,¹⁹⁹ in his knightly pursuits, so after driving a very hard bargain she agrees to give up her honour as a faithful wife to the stranger. After they have sex, she mocks him for giving up so much for a short term gain, and the knight leaves. Unfortunately for her, a squire sees them together and alerts her husband, who refuses to hear any explanation and deserts her. After two years, the wife decides to go in pursuit of her husband and journeys with her entourage to an inn, where she then sends everyone away. She tells the inn keeper that she is actually a male dressed as a female and asks for male attire. She convinces him to outfit her, hire an entourage, and then she cuts her hair and completes her disguise. Armed as a knight in excellent armour and clothes and bearing the name Heinrich of Swabia,²⁰⁰ she goes to the court where Conrat is residing. Since she claims a similar geographical area as Conrad as her homeland, he befriends her as a fellow outsider to court. Heinrich dominates both him and all the other knights at hunting. Her fine hounds kill a bear, her falcon performs well, her horse beats all the others in a race, and she is successful in a tournament against a knight acknowledged to be much stronger, who has already unhorsed Conrat. When Conrat notices her fine items, he covets them and tries to barter with Heinrich, who reveals that “he” only likes men and will only give him two of the items if Conrat commits a sex act with Heinrich on the top and

¹⁹⁹ In the English translation that I am using, Albrecht Classen translates his name to Conrad. Other alternate spellings found have been Kuonrat and Konrad. All quotes will be taken from this translation. Classen, Albrecht. *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2007. The translation of *Der Borte* is found in chapter 3 of this text, but as I was unable to get a hold of the copy, I am working off the specific section of *Der Borte* that Albrecht Classen was kind enough to send me. This section is his chapter 3 and goes from pp. 1-13 in the copy that I am using.

²⁰⁰ In Albrecht Classen’s translation, she is called Henry.

dominant position. Conrat agrees, and Heinrich then reveals “his” true identity, chastising her husband for condemning her for having sex to acquire these items when he is willing to do much worse in order to get them. She also points out that he was willing to do much more for much less than she was willing to do. Conrat is then reconciled with his wife.

Though there are a number of interesting things in this story, what is of most interest for this particular study is the “double” cross-dressing that takes place in this text. Though the wife is not cross-dressing when she claims to be a man dressed as a woman, she is pretending that she is. She also appears to be extremely convincing, as the inn keeper then provides her with “proper” clothes.²⁰¹ The text does not go into great detail as to how she convinces the inn keeper that she is indeed male. It is possible that her knightly possessions would have already been an indicator that she has male tendencies. When she is abandoned by her husband she finds herself with possessions that are only valuable to a knight.²⁰² The hawk, hounds, belt, and horse that she won from the knight she was unfaithful with were never intended to be female possessions, as the wife did not win them for herself but for her husband.²⁰³ The only thing she needs to fully be seen as male would be knightly attire, which she is able to obtain through this faux cross-dressing. It is only then that she is able to actually cross-dress, becoming a male and adopting the persona of Heinrich. By doing this, the wife also recognizes that cross-dressing can be difficult and requires more than just clothes. She does not just go and obtain male clothing in order to cross-dress, despite having money available to her. Instead, she must enlist the help of an inn-keeper. For her this requires trickery, sending everyone that knows her away so that she can deceive the inn keeper into giving her clothes. She also enlists his help so that she can hire a

²⁰¹ Classen, Albrecht. P. 7.

²⁰² Ribaj, Brikena. “Economics of Virtue in Dietrich von der Glezze’s *der borte: A Wife Errant and a Husband Caught*” in *Neophilologus* (2009) 93:647–657. P. 652.

²⁰³ *Ibid.* P. 11.

knightly entourage that will also help her pass as a male. Ulrich von Liechtenstein never had this issue, as he simply went off and had his female clothes made, and was able to hire all new servants himself that did not previously know him. The wife's faux cross-dressing allows her to get the resources that she needs in order to succeed, and she is therefore able to continue with her quest to get her husband back.

The wife's faux cross-dressing is also of interest in that she has two things working against her in her attempt to appear to be a cross-dressing man, but she finds a way around them. First, she approaches the fact that she does not appear strong like regular men. She addresses this by pointing it out to the inn-keeper herself. "Ich bin ein ritter und niht ein wip:/ aleine schinet mir kranc der lip,/ ich han doch sterke hart evil,/ swenne ot ich si uben wil."²⁰⁴ [I am a knight, and not a woman, even though my body seems to be weak. I have much strength if I want to show it.]²⁰⁵ She recognizes her physical limitations that are obvious, even later when she is in knightly dress, and so she does not try to hide it but instead draws attention to it. Later, when she is preparing to show off to her husband by jousting against a strong knight, she is advised against her actions due to her physical limitations. "Er ist starc und ir niht,/ ir sit gegen im enwiht."²⁰⁶ [[The Briton] is strong, whereas you are not; you are not a match for him.]²⁰⁷ Some of the physical attributes of her feminine character are still apparent despite her trickery and her cross-dressing, but she is able to find ways around them. To the inn-keeper she claims that while she appears weak, she still has great strength. To her husband, she uses her knightly possessions to show her strength, since her horse is so swift that she cannot be unhorsed despite her

²⁰⁴ Meyer, Otto Richard. *Der Borte des Dietrich von der Glezze*. Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1915. P. 96 lines 471-4.

²⁰⁵ Classen, Albrecht. P. 7.

²⁰⁶ Meyer, Otto Richard. P. 102. Lines 633-4.

²⁰⁷ Classen, Albrecht. P. 9.

weaknesses. The second thing in her appearance that works against her is her long hair. She approaches the inn-keeper while still having long hair. However, she must have recognized that this works against her disguise since, after she acquires her knightly attire, she promptly cuts off her hair.²⁰⁸ This absence of hair makes it work towards her disguise when she encounters her husband, but she also makes sure to appear to the inn-keeper as well once her hair is cut, in what could be seen as again proving to him that she is a man. The text mentions that “we wi wol ir daz stat!”²⁰⁹ [oh, how [her male clothing] fitted her so well.]²¹⁰ The wife recognizes what makes her appear to be a woman, and she makes sure to address it directly while in disguise, and her confidence allows her to become more convincing.

The wife’s manly clothes are also given special attention in the text at the time when she is executing her most convincing trial, defeating a knight that has already defeated Conrat. The clothes and armour that she has acquired make her appear to be a very worthy and honourable knight:

Sin harnasch schein als ein glas,/ geschuhet er in di hosen was,/ di waren cleaner ringe,/ vil gut sin hurtelinge,/ di mahte rot der tracken blut./ Sin schivire waren gut/ mit gold uber gozzen/ Uf der huf gedozzen/ lac ein sidin huffenir./ Von blankeit ein spaldenir/ zirte im den lip wol./ Sin plate was gesteines vol;/ sin arm heten spozenir/ bedecked unde muzzenir,/ sir helm dar uf ein zimir gut,/ enfloriret mit des meien blut./ Er furte ein swert kurlich,/ sin vazzel der was wunderlich,/ er was mit golde durchslagen./ Von dem borten wil ich sagen,/ der sin gurtel solde sin,/ der schirmte in vor aller pin./ Sin Wafenroc was grune var,/ von guldinen rosen clar./ Er furte ein sper in der hant,/ guldin was des schildes rant,/ da miten inne ein lilie wiz./ Des vil guten meisters vliz/ zirt harte wol daz lankenir./ Von golde was daz testir,/ daz lankenir was grune var,/ dar uf von golde rosen clar./ Von des gesmides ringen/ ginc daz ros clingen,/ streben unde ringen/ begonde iz unde springen./ Iz grein, do iz den schal vernam.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Ibid. P. 8.

²⁰⁹ Meyer, Otto Richard. P. 97.

²¹⁰ Classen, Albrecht. P. 8.

²¹¹ Meyer, Otto Richard. Pp. 103-4, lines 639-75.

[His armor gleamed like glass, and he was also protected by iron leggings, which consisted of tiny rings. His leg covers were of very good quality and red because of dragon's blood. His sleeves were strong, decorated with gold. Around his hip he had wound a silk cloth. A light gleaming vest gave him a good appearance. His breast plate was covered with gems; his arms were protected by metal tubes. He wore a helmet with an excellent decoration, covered with flowers in the color of the month of May. He had an extraordinary sword with a most unusual holder interlaced with gold. Now let me tell you of the belt which protected him of all suffering. His vest over the armor was green, embellished with roses in gold color. In the one hand he held a spear, and in the other a shield which had a rim of gold. In the middle there was painted a white lily. An artist craftsman had made the saddle blanket. The head cover for the horse was in gold, and the saddle blanket was green, embellished with brilliant roses in gold. Because of the precious rings the horse created clinking noise. It urged forward and began to jump. It neighed loudly²¹² when it heard the sound of trumpets.]²¹³

Her armour is full of gold and gems, which would have been worn by only the best knights. The importance of green and gold is very prevalent in this description, which references the wife's youth, as well as the extravagance of her armour.²¹⁴ All of her armour is expensive and well made, which is also indicated by the fact that an "artist craftsman" made her saddle blanket, and her leg coverings were red because of "dragon's blood". It is not just her elaborate armour but also her weapons that are mentioned. She has a spear as well as a sword, which are very masculine weapons, and she is able to use them all successfully. The author pays special attention to the fact that she is wearing her magical belt, which would explain her ability to dominate on the tournament field and against the Briton despite being a woman, but the other description of her clothing accentuates how successful the wife is at pretending to be Heinrich, as

²¹² This particular description is very close to the book of Job, enough to be able to argue for the description of the horse being Biblical. The relevant passage is from Job 39: "Do you make him leap like a locust . . . He cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet. When the trumpet sounds he says, 'Aha!'"

²¹³ Classen, Albrecht. Pp. 9-10.

²¹⁴ Green was a colour that was associated with young unmarried people, either male or female. It also refers to knights who are in pursuit of courtly love, which is also emphasized by the description of flowers in "the colour of the month of May". May was the month in medieval literature that signalled courtly love. This could refer the wife's attempt to pretend to be a homosexual knight and woo her husband, or it could refer back to her tryst with the knight, which happened in the month of May. The idea that it refers back to her adultery with the knight could also be strengthened by the use of rose imagery on her armour, as roses were also described during her time with the other knight.

her armour and her equipment are the finest quality that would have been worthy of only a good knight, which would make her onlookers seriously doubt her true identity as a woman.

The importance of mockery in this text is also of interest and speaks more for the text having elements of the humorous as well as the moral. The wife in this tale is able to mock two knights, the first knight who loses his possessions and her own husband who is willing to lose his honour. With the first knight, immediately after they have sex, she chides him for his stupidity. “Ir ensit niht wol gamut,/ daz ir so torlich uwer gut/ habt geworfen zu verlust/ durch einen cleinen wollust.”²¹⁵ [You are out of your mind that you throw away so foolishly your properties for so little joy.]²¹⁶ The knight disagrees with her, but after he leaves he is full of sadness, proving the lady right to mock him. Later, when she gains the upper hand with her husband, she mocks him for his lack of judgement as well as his inability to barter.

Weiz Got,/ ir sit worden mir ein spot!/ Welt ir nu ein ketzer sin/ durch hunde und den habich min?/ Wil untugenthafter lip, ich bin uwer elich wip. . . /Nu welt ire in ketzer sin/ vil gerne durch den habich min/ und rumt ir vor mir di lant./ Ir habt uch selben geschant! Daz ich tet, daz was menschlich;/ so woldet ir unkristenlich/ vil gerne haben nu getan./ Ir sit ein unreiner man,/ daz ir durch di minsten gabe zwo, uwer ere woldet also/ haben gar verlor.²¹⁷

[By God, what a loser you are! Are you willing to turn into a heretic in exchange for the dogs and my goshawk? You are a man without virtues! I am your wife in marriage . . . Now you are very willing to turn into an heretic in order to win my goshawk, whereas you had left me alone at home. You have put shame on yourself! The wrongdoing that I committed was human frailty, whereas it was a crime against Christianity what you would have done voluntarily. You are a corruptible man considering that you would have abandoned, just for two minuscule gifts, your honor. I tell you, I am furious about that.]²¹⁸

Her husband in this tale thought that he had the moral high ground, but with her trickery she is able to prove that not only is she justified in her actions of adultery, but if he would be in her

²¹⁵ Meyer, Otto Richard. P. 92.

²¹⁶ Classen, Albrecht. P. 6.

²¹⁷ Meyer, Otto Richard. Pp. 108-9, lines 775-805.

²¹⁸ Classen, Albrecht. P. 11.

position he would have done the same, though not as adequately. She refused to sell her honour for a lesser price, but her husband is willing to lose honour and religion for even less, despite being a man who is supposedly of nobler make than a woman. The wife uses her “human frailty” as a woman to justify her actions as well as her hard bargain for her chastity, and her husband cannot come up with an argument to refute her mockery because he has acted so basely as compared to his own wife who he was shunning. This is much like *Berengier* in that the wife shames the husband, but unlike the wife in *Berengier*, she does not mention the incident again in order to keep him in line, but uses it to reconcile herself to him. Both wives in these tales shame and mock their husbands and use it to allow them to remain married despite adultery.

It is again important to note “Heinrich’s” convincing behaviour as a man. The wife’s ability to deceive was already indicated in the text by her success in convincing the inn keeper that she was a male in female clothing. Once she is at the same court as her husband, she is also able to convince all those there that she is a man. Unlike *Berengier*, there is no indication that it is her position in the noble class that gives her the inbred ability to be a successful knight. Though she clearly understands chivalry and the importance of certain items, as was indicated when she recognized the special equipment for its ability to aid her husband, she only appears to be convincing as a successful knight because of her possession of this special equipment. However, using it and showing it off are integral to her plan. She needs her husband to notice, and she needs him to covet her equipment in order for her to redeem herself. Everything hinges on her “selling” of her special items, and in order to do that she needs to convince everyone that she succeeds because of them, but not clue them in to her true sex. She uses them to make herself convincing as a knight, which then lets her gain her husband’s friendship, and then she uses them to maneuver her husband into an embarrassing situation so that she can prove that what she did

was more honourable than his actions. In the medieval mindset, “women who transgressed the expectations for their gender . . . became deviants and the same was true for men”.²¹⁹ The wife was expected to remain chaste, and when she didn’t she became a deviant to what she was expected to be, and the only way out to her was to make her husband a deviant as well. Her husband refused to listen to her explanation on her infidelity beforehand, so the wife creates this elaborate scheme to put him in the exact same situation, and the only way to do so is to appear male. Much has been said by modern readers of this medieval text about the homosexuality in this scene, but instead of speaking for Conrat’s possible homosexuality, I believe that it instead speaks for his desire for these items as well as his wife’s careful maneuvering in order to justify her actions to her husband and allow her back into his good graces. Conrat’s willingness to commit a same-sex act does not speak for his homosexuality, but instead speaks of his lust for Heinrich’s possessions.²²⁰

The use of gender in this text has been debated back and forth by a number of scholars who question whether it can be seen as a homosexual text or as a highly heterosexual text. Brikena Ribaj brings up many different views of these issues in her article, but believes that there is some modern interpretation being forced onto a medieval text. She mentions how Martin Blum has commented on the lack of scholarship on the text and how he believes it is due to the queerness of the subject matter. He goes on to say that people have attempted to tone down the homosexuality.²²¹ Ribaj disagrees with this interpretation, but rather looks at the text as being subject to modern interpretations when it should be approached with medieval mindsets, more specifically the idea of homosociality. She points out that this text was written in a society that

²¹⁹ Karras, Ruth Mazo. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*. New York: Routledge, 2005. P. 5

²²⁰ Ribaj, Brikena. P. 655.

²²¹ Ibid. P. 650.

valued and sought out male companionship and camaraderie, as well as a time in which homosexuality was not yet defined.²²² Ribaj instead focuses on what she sees as a very important but ignored part of the text; trying to obtain material objects through “commoditized sex”.²²³ Both a man and a woman in this text are willing to give sexual favours in order to obtain particular possessions. Ribaj also argues that even when pretending to be a male, the wife is still in the act of prostitution when she is encouraging her husband to offer a homosexual sex act, as she is pretending to be using this sex as currency. Therefore the text is not about homosexuality per se, but more about the intense desire to obtain special material objects, and how far past the law and social etiquette the characters are willing to go in order to obtain their desires.

The lack of names for the wives in both of these texts is odd, in that the wives do not have a name attributed to them unless they are cross-dressed. In *Berengier*, the wife remains nameless, but references herself as Berengier, creating a name for a male persona of herself. She only invokes it when she wants to control her husband, and does not have to deceive others with this fake version of herself. The wife in *Der Borte*, however, uses the name in an entire court and remains cross-dressed for a longer period, also adding a place or origin in order to add to her male version. Her female version is not important enough to receive a name, like her husband who is named at his first appearance. Instead, she is always referred to as the wife of Conrat. When she masquerades as a male, a name is needed and is an important part of her disguise. In *Berengier*, the name removes any doubts in the husband’s mind as to whether what is before him is a normal knight, since the name references what he sees. In *Der Borte*, the fake name adds legitimacy and also links the wife to her husband, as Conrat sees her as an outsider like himself which gains a kind of friendship between the two of them. The names for the fake male

²²² Ribaj, Brikena. P. 651.

²²³ Ibid. P. 651.

personalities that are invented in medieval texts prove important, both in these and in the two texts which will be studied in the next section, *Le Roman de Silence* and *Yde et Olive*.

These two tales are a more light-hearted approach to female cross-dressing, despite having serious subjects as part of the plot. Adultery and same-sex encounters are things that would have been very serious to the medieval audience, but these two texts approach resolution to these topics with elaborate tricks and the quick thinking of two wives to shame their husbands in order to achieve their ends. Though the wife in *Berengier* does not respect her husband, in *Der Borte* the wife genuinely wants to be reconciled, but she still humiliates her husband in order to achieve this. These two incidences of shaming occur in private between just the wife and the husband, but while in *Der Borte* the husband is let in on the wife's secret identity, in *Berengier* the husband is not and remains under the dominance of his wife because of his fear of the elusive Berengier au Long Cul. The joke in both of these texts is the fact that these two women are able to rub their husbands' noses in their own mistakes and better their marriage through trickery, instead of trickery being the reason that their marriage fails. They play a trick on their husbands, but the trick gives them the marriage that they wanted, and they are able to resolve their problems by becoming male and creating a position of dominance for themselves in which they are able to remedy their problems. This is something that both *Silence* and *Yde* attempt to do in the following texts, but they cannot achieve resolution despite their male personas without outside help, unlike the wives in these two texts.

Chapter 5

Serious Female Cross-dressing Knights

These stories of women cross-dressing, while they vary in tone, also vary in how much time is spent with cross-dressing. While Ulrich von Liechtenstein cross-dressed for a number of weeks, this pales in comparison to the years that some women in medieval literature spent as cross-dressed men. The stories that deal with a woman cross-dressing for a number of years also tend to lean more towards the serious and philosophical side, making them different from the stories of men and women cross-dressing that have already been looked at. In the stories of transvestite saints such as Marina and Pelagia, women spent lifetimes as men, hiding under a tonsure and a monk's robe until their death. It was also a very common theme for women to cross-dress in order to avoid persecution and suffering. The Church was a sanctuary for these women who pretended to be monks, but the male dress itself was a sanctuary to a number of literary characters who spent years as men in order to escape their fates and ultimately to get ahead in life. Two accounts that offer similar plots but very different outcomes can be found in two Old French medieval texts. *Yde et Olive* is the earlier text, as it is a 12th century "chanson de geste" in Old French which was later worked into prose,²²⁴ a drama entitled "Miracle de la fille d'un roy", and a Middle English adaption in the 16th century.²²⁵ *Le Roman de Silence* is a later romance, written in the 13th century in Old French.²²⁶ Both texts have the main plot of the female protagonist cross-dressing as a man throughout the story, and as seen by the endings and

²²⁴ These manuscripts are kept at the Biblioteque Municipale of Tours and the Biblioteque Nationale.

²²⁵ *The Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux*, was done in English by Sir John Bouchier, Lord Berners, and printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1534.

²²⁶ This manuscript is kept in the University of Natttingham at the Wollaton Library Collection.

the way that the authors approach the cross-dressing itself, they reveal both what was seen as masculine attributes at the time, as well as how women who cross-dressed were viewed.

Women, both in literature and in reality, cross-dressed for a number of reasons. For some, particularly the transvestite saints, cross-dressing was a way to be closer to God as well as preserving their chastity. In literature, women commonly cross-dressed in order to avoid persecution, which will be seen in *Yde et Olive* and *Le Roman de Silence*. These subjects are all quite serious, and may account for why these narratives are approached by their narrators more somberly than tales in which a wife is merely trying to reconcile herself to a wayward husband. The transvestite saints in particular play a major role in these tales, as their influence can be seen in the plot of both *Roman de Silence* and *Yde et Olive*. The stories of these, particularly Saint Pelagia and Saint Marina, have a similar plot. In both, the girls pretend to be a man and seek refuge in a monastery. They are so convincing as men that they are accused of impregnating women, and they care for the children until their deaths when it is discovered that there was no way that these children were theirs. Some of these stories, particularly the vita of Hildegund von Schönau are believed by scholars to at least have some historical basis.²²⁷ The fact that these transvestite saints were acting as they did to better themselves or to seek refuge from God made them acceptable and therefore these characters became worthy of being allowed to be viewed as saints by the Church.²²⁸ It is for similar reasons that cross-dressing literary heroines, such as Silence and Yde, are also admired by the characters around them, due to overcoming persecution and remaining virtuous.

²²⁷ Hotchkiss, Valerie. P. 7.

²²⁸ Both Marina and Pelagia are two saints that are present in the *Golden Legend*, showing up as a few of the female transvestite saints that are present.

Le Roman de Silence

Le Roman de Silence is a late 13th century Old French romance that exists in only one manuscript, which remained relatively unstudied until the mid-20th century.²²⁹ This might be due to its lone manuscript, or the fact that though the author, Heldris de Cornwall, is named, nothing else is known about him. Whatever the reason for the disinterest towards it after its discovery, *Roman de Silence* is a rich text that gives a unique perspective on the practice of cross-dressing. The text follows the story of Silence, who is born as an extraordinarily beautiful female. However, the king in the area has just declared that no female is allowed to inherit. Due to this Silence's parents fear that she will not be adequately provided for, and her father decides to announce her as a boy and dress her and train her as though she is male. This is no issue until Silence goes to the court of King Ebain, and Queen Eupheme falls in love with her. Silence refuses to reveal her true identity, much like in the stories of the transvestite saints, and must suffer exile and the task of finding Merlin because of the Queen's affections and her wrath at being denied. It is Merlin at the end who reveals everything, and once Silence is discovered as female and the Queen is discovered false as she has hidden a man in women's clothing in her entourage, Silence is married to King Ebain and allowed to inherit.

The reason behind this particular case of cross-dressing is very stressed throughout the text, and becomes an important theme. While at first, it is Silence's parents, Cador and Euphemie, that do anything in order to see their children inherit, later Silence picks up on the importance and goes to great lengths in order to cross-dress and therefore be assured of her birthright. Cador in particular is very adamant about the cross-dressing scheme, but his reasoning and his insistence begin a bit weak, as he assumes events that conveniently end up

²²⁹ It went undiscovered until 1911 when it was found in a box in a manor house. It went unpublished until 1972, a volume which is now out of print. However, in recent years it has started attracting more scholarly interest.

happening, but which he had no reason to believe would indeed happen. Immediately after Euphemie conceives, Cador begins to scheme. He believes that “women have lost much”²³⁰ due to not being able to inherit, and he seems convinced that the child will be a girl. “Devant le colp ai grant dotance, Biele, que nostre engendreüre/ Torte a femiele porteüre/²³¹ I fear greatly, fair one./ that our engendering might result in a female birth”.²³² His second assumption is that they will fail to later have a son:

Or en pensés, amie biele,/ Car nos ne poö[n]s pas avoir/ Se jamais poriens malle avoir./
Nos n’en somes pas aseür,/ Et se nos l’avons par eür/ Cesti ferons desvaleter./ Nus ne nos
en pora reter. De traïson, de felonie,/ De malvaistié, de vilonie./ Et se nos falons a oir
malle,/ Ceste ira al vent et al halle,/ A la froidure et a la bize.²³³

[Now consider, fair *amie*:/ we have no way of knowing/ whether we can ever have a boy./ We are not sure of it,/ but if by good fortune we do have one,/ we can change this one back again./ No one will be able to accuse us/ of treason, treachery,/ evil, or baseness./ If we fail to have a male heir,/ then this child will go out/ in wind and sun, in cold and damp./ We will have been prudent.]²³⁴

In making these assumptions, Cador comes off as very paranoid and convinced that the worst will happen and the inheritance that he leaves will not end up going to his own children.

Although his fears do end up coming true, Cador begins planning for having a girl quite early, and it works out conveniently to the plot of the story. Euphemie also quite readily agrees to his plot even before knowing whether it is a girl, and they go to great lengths to make their offspring into a man.

²³⁰ Heldris of Cornwall. *Le Roman de Silence*. Translated by Regina Psaki. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1991. P. 47. All English quotations will be taken from this edition, as it is the English translation that I have been the most familiar with. Sarah Roche-Mahdi’s English translation is also quite accurate.

²³¹ All original French quotations are taken from Sarah Roche-Mahdi’s edition of *Silence*. East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992. P. 80.

²³² Psaki, Regina. P. 47.

²³³ Roche- Mahdi, Sarah. P. 96, lines 2042-53.

²³⁴ Psaki, Regina. P. 57.

According to the text, they have their work cut out for them, as Silence is born as an exceptionally beautiful female. All of Nature's skill goes into creating Silence.

Nature I mist s'ententiön./ Li matere est et biele et pure./ Ainc de mellor n'ovra Nature . .
./Cho dist Nature l'engignose/ Ki en s'ovraigne est merveilleuse:/ "Ainc mais nen endurai a
prendre. Ceste matere, ne despendre: Or la prendrai house ma mescine . . ./ A son secré va,
si descuevre. . ./ Et Nature en a une aërse./ Ainc mais user ne l'endura./ Nature quanque a
fait jura/ Qu'or a d'ovrer moult bon talent./ Prist cele forme, porta l'ent,/ Va cele part a
entençon/ U doit ovrer, commence en son:/ Biel cief fait, bloie kievature/ Ki luisent cler
par nuit obscure./ La kavelure recercelle;/ De la greve dusque a l'orelle/ Com une ligne
droit descent/ Sique ses poins ne se desment./ La kavelure al cief li serre:/ Jan'estevra la
greve querre,/ Ne al pinier ne al trecier,/ Car Nature iert al redrecier./ Les orelles li fait
petites/ Nature, ki les a escrites,/ Les sorcils bruns et bien seöir,/ Nul hom ne puet si bials
veöir . . . / Don't part l'entruel/ De son polcier si bielement,/ Et don't li fait isnielement/
Plain volt, et face bien retraite,/ Et la color si bien refaite. . ./ Atant la face li bresille,/ Et
com plus croistra la puciele,/ Et li colors en la masciele./ La bouce escrist, fait l'overture/
Petite, et levres a mesure,/ Sor le menton les dens serrés./ Ja nul sib el volt ne verrés./
Apriés li fait col blanc et lonc,/ Voltice espaulé par selonc,/ Et les bras li fait sit res drois,/
Les mains petites, lons les doins,/ Le pis bien fait, graisles les flans,/ Miols faite ne vit sers
ne frans./ Et les hances si fait voltices,/ Les cuisses moles et faitices./ Les janbes droites fist
Nature,/ Et pies et ortals a mesure./ Que vos feroie huimais alonge?/ Vos le tenrés puet
s'estre a songe./ Ainc belizors voir ne vesqui/ De li el monde, ne nasqui,/ Al plus droit que
jo puis esmer.²³⁵

[Nature put all her skill into her./ The material was both fine and pure:/ Nature never worked
with better. . ./ Thus spoke Nature the artful,/ who is wondrous in her workings:/ "I shall never
try to take/ this material, or use it:/ I will make my maiden from it . . ./ Occasionally I must
create something perfect/ . . . Nature had one [mold] set aside,/ which she had never allowed
herself to use./ But now, whatever else she had made, Nature swore/ that she had a great desire
to create./ She took the form, brought it in,/ and went to her workplace/ all intent, and began
with her/ beautiful head, making blonde tresses/ that would shine brightly even in a dark night./
She curled the hair/ from the part down to the ear,/ descending in a straight line/ so that her hair
would always be smooth./ She attached the hair to the head:/ the girl would never have to make
a part/ or a coiffure or a braid,/ for Nature had arranged it all./ Nature made her ears small,/
Nature who has inscribed them,/ the eyebrows dark and well-placed –/ no one had ever seen such
beautiful ones . . ./ Then she shaped the area between her eyes/ neatly with her thumb/ and then
quickly made/ her face for her, well-formed/ and her color beautifully done . . ./ She tinted her
face with red/ the more the maiden grows,/ and put color in her cheek;/ she inscribed the mouth,
made the opening/ small, and the lips to match,/ the teeth set even above the chin./ You will
never see such a beautiful face./ Then Nature made her neck long and white/ with gently curved
shoulders to fit,/ and made her arms very straight,/ with small hands and long fingers,/ a well-
formed bosom, slender hips./ There never lived anyone better-formed, serf or noble./ Her

²³⁵ Roche-Mahdi, Sarah. Pp. 88-92, lines 1864-1949.

haunches Nature made gently curved,/ her thighs soft and elegant./ Nature made her legs straight,/ and her feet and toes to match./ Whatever praise I could give her now,/ you might consider a dream./ Truly no fairer woman than she/ ever lived in this world, or was born,/ as far as I can tell.]²³⁶

Silence is created as the ultimate female form, with particular focus going to her head and face, both areas that would be exposed when dressed as a man. This is in line with the romance tradition of describing the heroine, but in this case this is a beautiful heroine destined to be a hero. Despite this great beauty, Silence hides her femininity for almost twenty years, being mistaken completely for a man. Male good looks in the medieval period, particularly of the youth, were not linked to the modern idea of rugged handsomeness, but more androgynous beauty could be idealized, which allows for Silence's feminine beauty to be accepted as male. This acceptance also shows the power of the male clothing, but it is not just that which makes Silence into a male. Just hearing the announcement that the child is male is enough to convince Cadour's subjects that the child is male and therefore "his" beauty is classed as male beauty. When Silence is baptized and the country's people hear the lie that the count spreads that the child is dying,²³⁷ they are particularly grieved since "they had heard it said that Our Lord had made him very beautiful".²³⁸ They are all convinced of the child's sex without the years of deception and training that Silence endures in order to convince others. Even when Silence is older, her beauty is still mistaken as masculine beauty. Silence is required to do masculine things and the text argues that this makes even her appearance more masculine. "Sel mainne plus sovent et halle/ Par cho quell violt faire plus malle."²³⁹ [The seneschal] took him most often out in the sun, to make him look more like a boy.]²⁴⁰ The point was to make the skin appear

²³⁶ Psaki, Regina. Pp. 52-4.

²³⁷ See next paragraph.

²³⁸ Psaki, Regina. P. 59.

²³⁹ Roche-Mahdi, Sarah. P. 116.

²⁴⁰ Psaki, Regina. P. 68.

coarse after being outdoors in the elements, as well as tanned from the sun. It appears to be these small details as well as the clothing that somehow make the most beautiful woman created into a man.

Silence's cross-dressing, though not as detailed as Ulrich von Liechtenstein's account, shows some particular details about clothing. The deception begins immediately after her birth. Though clothes were universally swaddling clothes for infants, at the baptism it appears that the child usually appears nude, as Silence's parents and her nurse go to great lengths to find a way in which she can be baptised while clothed. So they create a lie to ensure that the priest cannot understand the secret. They claim that the child is dying, and to remove the cloth tied around his loins will kill the child. While it is just a cloth and not a particular item of clothing, this is still a case in which clothes are used to deceive in order to make Silence into a man. Silence must be christened with a male name, and in order for her future cross-dressing to be successful, she must have a name that signals her to be male. The priest rushes the baptism in order to save the child, and allows Silence to be baptised without her true sex being discovered. In this instance, swaddling clothes can be used to make a man, and the child becomes "Silentius", a male.

When Silence is old enough to wear clothes, she is immediately put into men's fashions, made to her size. Though children's fashions were unisex until a certain age,²⁴¹ Silence is dressed immediately as a male. This is done even though Silence is raised outside of civilization.²⁴² The count and countess arrange for her to grow up outside of court in a place specially arranged for her. When Silence becomes older she wants to rebel against her particular clothing and lists what it is that she finds so abhorrent. "Jo n voel pas moi estalcier,/ Fendre mes

²⁴¹ See *Dress in the Middle Ages* as translated by Caroline Beamish, particularly Chapter 7. Pp. 103-107 deal with the cycles of life and the changing of clothing as a medieval child aged.

²⁴² Psaki, Regina. Pp. 59-60.

dras, braies calcier,/ Ne mais vivre a fuer de garçon,/ Prendre mon coivre, et mon arçon. . ./ Se
me desful par aventure/ Don't ai paor de ma nature."²⁴³ [I do not want to cut my hair short,/
disguise my clothing, wear breeches,/ nor live like a boy any more,/ hunting with bow and quiver
. . ./ if my garment opens by chance/ I'm afraid my sex will show.]²⁴⁴ The clothes that she wears
scare Silence, because she doesn't know if she will be able to keep her secret through her
clothes. When she becomes older, her cross-dressing becomes more specifically geared towards
her prowess as a knight. Her armour is specifically mentioned a few times after she is knighted.
She is depicted as jousting without a mantle²⁴⁵ when King Ebain has need of knights and Silence
comes to court. Heldris spends a great deal of time dwelling on Silence and her thirty knights
from France that she obtains near the end of the romance:

Desor un ganbizon de soie/ Giete l'obierc malié menu/ que li rois de France ot tenu/ En tel
cierté qu'il nel donast/ Por rien c'on li abandonast./ Legiers est, ne puet faire falle./ Calces
de meïsmes la malle/ Li lacent qui moult bones sunt./ si esporon a proisier funt:/ De fin or
sunt bien avenant,/ Se li fremerent maintenant./ Soi sien valet de gregnor los/ Li gietent
donc l'obierc el dos./ Sa bone espee a donques çainte/ C;uns siens vallés li a atainnte./ Et
maintenant ainz qu'il s'en alle/ Li ont fremee la ventaille./ Moult tost li ont puis lacié
l'elme:/ Nen a si bon en nul roialme./ Pieres I a et cercle d'or/ Ki valent bien tolt un
tressor. . . / Li auferrans est amenés . . . / Armé sunt li.xxx. François/ Alsi tost com il, u
ançois,/ Et montent o lor avoé . . . / Li François sunt bien a controï./ Bien pert qu'il vienent
de bon roi./ Il ont tramis estor furnish,/ Des obiers, des elmes burnis,. Et des escus a l'or
d'Espagne/ Don't resplendist tolte la plagne.²⁴⁶

[Over a gambeson of silk/ he threw a small enamelled hauberk/ which the King of France loved
so dearly/ that he wouldn't have given it away/ for anything anyone could offer him./ It was
light, and could not fail./ They laced leggings of the same mail/ onto him, which were very
good./ His spurs were most valuable,/ being of beautiful fine gold./ Two of his squires, of great
merit,/ attached them to him./ They threw the hauberk on his back./ He then girded on his good
sword/ which one of his squires brought to him;/ just before he left/ they closed his ventail./
Then they quickly laced up his helm;/ there was not a better one in any kingdom./ It had
precious stones and a gold circlet/ which were worth a treasure . . ./ there was a ruby in the nasal
. . ./ the thirty Frenchmen were armed/ as soon as he, if not sooner,/ and mounted with their

²⁴³ Roche-Mahdi, Sarah. P. 120, lines 2559-72.

²⁴⁴ Psaki, Regina. P. 70.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. P. 139.

²⁴⁶ Roche-Mahdi, Sarah. Pp. 250-2, lines 5336-92.

leader . . . / the French were well organized;/ it was clear that they came from a good king./ They came prepared for pitched battle,/ with hauberks, burnished helms,/ and shields of gold from Spain,/ which made the entire plain glitter.]²⁴⁷

Though by the description of this clothing it is uniquely valuable and therefore worthy of note, it is also distinctly male, and once she is a knight, Silence wears these symbols of knights, the good armour complete with excellent weapons. It also shows her prowess at battle as these weapons were given to her because of the French king's love for her as a knight. Silence and her entourage are good knights, and though the gold and ornamentation of their weapons seem to be more for show, in reality they are excellently made. Their ability to wield such expensive and important weapons show these to be knights worthy of such arms.

Her armour as described here, though keeping with the French medieval tradition of showing grandeur displays of wealth when describing armour,²⁴⁸ goes directly against church criticism. As was discussed above,²⁴⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux spoke out against the excessive ornamentation of knights. He mentions specifically the imprudence of impressive yet non-functional helmets and golden shields, condemning them in his list of effeminate clothing. Yet here, Silence and her fellow knights dress in this particular way. I would argue that this is a good example of medieval literature not representing real medieval society. If Heldris was dealing with the rules of society, he would never risk having his main character, who has fought to remain hidden as a man for decades, dress in something associated with the feminine. It would not make sense for his story. However, Silence does wear this kind of clothing, and therefore this appears to be an imaginary society in which these displays of wealth were not

²⁴⁷ Psaki, Regina. P. 144-5.

²⁴⁸ A good example of this is the famous *Song of Roland* in which the armour of the Saracens and the special armour of important knights such as Roland and Charlemagne are very excessive and ornate. Roland even has holy relics in his sword, and gold and gems are often included in descriptions of the Frenchmen's weapons.

²⁴⁹ See Chapter 1 of this thesis, pp. 28, 30-1.

effeminate but rather a way of showing importance. Silence is a proficient knight, and because of this she wins favour with the King of France and deserves the special armour that she wears. These gifts from a king are the ultimate proof of her success, not of any shards of femininity and the love of excess adornment. Bernard of Clairvaux's criticism is not taken into account, as the dressing of Silence in beautiful gold and gem-encrusted armour is not viewed as feminine as Bernard argues it should be.

Silence's cross-dressing goes beyond her clothes, and Heldris includes other reasons that Silence is successfully able to masquerade as a man. As discussed earlier, she was taken out in the sun in order to give her colour and make her appear more like a man. This is done so successfully that even after she is no longer cross-dressing she still bears the marks of the masculine for three days afterwards:

D'illuec al tierc jor que Nature/ Ot recovree sa droiture/ Si prist nature a repolir/ Par tolt le cors et a tolr/ Tolt quanque ot sor le cors de malle./ Ainc n'I lassa nes point de halle:/ Remariä lués en son vis/ Assisement le roze al lis.²⁵⁰

[On the third day after Nature/ had regained her right/ she began to re-embellish/ Silence's whole body, and to remove/ everything masculine about her./ She left no bit of weathered skin,/ and she remarried together/ the rose and the lily, beautifully.]²⁵¹

There is more to Silence's cross-dressing than just her clothing. Her upbringing and her actions made her as close to a male as a female could be. Her fear of losing her inheritance made her committed to her disguise, even as a child.

Ses cuers meïsmes bien l'escole/ Al deguerpir maniere fole./ Por cho a il²⁵² lassor assés/ Et quant il ot. Xi. Ans passes/ N'I a un seul de lui plus maistre./ Quant il joint a la palaistre,/ A boholder, n'a lescremir,/ Il seus fait tols sees pers fremir.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Roche-Mahdi, Sarah. P. 312, lines 6669-76.

²⁵¹ Psaki, Regina. P. 179.

²⁵² For a discussion of the author's use of male pronouns when referring to his heroine, see pp. 111-12.

²⁵³ Roche-Mahdi, Sarah. P. 116, lines 2489-96.

[The fact that he feared to lose his birthright/ made him stick even closer to wisdom./ His own heart taught him/ to avoid foolish behaviour./ Thus he had sufficient inclination,/ and by the time he was eleven/, there was no one more adept than he;/ when they played at jousting,/ at tilting, or at swords,/ he alone made all his peers tremble.]²⁵⁴

Silence is aware of her need to be convincing in her disguise, and uses her abilities to disguise herself expertly. At one point in the text, she decides to try to learn how to play instruments and wants to run away with minstrels. She uses her ability to disguise herself to escape from her mother and father, and proves her expertise by colouring her face to make her appear low-born.²⁵⁵ Using a special root, she makes her already tanned face even darker, which is seen as evidence that she is of a lower class by the minstrels that she is deceiving. She also realizes the importance of taking the disguise farther than the physical and changes her name to Malductus.²⁵⁶ The narrator never gives a reason for this particular name choice, but she uses this in order to trick those around her from recognizing her, in case they have heard of the count's son, Silence.²⁵⁷ In doing this, Silence shows that she is more than aware of all the little details that go into changing her identity, even beyond her clothing, and she uses them constantly throughout the romance in order to be a male.

The idea of cross-dressing and how it is approached is problematic in this romance at times, as some characters see it positively and some view it negatively, while some go back and forth over its benefits. Cadour and Euphemie see it in a positive light, as they believe that this will protect their daughter and ensure that she remains safe and keeps her rightful inheritance. However, Silence struggles with it constantly. At twelve, she begins to question her role, and desires to be what she is. At no point does she ever stop cross-dressing because she recognizes

²⁵⁴ Psaki, Regina. P. 68.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. See pp.81 ff for Silence's disguise to the minstrels.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 87.

²⁵⁷ For a discussion on names in female instances of cross-dressing, see the conclusion of this thesis, p. 134-5.

the threat of the loss of her inheritance, but she still has doubts about whether what she is doing is good. She sees her cross-dressing as negative, calling it a “barbarous usage.”²⁵⁸ She then determines to be the woman that she is, until Nurture reminds Silence of what she will lose as a woman. It is here that Silence parrots what medieval society believed about gender. “Et voit que moils valt li us d’ome. Que l’us de feme, c’est la some . . . Quant as femes voel ester onis.”²⁵⁹ [. . . and saw that a man’s life is better/ than a woman’s, all things considered . . . I’d be shamed if I wanted to be like the women.]²⁶⁰ She sees being a man as more honourable, and this makes her keep her disguise. Though she still continues with her role as a man, she at this point does not seem to like it, though she convinces herself otherwise and by the end of the text is comfortable being a male. A few pages in the romance later, however, she is again attempting to salvage some parts of her femininity. When the minstrels come to court, she realizes that learning musical skills will aid her if she ever has to act as a woman.

Et tu iés ore si salvage,/ Ne sai a us de feme entendre,/ Alques t’esteveroit aprendre/ Don’t te seüsces contenir,/ Car tolt cho puet bien avenir./ Et se coze est par aventure/ Que si fais us longhes te dure,/ Bien sai, tu ieres chevaliers/ Puet se’estre coärs, u laniers,/ Car ainc ne vi feme maniere/ D’armes porter en tel maniere.²⁶¹

[You are now so wild that/ you know nothing about female behavior./ You should learn something/ about how you should behave,/ for all this could well come about./ And if it should happen/ that such a life should continue for long,/ you know well, you will be a knight;/ you might be a coward, or a poltroon,/ for I never saw a woman skilled/ at bearing arms in such a way.]²⁶²

Silence constantly doubts the benefits of her cross-dressing and is shrewd enough to have a back-up plan. After a certain point, she no longer falters in her resolve to cross-dress, but this is after she knows that she has skills as a minstrel as well. At the end, Silence even reveals that she no

²⁵⁸ Psaki, Regina. P. 70.

²⁵⁹ Roche-Mahdi, Sarah. P. 124, lines 2637-44.

²⁶⁰ Psaki, Regina. P. 72.

²⁶¹ Roche-Mahdi, Sarah. P. 132, lines 2834-44.

²⁶² Psaki, Regina. Pp. 77-8.

longer has any intention of being a woman ever again. When Merlin has been captured and is about to reveal her true identity, she mentions that she will lose all her honour, as she “had thought to forsake the ways of women forever”.²⁶³ At the beginning there is a lot of back and forth for Silence about whether her cross-dressing is positive or negative, but by the end she has been living the lie so effectively that she sees no point to becoming a woman, since she has succeeded so well as a knight. Ironically, it is then that she is found out and begins to play the role of her true sex.

At the end of the romance, the idea of cross-dressing as positive as viewed by those who have been deceived comes into question, and at the ending Heldris introduces a second cross-dressing character to be used in contrast to Silence. Merlin is brought in at the request of the king,²⁶⁴ and he sees through Silence’s and a nun’s cross-dressing in court and believes it to be a joke and cannot stop laughing. This is the first time that the nun is seen in the romance, and she proves to be very loud and outspoken until she realizes that her own little secret is going to be discovered because of Merlin. When Merlin finally explains his laughter, his words are harsh, even towards Silence. “Two of us, you should know, have shamed the other two of us, beneath a false and lying dress”.²⁶⁵ Merlin associates both Silence’s and the nun’s cross-dressing with shame because of how they have deceived their betters. He also says that Silence and the nun have “mocked” the king, which is also quite negative. Silence was cross-dressing to preserve herself and not as an affront to the king, while this nun is revealed to be a man that is having sex

²⁶³ Psaki, Regina. P. 174.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. P. 156. The Queen suggests that Silence be sent to find Merlin, since it has been rumoured that only a trick of a woman will catch him. She believes, since Silence is a man, that he will be forced to quest after Merlin his whole life. However, as Silence is secretly a woman, she is able to succeed, but this reveals her identity. As to how Merlin is caught, it is not explained in the text if he is caught because Silence is a woman, or by cooking skills, which could also be seen as a trick of a woman. Silence uses cooked meat as well as honey, milk and wine in order to confuse him and capture him.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 174.

with the Queen and is therefore actually mocking the king. The king treats both cases of cross-dressing harshly, again adding weight to the idea that cross-dressing is negative. He has both the nun and Silence stripped in public in his court. This would have been extremely shameful for Silence, who as a highborn woman should never be subjected to being forced to be nude in public.²⁶⁶ The nun is further punished by being executed. However, being disrobed in public is the extent of Silence's punishment. At the end, her cross-dressing achieves exactly what it was supposed to, but in a very different way than originally planned. The fact that this happens also speaks negatively for cross-dressing, as Silence's plans are not accomplished as she wanted, and it is only through her disrobing that she gets what she needed. Cross-dressing was the lie, but it was the truth that prevailed.

The intention behind cross-dressing also plays a major role in the Queen's and Silence's plots. Silence is pretending to be a man in order to keep her birthright. She is doing so in order to obey her parents, who have asked her to do this since birth. The Queen, meanwhile, is using cross-dressing in order to keep a man close to her for sex. She uses this to betray the king, whom she should obey. Due to this, the Queen is killed while Silence is just returned to her natural sex. Both are deceiving the King in particular, but Silence is excused. It is also of interest that the cross-dressing is attributed to the women, though it was never Silence's idea. It was Cador's idea, and he made his daughter into a man in order to deceive the king. Silence may have been the cross-dresser, but she was following her father's orders. However, she is always accused as the agent, though her good intentions and her success in being honourable seem to get

²⁶⁶ However, this ends up happening in several romances, so this might be adding in to the romance tradition. Enide is shown almost naked in front of the court by Erec, when he keeps her in a threadbare shift. See Chrétien de Troyes "Erec and Enide" in *Arthurian Romances*, translated by D.D.R. Owen, lines 393-410, 1353-1406, and 1552-87. In a similar fashion in *Lanval*, his fairy lover takes off her outer clothing in front of King Arthur's court in order to reveal all of her beauty. See Marie de France's "Lanval" in *Lais of Marie de France* lines 585-610.

her excused. The Queen, though her “nun” is also punished, is the one that is most obviously punished for her treachery. The nun is mercifully executed, while the Queen is drawn and quartered, a punishment for her treason against the king. Her intentions were extremely dishonourable, and she is doubly guilty when Silence’s cross-dressing further reveals her deceit, as she was also trying to seduce Silence. Therefore the cross-dressing in this romance, both what the Queen was involved with and when she was deceived, does not pay off for the Queen, and she clearly remains the villain of the piece and is punished for it, while Silence gains honour despite her cross-dressing.

Silence’s persecution at the hands of the Queen is what most closely associates her with the well-known saints Marina and Pelagia. Silence is accused of rape, while Marina and Pelagia are accused of seduction and fathering a child. These three characters have in common that they are accused of a crime that they physically could not have done, but refuse to give their irrefutable evidence in order to keep their sex a secret. Silence also endures hardships as a result of false accusations, but remains strong despite them, just as the two saints did. The similarities are quite clear, and this linking of Silence to saintly characters would have cemented the view that she is an ideal character. These two saints were both well-known and present in the *Golden Legend*, and I would argue that their stories could be a source for Heldris de Cornwall’s account of Silence’s sufferings on account of the Queen. Due to the fact that Silence is cross-dressing in order to right a wrong, and then that she refuses to succumb to hardships due to persecution, make her seem even more honourable. Unlike the saints, Silence is discovered before her death and is therefore able to reap rewards for her honourable behaviour within her own life, while the saints were respected after their deaths and were believed to be rewarded with spiritual benefits.

Though Silence is very vocal throughout the text, at the end of the romance it is not clear how she feels about now becoming a true woman for the first time in her life. When Merlin is getting ready to reveal her secret, she is extremely regretful of bringing him to court at the order of the king, as this will literally expose her as a woman.²⁶⁷ However, after she is revealed to be female, explains her intentions behind cross-dressing, and is married to the king, her voice falls silent. The narrator does not give any voice to her feelings once she is acting as a woman as compared to how it was to act as a man. She had at one point recognized that to be a man was more honourable, but once she is found out there is no question of her remaining in her masculine ways, since she has been assured of her inheritance. Heldris seems to believe that everything will be completely normal and Silence will have no trouble playing the part of a dutiful wife, despite her years as a man. The only response she gives at the end is that she desires to remain loyal to her king and do whatever he wishes. The king in turn is also less vocal of what he thinks of her now that she is a woman. He even decides to marry her before all traces of masculinity have worn off and she is revealed to be very beautiful. The wonder of the text, and therefore what Heldris dwells on, is Silence pretending to be a man. Once she reverts back to her true nature, her gender issues are no longer spectacular and therefore not worth noting. She is only a woman in the role of a woman. Neither Silence's opinions of being a female, nor her parents or the king's opinion, is revealed aside from the sense that all is now as it should be. Silence gains what every woman strives for, a good marriage. She achieved this acting as a man and without using her femininity, and we never get to truly see her using her femininity at the end.

²⁶⁷ Silence could not have known that the king would force her to strip in front of his court, and previous to bringing Merlin to the court, she did not realize that he was going to reveal her secret. It is only after he has been laughing and then begins to speak of the king being deceived that she realizes that her secret will be exposed.

The grammar in this text also adds to the idea of cross-dressing. Once Silence is in male clothes, she is always referred to as a male. Even her father, when speaking to her privately and knowing that she is female, refers to her as his “dear son”.²⁶⁸ Heldris also refers to her as either just a boy or later as growing into a “young man”.²⁶⁹ This emphasizes when Silence is acting as a male and when she is female, though it might seem inconsistent to the modern reader. In medieval texts, “writers and recipients focused more intently than we on the individual moment and its elaboration; second, as a consequence, they devoted less attention to overall consistency; their mode of perception may in fact have kept them from noticing the inconsistencies that often bother us.”²⁷⁰ Heldris might change Silence’s gender back and forth from male to female, but he is focusing on the individual crises that Silence is facing. In the passages where the Queen tries to seduce Silence, Heldris refers more to her femininity and points out regularly that the Queen can never get what she wants since Silence is a female.²⁷¹ Likewise, the nun is always referred to as female, even after Merlin points her out as a male. As long as he wears women’s clothes, the nun is still perceived as female in the text. Of course, this is at first done to hide the nun’s secret so as not to give away the ending of the text. Silence in contrast has been referred to as male even while known by certain characters to be female, by her father in private and by the narrator. This use of pronouns referring to what sex a character is masquerading as then continues with the introduction of the second cross-dressed character, the nun. This way of referring to Silence emphasizes her masculinity, but also her plight as at crisis she is still referred

²⁶⁸ Psaki, Regina. P. 67.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 86.

²⁷⁰ Schultz, James. “The coherence of Middle High German Narrative” in *Medieval German Literature: Proceedings from the 23rd International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo Michigan, May 5-8, 1988*. Ed. Albrecht Classen. Kümmerle Verlag Göttingen, 1989. P. 80.

²⁷¹ See Regina Psaki’s translation, particularly pp. 104-113. Not only does Heldris mention Silence’s “nature”, but the Queen also begins to think that Silence likes men.

to as the “boy who was a maiden”.²⁷² Particularly when the Queen is trying to seduce her, the narrator then draws on the fact that she is indeed a woman, but in areas when her sex is not in danger of being found out, she is simply referred to as male.

Some scholars have argued that the author’s play on Silence’s sex is a way to show an arbitrary gender distinction, playing with the significance of genitalia to determine sex when Silence can so easily be seen as male. In her introduction to her edition of *Le Roman de Silence*, Sarah Roche-Madhi mentions the rhetoric possibilities from the author’s “consistent use of grammatical inconsistency”.²⁷³ She argues that Heldris’ punning on Silence’s masculine and feminine name ending challenges the societal norms and emphasizes that they are masculine. Because of this, the fact that Silence can be both masculine and feminine at the same time demonstrates that woman in this text cannot be seen as minus of man.²⁷⁴ “The root is the same, the endings are grammatically (if not socially) equi-valent”.²⁷⁵ Roche-Madhi also points to the author’s constant reminders that there was little lacking for Silence to be a male. Valerie Hotchkiss also points out the fact that in most accounts of women in men’s clothing, the idea of true and perceived sex is always an issue in the text, and proves to be a difference from medieval views of gender as separate and unequal. Her book, *Clothes Make the Man*, argues that gender lines were blurred long before the modern era.²⁷⁶ She points out the author’s admission that “the body is nothing but another rough garment” as saying that sex can be performative.²⁷⁷ This is

²⁷² Psaki, Regina. P. 105.

²⁷³ Roche-Madhi, Sarah. P. xxi.

²⁷⁴ In the medieval view of women, women were not only inferior but they were lacking enough heat to be considered male. Therefore they were lacking something that men had to make them into men.

²⁷⁵ Roche-Madhi, Sarah. P. xxi.

²⁷⁶ Hotchkiss, Valerie. P. 9.

²⁷⁷ Ibid. P. 112.

similar to Judith Butler's ideas that sex becomes a cultural production.²⁷⁸ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler draw on Butler's ideas and apply it more towards the medieval period in their text *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*. They both see gender in the medieval period as a process of transformation, not frozen in being, since it is not useful in their opinion to explore gender in terms of stability, but rather to see it as "an unending process of its becoming, its stabilization, and its materialization."²⁷⁹ Angela Weisl, after studying the examples of gender changes in medieval literature, also sees the gendered body in medieval literature as malleable and permeable.²⁸⁰ Silence's gender then shows that what is seen as male and what is female is never fixed but constantly changing. *Le Roman de Silence* is seen by these modern scholars as a text that shows a very different viewpoint of how sex is determined, since Silence is able to be both male and female through her clothing and her performance. Roche-Madhi even goes so far as to question whether Heldris of Cornwall is actually a man or a female due to the ambiguity, in one of the footnotes in her text.²⁸¹ The text's ambiguity when it comes to the grammar and the masculine and feminine pronouns definitely blurs the lines between Silence's male and female attributes, and shows her as being male at the same time as female.

This romance in particular struggles constantly throughout the text with Silence's gender, making her at times more male and other times more female. She obeys the men in her life like a

²⁷⁸ Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge. 1993. Pp. 9-10.

²⁷⁹ Cohen, Jeremy Jerome and Bonnie Wheeler. *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1997. P. xii.

²⁸⁰ Weisl, Angela. "How to be a Man, Though Female: Changing Sex in Medieval Romance". *MFF*, vol. 45 no. 1, 2009: 110–137. P. 110.

²⁸¹ Roche-Madhi, Sarah. P. xi, fn. 2. I think that this argument is a stretch, but of course it cannot be proved decisively due to the lack of knowledge about the author. However, the author brings up negative opinions of women on separate occasions, even having the moral of the text being that a good woman stays silent, which does not point towards the author being female.

good woman was required to in the medieval period,²⁸² but she also rebels and does what she thinks best such as when she runs away with the minstrels. However, two advantages for Silence's successful cross-dressing are her support from her family as well as the fact that she is taught to cross-dress all her life. She does not have it thrust onto her suddenly, but is able to see what works and what doesn't, all the while being encouraged by her parents' blessing to continue as she has in order to be assured of her inheritance. Other women who cross-dressed did not have that luxury, as will be seen below on the discussion of *Yde et Olive*. Silence may have been trained to be the best male that she could, but her femininity was still always below the surface, and her gender issues could only be resolved with the reclaiming of her femininity and a reward for her troubles.

Yde et Olive

The version of *Yde et Olive* that will be studied here is found in the cycle of *Huon de Bordeaux*, and is a 13th-century chanson de geste, written in Old French.²⁸³ It has been relatively unstudied and has been published in only one edition in 1889 by Max Schweingel, and studied in a thesis in 1977 by Barbara Anne Brewka.²⁸⁴ Despite the lack of a current edition, scholars have begun to take notice of this text for its interesting subject matter. *Yde et Olive* follows the main heroine, Yde, who is an exceptionally beautiful girl. Her mother, Clarisse,²⁸⁵ dies in child birth,

²⁸² Hotchkiss, Valerie. P. 113.

²⁸³ *Yde et Olive* exists in four versions. The Old French versions are the poem that is studied here, a later prose edition, and a drama which will be mentioned briefly due to its different ending. The Middle English version is from the 16th century and follows the poem.

²⁸⁴ In this thesis I will be using Barbara Brewka's unpublished edition of the text, since it is a century more recent than Schweingel's. I will also be relying on the Middle English translation by John Bouchier as published in the Early English Text's Society, but with caution as it is a loose translation.

²⁸⁵ It is "Clairet" in the Middle English translation. All spellings of names will be taken from the Old French version, with a footnote about the Middle English spelling of the names.

and her father, King Florens,²⁸⁶ refuses to take another wife. However, he begins to notice Yde and decides to marry her and produce a male heir. Yde flees the incestuous advances of her father²⁸⁷ by getting the help of an elderly woman who obtains men's clothing from a sympathetic counsellor, Sorbarrés. Yde then leaves the castle as a man until she comes to Lombardy. She hears that men are needed to aid the emperor against the king of Castille, and offers herself as a squire to a German soldier. However, they leave late for Rome and are ambushed in a dark forest by Spaniards, who kill all the Germans. Yde kills three but is the last person standing, so she flees. She falls in with a gang of thieves, who attack her, but she wrestles the chief to the ground. She then kills five of them and escapes. She finally reaches the emperor of Rome, and he is impressed by her story and her fairness. Yde is charged with guarding the king's own daughter, Olive. Yde stays at the court and becomes loved by everyone there due to her honourable actions of serving. She is also seen as deeply religious, going to mass on a regular basis without fail.

Eventually, the king of Spain threatens the emperor of Rome, and he asks Yde's counsel. Yde asks for men and promises to defend the emperor and his land, and the emperor knights Yde and gives him good armour. Yde performs exceptionally well on the battlefield, killing the nephew of the king of Spain and nearly killing the king himself, taking him as prisoner. Because of Yde's prowess, Olive falls in love with her, not knowing she is a woman. The emperor rewards Yde, and when he wants to kill the king of Spain and Yde argues for mercy, the emperor listens. After these events, the emperor decides that there is nowhere a more worthy man than

²⁸⁶ It is "Florent" in the Middle English translation.

²⁸⁷ This was a common plot in many texts in medieval literature, but *Yde et Olive* also combines the use of cross-dressing in the tale. Often the incestuous relationship was avoided by the daughter's self-mutilation. See Elizabeth Archibald's text, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, particularly Chapter 4, "Fathers and Daughters", p. 145. She also has list of all the stories of flight from incestuous stories in her appendix from pp. 245.

Yde, and he bestows his daughter Olive in marriage to her. But Yde counsels the emperor against it due to her low standing, in an attempt to get out of the marriage. The emperor is insulted and Yde concedes to avoid his wrath. But she cries to God for help, worried that when she is discovered they will send her back to her father. She decides to do whatever God wants her, and marries Olive, but claims to be ill and though she sleeps in the same bed, refuses to touch Olive. Olive is very upset and tries to touch Yde, but Yde then reveals her secret. Unfortunately for them, they are overheard and the emperor is told, and he swears that if Yde is found to be a woman, he will kill both her and Olive. The emperor prepares a bath and demands that Yde bathe in his presence, but when she refuses and begs for mercy, he readies a fire for her. Yde prays to the Virgin Mary, and an angel commands the emperor to not hurt Yde, for Yde has been changed miraculously into a man and will bear a child with Olive. Furthermore, the emperor will die in eight days and Yde and Olive will rule. All this comes true, and their son, Croissant,²⁸⁸ is born.

This text has a number of similarities to *Le Roman de Silence*. In both texts, the cross-dressing is done for a noble purpose. Silence becomes a man in order to keep her rightful inheritance, and despite many hardships she maintains her disguise. Yde is also attempting to avoid evil, as she does not want the incestuous relationship that her father desires. The story of the incestuous father is common in medieval literature, and one of the common themes is that the daughter does not develop incestuous love for the father, and the father remains in complete control of the desire for a relationship.²⁸⁹ She fears being forced into sin, and so she must flee in order to do so. She is left with very little choice in the matter, as her father springs his desire on

²⁸⁸ The spelling is the same in both the English and French texts.

²⁸⁹ Archibald, Elizabeth. *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. See Ch. 4.

her very quickly and gives her only a small window in which to disappear.²⁹⁰ The only way out that she can see is through trickery, and because of her father's power she is unable to have any further help in her situation. Once she is out of her father's clutches, a series of developments force her to remain attired as a man. She flees without any help and therefore is a woman on her own in unknown areas. To reveal herself to be a woman would be putting herself at risk, and therefore she must hide behind her clothes in order to preserve herself. By the time she has reached Rome, she has created this persona that she can no longer disentangle herself from. This is further emphasized by the ending in that Yde cannot go back to being a woman, and due to divine intervention she never has to. The miracle of her becoming a man validates her behaviour and allows her to be viewed as the man that she was pretending to be.

Like Silence, Yde also has a fear of her clothes betraying her and revealing who she really is. She fears being exposed and does everything that she can in order to avoid it. She comes into a number of situations in which this is a possibility and does everything in her power to avoid being found out. The first major incident in which her threat of exposure is specifically mentioned is when she falls in with the thieves.²⁹¹ The threat of robbery includes the loss of her clothes, which would be a reasonable thing to steal in this situation. Clothing and materials, particularly of the noble class, were very expensive yet easy to re-purpose,²⁹² and Yde is the perfect target for this in her situation since she is alone yet has these goods. Yde is forced to either use her wits or to fight her way out in order to still remain cross-dressed. She cannot reveal the truth to these thieves as she would find herself in a worse situation, and there is no one

²⁹⁰ Brewka, Barbara Anne. Pp. 418-9.

²⁹¹ Ibid. Pp. 425-9.

²⁹² Clothing was often reworked and re-gifted in the medieval period. Wills often included gifts of clothing to certain people, and the church often received gifts of clothing and fabric in lieu of money. It could be used as a type of currency.

that she can turn to for help besides herself, as all of her companions have been slain. She therefore tries to trick the thieves by having one on one combat with their leader, and when that does not get her out of the situation she is forced to fight her way out. Her cross-dressing helps this as well as she is able to first negotiate with the thieves as a man, almost convinces some of them to let her join them, and then uses manly prowess, which she might not have been able to do so convincingly had she been dressed as a woman, in order to escape the situation and keep herself and her secret safe.

One great distinction between *Le Roman de Silence* and *Yde et Olive* is that Silence endures hardships because of her cross-dressing, while Yde encounters them regardless. Silence makes an enemy of the Queen and can avoid her wrath just by telling the truth and no longer cross-dressing, but she doesn't or she will lose her inheritance. Yde, in contrast, comes into hardships that would have happened whether she would have been male or female. Being set upon by Spaniards and thieves does not happen because of her cross-dressing, but because of her fleeing from her father and being in strange places. Unlike Silence, Yde cannot solve her problems by taking off her male attire; in fact, it would escalate the situation, and even when she is found out she attempts to keep her male dress. Yde's hardships are not easily avoided. Silence could have avoided being attacked by the Queen, forced out of court, and forced to find Merlin, had she simply told the truth. With Yde, the truth will not aid her, and she finds herself forced to continue to live the lie with no way out. The only way out ends up being divine intervention that makes Yde become the man that she has pretended to be. It is only through becoming her lie that she gains safety and finally can stop running.

What is interesting is the fact that the final hardship she faces, marriage to Olive and the persecution that results because of it, is usually in literature more of a female problem than a

male's problem. Yde is forced into a marriage that she doesn't want due to family politics. The emperor has decided that Yde is the only honourable match for his daughter. Yde tries to avoid the marriage, but is eventually forced into it in order to please a male figure, in this case the emperor.²⁹³ This idea of a mismatched marriage is a common trope in medieval literature, being seen in famous instances like *The Canterbury Tales*, various fabliaux, and even *Berengier au Long Cul* as was already discussed. Yde in fact mentions the fact that the marriage is mismatched in order to convince the emperor against it, but does not reveal the ultimate reason for why it is so. She instead points out the fact that the emperor believes her to be a poor knight, and therefore not of a suitable class for an emperor's daughter. However, she is in fact the daughter of a king, which would be a high-enough class for the emperor, but she uses a lie to hide another lie. It is true that the marriage is mismatched, but only because it is in between two women, something that Yde cannot confess to. So she creates a new lie, that she is not well-born, to tell the truth about this being a bad union. Unfortunately for her, her ruse does not work and the emperor still insists on her not only being married, but married quickly. This becomes her last lie, as the marriage forces her secret into a more public sphere, being discovered by Olive, and Yde can no longer successfully deceive those at court.

Much like Silence, Yde has to convince a wide variety of people that she is a man. She deceives many different classes into thinking that she is indeed a male, and it is not her clothes in particular that do so, but rather a quickly escalating persona of maleness. Yde is dedicated to her lie, because if she slips and someone sees that she is indeed a woman, she will not just lose her inheritance in this case, but her very life. Perhaps it was this incentive that gives her the drive to convince others around her through manly deeds that she is indeed a male. She begins simply

²⁹³ Brewka, Barbara Anne. Pp. 439-40.

enough, by just being a squire to a German knight.²⁹⁴ She does not have to perform deeds of prowess in this employ, but she must learn to care for his horse and arm him. This is a suitable way for Yde to pass as a man by acting like one, as it was a position of instruction that she can learn along the way, as long as she is willing and keeps quiet, which she does. However, when the German is killed she then has to convince the Spaniards, quite briefly, that she is not an easy target, and is forced into a fighting situation in which she must defend herself. She is with a group of other Germans, so she is not merely by herself, but she survives long enough to be able to escape.²⁹⁵ Her next test is immediately afterwards with the thieves. Here the situation is more dire, since she is now alone and is forced to fight, both mentally and physically, with the thieves in order to convince them that she is a male and also a strong enough male that they should leave her alone. So Yde goes from a simple squire to a fighter capable of taking on several men at once. Her persona of maleness escalates still further when she is at the court of the emperor, since she then becomes a leader of men and fights so bravely that she is heralded as the best knight.²⁹⁶ Yde tries to keep her lie small by being a squire to a single knight, but eventually finds herself trying to convince an entire kingdom that she is indeed male, and her actions must coincide with her persona. “The longer Yde . . . passes as a man, the more she fully she inhabits male identity”.²⁹⁷ The lie becomes larger and more complex, and Yde finds herself attempting to upkeep her image not just as a man but as the ultimate knight, something that even actual men did not always achieve despite their training in combat.

Yde is convincing despite the fact that she does not have the support that Silence had. Silence had her family who she could turn to in order to speak about her situation. Yde has no

²⁹⁴ Brewka, Barbara Anne. P. 421.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. Pp. 423-4.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. P. 438.

²⁹⁷ Weisl, Angela. P. 129.

one to confide in, and no one to counsel her, and therefore she is forced to make a number of important decisions on her own. This changes after her marriage and Yde finds herself confiding in her new wife, Olive. In Olive, Yde finds someone who will finally listen to her and will keep her secret. It is not Olive that goes to the emperor but instead one of Olive's attendants. Yde and Olive support each other, as Olive agrees to help Yde continue, even though it means that both of them will not get the marriage that they wanted, since Olive thought she was marrying a handsome knight. This is a point that some scholars who have looked at the text find interesting,²⁹⁸ since Olive does not try to immediately get out of a same-sex marriage, but instead tries to find ways to keep it and does not react with disgust.²⁹⁹ Rather than pointing to the character's sexuality, I think this instead looks ahead to the text's ending, with Yde becoming a male as well as emphasizing the medieval view of marriage. Marriage was a sacrament which must be made to succeed no matter what the circumstances. Yde and Olive have entered the sacrament, and therefore must do whatever they can in order to keep the sacrament and remain married. The ending provides a way in which this marriage, which seemed doomed to fail, actually becomes successful and accepted by the king who was willing to kill his daughter because of her homosexual relationship. Increasingly, Yde has found herself becoming more and more immersed in her persona of Yde the man, until it finally culminates in her actually being married to a woman. There is no way out for her, and she cannot go back to being a female. Due to this, the only endings that will work for Yde are either death or divine intervention. As divine intervention is the most interesting and positive ending, the miracle makes this story as well as Yde and Olive's marriage more fascinating. It also shows that God

²⁹⁸ Amer, Sahar. "Crossing Sartorial Lines: Female Same-Sex Marriage in *Yde et Olive* and *The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Princess Boudour* from *One Thousand and One Nights*" in *Crossing Borders: Love between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

²⁹⁹ Watt, Diane. "Behaving like a Man? Incest, Lesbian Desire, and Gender Play in *Yde et Olive* and Its Adaptations" *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Autumn, 1998), pp. 265-285. P. 273.

approves of the match between Yde and Olive, despite the fact that they both started their romance as two women. Olive loves Yde as a man before the marriage, loves her as a female in the marriage, and loves her even more as a man when she becomes one. She in turn gives Yde the support she needs, and both end up with something that they wanted. Yde is safe from her father and has honour, and Olive has the love of a good knight.

The text offers no explanation for Yde's abilities to pass herself off as a man. Prior to her exploits, the text only mentions Yde very briefly in passing. Yde's mother dies in childbirth, and the text focuses on her father Florens' despair until Yde reaches adulthood. She appears to be the epitome of a courtly woman, as Florens falls in love with his own daughter and believes her to be a suitable wife. Yde has been raised as a daughter, unlike Silence who was raised as a son. Yet despite not having any training whatsoever, as well as no support from anyone to help her, Yde has the ability to convince everyone she encounters that she is a man without a doubt. "Medieval audiences had reason to accept such abrupt changes as perfectly natural"³⁰⁰ within the story world. Yde's transformation as a man was more acceptable despite having no explanation as some other texts. As mentioned above, her trials in which she proves herself as masculine start off small and work their way into her eventual marriage to a woman, but this still does not explain her ability to use a weapon the second that she has need of it, nor the fact that she becomes one of the best knights of the empire. There is not even the suggestion that was found in *Berengier*, that since she is of noble birth she automatically has abilities of a knight in her blood. Yde just naturally seems to have these abilities despite being born a woman. The text does not dwell too long on Yde's abilities as a woman, but instead focuses more on her time spent as a man. It does depict her as beautiful and sweet, and mentions that in her beauty she

³⁰⁰ Schultz, James. P. 85.

surpasses other women.³⁰¹ However, once she is cross-dressed as a man, the focus is more on her courtly behaviour as a knight and her prowess as a man, gradually shifting the thought away from her as a woman but instead depicting her more as the ideal man.

Angela Weisl argues that in female-to-male cross-dressing, just the act of putting on the opposite gender's attire can make a man. She sees this as a "functional sex change"³⁰² regardless of the text's ending. Transvestism in the medieval period went well beyond just wearing different clothing, as it also changed identity, and in this case made men into women.³⁰³ When this is applied towards Yde's story, she is then seen as male even before the sex change. This can be evidenced by her increasing escalation into maleness. The longer she wears the male clothes, the more she becomes male. She is perceived as male by those around her, and though she is aware of her true sex, she still must perform as a male. Weisl argues that her physical transformation when she becomes a man is just a "confirmation of what already exists".³⁰⁴ God himself gives his approval to Yde becoming a male, and by changing her sex, she becomes accepted as male, despite her secret being found out. Not much changes for Yde after this: she was seen as male before, and she continues being seen as male afterwards despite being ousted by her marriage to Olive. She is given the one thing she lacks, the genital sign of maleness, but has already embodied masculinity before obtaining the male member.³⁰⁵

Another significant difference from *Le Roman de Silence* is that Yde never acts as a woman even in disguise. Silence is obeying her father and being a dutiful daughter, and though

³⁰¹ Bouchier, John. *The Boko of Huon of Bordeaux* Vol. 40. Early English Text Society: 1973. Accessed online at <http://archive.org/stream/bokedukehuonbur00unkngoog#page/n98/mode/2up/search/yde> P. 692.

³⁰² Weisl, Angela. P. 117.

³⁰³ This was discussed in Part 1 and 2 on the importance of clothing as communication.

³⁰⁴ Weisl, Angela. P. 117.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. P. 122.

she is pretending to be a man, her duty to listen to those around her and to do as women should and keep silent in the end shows her as still being the ideal woman. Yde, however, does not adhere to the men who she should be governed under at any time. Her cross-dressing is a deliberate refusal of her father's wishes. Though her father is clearly depicted in the text as the villain, Yde as the dutiful daughter should have done everything in her power to obey his wishes by marrying who he chooses for her. Unfortunately for Yde, that person was himself, and she sees this as a horrible idea and therefore offends her father by fleeing. This causes her father great distress. Yde had a legitimate excuse in disobeying her father, since he is forcing her into a great sin, which would be seen as more dire than lying and disobeying her father. Incest resulted in damnation, while lies could be forgiven. However, Yde continues to act out against the men she serves by disobeying the emperor. Though she does her service to him and serves his daughter and saves his kingdom, when he asks her to marry someone she again refuses. Though she eventually honours his wishes, it is not because she believes she is doing her womanly duty by serving her lord, but instead because she wants to avoid his wrath. This, as well as her abilities on the battlefield, makes Yde out to be more of a man than she is a woman. God also sees this and therefore, at the end of the tale, He makes her into what she is more suited to be.

The inclusion of God in this text can be seen as linking the story to the tales of the transvestite saints, in that there are a number of similarities to both. Yde is cross-dressing in order to avoid an evil marriage as well as avoiding being forced away from God, as incest would have damned her. She believes that marrying her father will bring her shame and make her sin, condemning her. The transvestite saints, such as Saint Pelagia and Marina, are also fleeing unwanted marriages, though the two saints are able to make it to a monastery, while Yde is instead still in great danger in the secular world. Both Pelagia and Marina then have to go

through trials that might reveal their sex, but their resolution to remain disguised as men makes them refuse to reveal who they really are. Both saints are blameless, different than the idea of converted prostitutes,³⁰⁶ yet they are accused of rampant sexuality since no one is aware of their transvestism. Yde is forced into marriage with a woman, which should be impossible for another woman, but she tries hard not to be found out so she still remains silent. The miracle that changes her into a man, however, links her not to the transvestite saints but more to those that asked for miracles to avoid marriage or rape. Saint Agnes is a good comparison as she asks for a miracle to avoid a mismatched marriage. Her story shows her avoiding a mismatched marriage through rapid hair growth and all men who try to rape her being struck blind. Yde is also asking for a miracle, but her mismatched marriage has already happened. She is instead asking for a miracle to be saved from sin, similar to Saint Agnes. God's divine intervention is a direct answer to her prayers, and the miracle links her to the very religious figures that were so well known in the medieval period. The saints' legends were such common literature in the medieval period that the similarities in *Yde et Olive* to the story of the transvestite saints can be argued as a sign of these legends being used as source material, or at least being known to the author.

One difference in Yde's story compared to those of the saints using cross-dressing to escape a mismatched marriage is that Yde does not escape her fate entirely, but requires a miracle to make her fate acceptable. At the beginning, she is forced into an unwanted marriage with her father and turns to cross-dressing in order to escape it. However, the events find her trapped in another mismatched marriage, this one perhaps less repulsive but still something that

³⁰⁶ See Sarah Roche-Mahdi's introduction to *Silence: A Thirteenth Century French Romance*. In particular, she mentions the idea of the saints' legends being used as sources on p. xvi. Many famous saints, such as Mary Magdalene, followed the idea of fallen women being redeemed. The transvestite saints are similar in that they are associated with sexual sin, but suffer for it despite being innocent.

Yde wants to avoid.³⁰⁷ The same-sex marriage is introduced in more positive terms by the author than those of the incestuous marriage, but the reaction of the characters to it is still quite negative. Marrying her father will not allow Yde to remain chaste in any way and avoid the sin of incest. With her mismatched marriage to Olive, this sin is not present, since as a woman she cannot have heterosexual intercourse with Olive. She tries at first to just ignore the situation and hopes that Olive will not mind a sexless marriage, but when Olive catches on, Yde is able to explain to her the problem and finds a willing partner that understands and will not let her sin further with unnatural sexual encounters. This would not have been able to happen if she had married her father, but Yde almost finds a way to make the mismatched marriage that was caused by her cross-dressing work, until she and Olive are overheard. Despite this, the reactions to these two marriages are quite different. Though frowned upon, the marriage between Yde and her father would have taken place. The marriage between Yde and Olive, if the emperor had known the truth, would never have been allowed and Yde and Olive are almost burned because of it. The entire story proves to be one of Yde trying to escape marriage, but in the end she cannot, though God gives her a miracle that makes the marriage she is in compatible by making her a man.

The idea of inheritance is also brought up in this text, though unlike *Le Roman de Silence*, it is those around the daughters who are concerned about the loss of inheritance rather than the main character herself. Diane Watt in her article “Behaving like a Man? Incest, Lesbian Desire, and Gender Play in Yde et Olive and Its Adaptations” mentions the worries that Florens has about inheritance. She points out Florens attempt to keep his kingdom within his own family, since if Yde were to marry the kingdom would go to her husband’s family rather than

³⁰⁷ Watt, Diane. Pp. 272-3.

his. However, Watt points out that it would have been unlikely for the children of an incestuous relationship to have been able to inherit.³⁰⁸ The emperor has a similar problem, as he only has a daughter, but he still marries her off, unlike Florens. When he marries her off to a woman, however, Watt argues that the problem of inheritance is again apparent, as two women cannot provide the empire with an heir.³⁰⁹ The homosexual union disrupts the social patriarchal order and puts the empire in the hands of two women who cannot produce an heir to pass it on, which could result in trouble for the kingdom after both rulers die childless. While the problems of homosexuality and incest are huge moral issues, Watt argues that an underlying problem is still inheritance in this text and these improper marriages threaten this.

Yde's reaction to her own cross-dressing is much less judgemental than Silence's, as she has less self-reflection in the text. She is more than willing to cross-dress and never questions it throughout the text. There is no philosophical debate on Nature versus Nurture in this text, but when Yde is discovered there are some ideas as to how cross-dressing was viewed, though the text at this point also links the criticism towards same-sex marriages. When the emperor discovers that Yde has deceived him all this time, he is indeed furious, but his anger is not just directed towards Yde, but also to his daughter. Despite the fact that he was the one that pushed for the marriage, Olive also showed eagerness to marry Yde. The emperor has also come to the conclusion that Olive is happy with her marriage to Yde, as he asks her after the wedding night and Olive proclaims that she loves Yde more now than she ever did.³¹⁰ The idea that his daughter has been married to a woman is too much for the emperor to accept, and therefore he threatens to kill his own daughter as well. He does not simply order their executions, but wants

³⁰⁸ Watt, Diane. P. 269.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. P. 273.

³¹⁰ Bouchier, John. P. 725.

them to be burnt to death, an execution meant for those guilty of serious crimes such as treason and heresy. In *Le Roman de Silence* there is specific mention of the king being deceived, but here there is no specific mention of it, yet the deception is treated much more harshly here than with *Silence*. There is no Queen that needs replacing, but instead there is an absence of a male groom since Yde is discovered as a female groom, which at first seems to be something that Yde cannot remedy. In *Yde et Olive*, nothing can be resolved by the cross-dressing just being discovered. This is a problem that is only remedied completely by Yde becoming male and completely embodying the image that she has set up, since the handsome knight that saves the kingdom is what is sorely needed.

Yde's sex change at the end is what allows the cross-dressing to be rationalized in a way, since it seems that she was fated to be a man. The story is fantastical, but Yde's actions prove her to be a better man than a woman, and her prayer does not result in her going back to being a female, but rather sees her become not only a man, but an emperor and the father of a famous son. Croissant goes on to great fame, showing Yde to be successful not only in engendering a child but also in producing a great offspring. This also shows Olive's love of Yde to be acceptable, as she loves a woman, but it is a woman who is better suited to being a man. Yde's sex change does not just save her, but also saves Olive and keeps her honour. If the emperor is willing to kill his own daughter because she has been married to a woman, though unknowingly, same-sex marriages are viewed in this text as an abomination, since it is an offense worthy not just of death but of burning. When Yde becomes a man, Olive now has feelings for a man, just as she as a woman should, and it is quickly forgotten that Yde was ever a woman. Her knightly deeds prior to this, and her position afterwards, allow her to be accepted as an exceptional man, one who is suited to marrying the emperor's daughter and eventually becoming emperor as well.

Yde et Olive exists in three forms: the poem that has been discussed here, prose, and in the 14th century, a play. The prose and poem have many similarities that do not need further discussion in this thesis, but the ending of the play is so vastly different that it deserves mention. In the play, the sex change is temporary, and Yde ends up married to the emperor while Olive is married to Yde's father.³¹¹ This changes the ideas about cross-dressing and gender that seem clearer in the poem. Yde is no longer meant to be a man, as her escalating abilities for masculinity seem to point towards. Furthermore, Olive's affections for Yde then become inappropriate, as Yde is only briefly a man and is more suited to being a woman. Making the persona that Yde puts on temporary seems to put Yde in her rightful place as a woman, but does not gain her as much honour as in the poem. She is still part of the married unit that rules Rome, but she is not the ruler, and her prowess in battle and her manly abilities are all for nought. Furthermore, the emperor is changed to be a better match, in that the play makes the emperor much younger and therefore more suited to take a wife, which in the poem he is elderly and shortly dies after Yde and Olive are married. It does not, however, condemn Florens, who in the poem dies shortly after Yde disappears in grief at the loss of his daughter/potential wife. In the play, Florens is given a very high match, the daughter of an emperor, and giving him honour seems to downplay his earlier actions. The cross-dressing is excused for very different reasons by this ending, but the attempted incest is also excused. Yde is rewarded in the same way that her father is rewarded, though she had to suffer hardships that he caused her. The play ends the story in a similar fashion to *Le Roman de Silence* in that Yde gets herself a very womanly prize,

³¹¹ "Miracles of Notre Dame". Ottawa: University of Ottawa. Web. May 25, 2013. <<http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/lfa/activites/textes/miracles-notre-dame/MirPer37.htm>> Lines 3209-15, 3280-3289.

a good marriage, through manly deeds, but the villain in the piece, unlike the Queen in *Silence*, is not punished.³¹²

When compared, Yde and Silence are two interesting figures with many similarities, yet the endings to their stories show them to be vastly different. Both are required to act as knights, and both do so in a successful way. Both are also masters of disguise; Silence understands how she is deceiving everyone around her, but Yde must keep deceiving despite not having any previous training. Both also have more ties to the masculine sex than they do to the feminine sex that they were born as, despite their exceptional beauty. Silence may be the most beautiful woman ever born, but she is trained as a man and *Le Roman de Silence* depicts her as a man for the majority of the text, only reverting her back to a female at the very end. Yde is also mostly depicted as a man, except for the short section at the beginning with her father, and for the brief moment where she lets down her guard and confides in Olive. The endings, however, completely change how these characters are viewed. Since Yde is turned into a man, it makes it appear that she was always destined to be a man, and that God wills her to be masculine since she has so successfully proven herself to be masculine. Silence, however, despite her intentions of remaining a male, is destined to be found out. Merlin can only be captured by a woman, and so by completing her mission her secret will be revealed. The debates between Nature and Nurture as well also win out, as Nature gets her to be as she intended, the most beautiful woman ever created and therefore worthy of the honour that only a woman can achieve, that of a marriage into high society. Silence is therefore a woman cross-dressing, while Yde can be argued to be a woman slowly transforming into a man. She begins with the clothing, but

³¹² In the late French prose, Florens because ill from shame, but is eventually reconciled with Yde after her transformation. In the poem, he dies due to his shame and Yde inherits the property.

continues with knightly deeds that escalate in prowess worthy of a great man, and ends with an empire. Though the plot of cross-dressing is the same in both stories, the endings completely change how the characters are viewed and what they are meant to be.

These two tales of women cross-dressing as knights approach the subject seriously and show a non-humorous view of how women cross-dressing were viewed. Unlike Ulrich, Lancelot, Berengier, and the wife in *Der Borte*, the intentions behind the cross-dressing in *Silence* and *Yde et Olive* are attempts to right some grievous wrongs. Though *Berengier* and *Der Borte* both attempt to repair a marriage, both of the wives have cheated on their husbands, and therefore it is not approached as a completely serious attempt to make right what is wrong, since the wives themselves have proven themselves to be in the wrong. In *Silence* and *Yde et Olive*, the two protagonists have been wronged, with Silence losing her inheritance and Yde almost being forced into an incestuous marriage. The cross-dressing is seen as a last resort, a desperate attempt to escape from injustice. Both characters also find themselves continuing to be wronged, with Yde being attacked repeatedly by thieves and Spaniards, and Silence being sexually harassed by the Queen. *Silence* approaches the cross-dressing as a philosophical question and shows how Nature and Nurture can work against each other to make a woman into a man, but ultimately Nature wins out, and Silence is returned to what she should be. Yde, however, though the text approaches her plight seriously as well, focuses on her suffering but not on her inner dialogue on how she is forced to pretend to be something that she is not. She seems to have no qualms about pretending to be a man, and instead is only scared about being found out and being returned to her father. However, the consequences are very dire if she is discovered, so the text does not allow any time for humour. The importance of God and the eventual miracle at the end make this a serious tale, as it brings some theology into it, being similar in plot to smatterings of

different saint legends. These serious tales approach cross-dressing as an unfortunate necessity, and it is not frivolous or enjoyable for the protagonists or those around them, but instead becomes a problem that only a figure with abilities beyond a human's, either God or Merlin, can fix.

The subject matters in these two texts never venture toward anything frivolous, and do not take cross-dressing lightly as do the texts previously discussed have. Ulrich von Lichtenstein was using cross-dressing to pursue courtly love, a light-hearted subject matter, while Lancelot, though attempting to protect his honour after a joke, uses cross-dressing to mock his opponents. *Berengier* is a tale about using cross-dressing to right a wrong, but the wife's approach to it is carefree and humorous. In *Silence* and *Yde et Olive*, serious issues are discussed and warrant the inclusion of philosophical or theological matters in order to be resolved. *Silence* is dealing with a loss of her livelihood, and her cross-dressing is a necessary way to avoid persecution and having her inheritance lost. *Yde's* situation is even more serious, as she is being threatened with an incestuous marriage and must flee in order to avoid it, turning to cross-dressing as the only way to escape. The situations that they find themselves in afterwards are also very serious. *Silence's* story reveals a Queen guilty of adultery and treason, and *Yde* is constantly bombarded with threats, as she is attacked by Spaniards and thieves. These stories were meant to be entertaining, but their subject matter keeps them from using cross-dressing to be amusing. This sets them apart from stories of men cross-dressing, or the *fabliaux* that use cross-dressing to reveal a joke.

Chapter 6

Final Comparisons

All of these texts show a different perspective on cross-dressing than what was believed by modern scholars to be thought by medieval society. These texts also bring up questions on how both clothing and gender boundaries were viewed by the medieval audience and by the fellow characters in the text. Whether it is a female or a male cross-dressing, there are a number of subjects that are brought up repeatedly, which gives more insight on how cross-dressing was viewed and approached, even across cultures. *In the Service of Ladies*, *Morte d'Arthur*, *Silence*, *Berengier*, *Der Borte*, and *Yde et Olive* all give clear evidence of intention and reveal how the genders were viewed in relation to the opposite sex. Cross-dressing was rarely approached as a sinful and vulgar thing in these texts, with the exception being *Silence* in which Silence struggles with living with the lie. As well, when there is a description of the clothing, it shows specifically what was viewed as feminine and what was viewed as masculine, as medieval clothing began to move away from articles that could be easily worn by either sex after the 13th century. The use of humour in these texts, as well as the way that homosexual relations are approached are also important aspects of these texts, and by studying knights cross-dressing, conclusions about how the medieval society viewed it can be drawn. These texts on cross-dressing knights prove valuable to both gender and to material culture disciplines as they broach the subjects of medieval views on gender and views on how clothing could be perceived and used to manipulate.

The issue of intention behind cross-dressing is helpful to modern scholars when dealing with all of these texts, as it separates when cross-dressing was viewed positively and when it was viewed negatively. Ulrich and Lancelot were using cross-dressing in order to amuse instead of

attempting to deceive, and made this clear by revealing themselves publically at the end of their period of cross-dressing and making sure that all were aware of who was under their dresses and why. Ulrich also further distanced himself from his clothing by getting rid of it, while Lancelot distanced himself by allowing the very dress that he wore to be used to disgrace Dynadan. The wives in *Berengier* and *Der Borte* both used cross-dressing to deceive, but they did so in order to better their marriage, which was extremely sacred in the medieval period and was supposed to be upheld at all costs, even at the cost of cross-dressing. Lastly, Silence and Yde both cross-dressed in order to do the right thing; Silence in keeping her rightful inheritance, and Yde in avoiding the evil of incest. All of these characters had a justifiable reason to wear the clothing of the other sex, and this allowed them to be viewed positively. They can be compared to the characters who did not cross-dress with positive intentions, such as the nun in *Silence* and John Rykener/Eleanor in reality. Both the nun and Rykener/Eleanor used cross-dressing to partake in illicit sex acts. The nun did so in order to commit adultery with the Queen, and Rykener/Eleanor used cross-dressing in order to prostitute himself to both men and women. The intention was to deceive in order to do wrong, which is opposite of what the main characters in these texts did. Their intentions were to amuse, or to right wrongs, and as cross-dressing was the best way to do this, cross-dressing became positive despite how the medieval world in reality viewed it. Wearing the clothes of the opposite sex was condemned in the Bible and by the medieval Church, but in literature, as long as the intent was pure, it was allowed and applauded. Intention becomes the most important part of the cross-dressing knight, as it could win him or her honour and fame, or it could condemn.

Another important aspect of these tales of cross-dressing is the importance of names. With the exception of Ulrich von Liechtenstein, the made-up names seem to be of more

importance in female cross-dressing than in male cross-dressing. With the men, either they are cross-dressing as a specific woman, such as Thor as Freya, Ulrich as Venus, Meraguis as the lady of the island, or they are anonymous women. However, with “Berengier”, “Heinrich” and also with “Silencius”, these women have to come up with alternate personas to go along with their clothes. “Heinrich” even adds a country, which might have made her look more legitimate than simply being a random Heinrich. Likewise “Berengier” comes up with the name and also references “his” unique physical features, which could have been done to further convince the husband that he was indeed looking at a man. Referencing what she knew her husband saw would add to her disguise and make her cross-dressing more believable. Pretending to be an already existing character does not appear in any tales for female cross-dressing, and the women must create a further backstory in order to add to their lie of cross-dressing. Though Yde keeps her name, there has been some discussion on the fact that the author might have intended her to change the pronunciation of her name, since when she is female she is simply Yde, but when she is male she is Ydé or Ydés.³¹³ After her marriage, Yde is always referred to in the text by masculine third-person pronouns.³¹⁴ Regardless, she changes her backstory and her country in the text in order to recreate her identity, and could not simply just be a male. Like Silence it is the ending of her name that determines whether she can be seen as male or female, but she also needs to have a new persona, that of a poor knight, in order to deceive the court at Rome.

The importance of humour in some of these texts also allows for cross-dressing to happen. Both Ulrich and Lancelot use cross-dressing to amuse, rather than to gain a certain end. Ulrich was attempting to win a lady, but he wanted to do something different and theatrical in

³¹³ Barbara Brewka gives a detailed discussion on the changes between Yde and Ydé in her thesis on pages 142-8. She does conclude that when the sex change has taken place, the name is changed to Ydé permanently, but previous to that there was ambiguity throughout the text.

³¹⁴ Weisl, Angela. P. 119.

order to win her. His *Venusfahrt* was meant to be a lighthearted approach to courtly love and not to be taken too seriously. He was disguising himself as a riddle, to avoid being discovered before the time in which he wanted to reveal who he actually was, but he did not intend to actually deceive and convince everyone that he was in fact a woman. His insistence on being not just any woman but Queen Venus also adds to the theatrical aspect of his *Venusfahrt* and adds to the amusement of his joust. Lancelot also did not intend to use his cross-dressing in a serious way, but instead he used it to poke fun of a fellow knight, and his comrades went further by forcing cross-dressing on Dynadan in order to elongate the joke. In *Berengier* and *Der Borte*, the joke or the trick had a serious consequence, but was still a source of amusement. By tricking their husbands, the wives were able to fix their marriages, but they used cross-dressing to humiliate and mock their husbands as well. Humour allowed for the cross-dressing to stop from being functional, as the characters were not cross-dressing in earnest, but were doing so with the end result of amusement, whether their own private amusement or for the public. If cross-dressing was merely used as functional, it ends up far too seriously and is in danger of being condemned.

The cross-dressing in these texts also reveals how the medieval world approached gender and also how homosexuality could be present in a heterosexual world. With the exception of *Berengier* and *Morte d'Arthur*, all of these texts in some way bring up the subject of same-sex interactions. With *In the Service of Ladies*, Ulrich is forced into the female submissive position by receiving courtly love gifts, but these gifts are given by a woman. So Ulrich is feminized by this action, while at the same time the action is being done by a female participating in the rules of courtly love in the usual position that a male would take. Ulrich's derision and his immediate dismissal of these tokens of love reveal him unwilling to take part in taking his cross-dressing so

far that he would engage as a woman in the game of courtly love. He may be participating as a woman in his *Venusfahrt*, but he refuses to participate as a woman in being wooed. This is where Ulrich draws the line in becoming female. In *Der Borte*, the wife does the opposite of Ulrich and uses her cross-dressing in order to reach the homosexual stage, willing to act as a knight who is interested in men in order to gain her desires. She takes her cross-dressing to the level of the obscene, but she does so in order to right her marriage, and the audience would be very aware of the fact that she cannot engage in a homosexual act like she proposes as she does not have the “equipment” to do so. Both Silence and Yde have their cross-dressing take them to the same problem of the same-sex relations, but both end up doing everything in their power to avoid it, making them very similar to Ulrich’s approach. Same-sex relations, which were a major consequence of cross-dressing, are approached in these texts as something to be avoided at all costs, or as a joke, as the wife in *Der Borte* merely pretends to want the same-sex relationship while the audience is aware of her sex. In *Yde et Olive* there is a same-sex marriage involved, but neither spouse is homosexual and this union is merely a brief section of the plot before the tension is relieved and the characters can continue in their heterosexual tendencies through the resolution of their cross-dressing.

The importance of clothing and how these characters successfully cross-dress shows how characters in medieval literature could use clothing to deceive, and also how clothing and accessories were used. The use of dresses, skirts, and longer clothing when dressing like a woman came up repeatedly in *In the Service of Ladies* as well as *Morte d’Arthur*, and the presence of armour and trousers was repeated in the tales of women cross-dressing as men. What came up a number of times in my research was the importance of hair when it came to cross-dressing. This was seen in the records of Church criticism in which the longer hair of men

was condemned and seen as effeminate.³¹⁵ The importance of hair as a way to cross-dress is also seen in these medieval texts. Ulrich was particularly fond of his long braids, which he used as a major part of his disguise. He also made sure that they were decorated in a way that was seen as feminine, and this was as stressed by Ulrich as his female clothing.³¹⁶ The use of hair for disguise was not just reserved for those pretending to be the opposite sex, as the knight who pretends to be a monk in *In the Service of Ladies* also has a tonsured wig on top of his helmet in order to complete his disguise.³¹⁷ The women who cross-dressed also mentioned the importance of cutting their hair short in order to complete their disguise. In *Der Borte*, the wife made sure to show herself as a cross-dressed man after cutting her hair, showing the importance of it for her disguise. Silence also cuts her hair as part of her disguise. The clothing and the hair stressed in these texts, either by male or female cross-dressers, show how changing into the opposite sex was achieved, and the aspects that are important prove to be the particular articles of clothing but also some physical characteristics such as hair.

When men cross-dress as women and women cross-dress as men, it also reveals what is seen as unique attributes of these genders. With Ulrich, he fixated on the clothing, as he had to buy pretty outfits in order to become a woman. However, he also was aware of the way he presented himself as being feminine, at least when he was off the jousting field. Ulrich mentions “walking merrily”³¹⁸ and being “courteous” and “polite”. He is also participating in watching from the sidelines³¹⁹ with the other ladies, as was expected of noble ladies. Ulrich spends much of his time focusing on the clothing that he wears in order to become lady-like, but he also

³¹⁵ See pp. 23-9 of this thesis.

³¹⁶ See above, pp. 57-8 on Ulrich’s braids.

³¹⁷ See p. 61 for the description of this knight.

³¹⁸ Thomas, J.W. P. 107.

³¹⁹ Ibid. P. 57.

recognizes that courtesy, manners, and delicate walking also make a woman. This is not seen in either *Morte d'Arthur* or *Berengier*, as both of these texts see only the clothing as relevant to cross-dressing. Both the wife and Lancelot merely put on the dress, and that is what transforms them into the opposite sex. Neither then attempt to do any actions that would feminize or masculinize them. Lancelot puts on a dress and then acts like a man by doing knightly deeds. The wife puts on the armour and then does not participate in any masculine activities, though she appears prepared to do so. In these two texts, it is only the clothing that links them to the opposite gender.

The way that *Der Borte* uses cross-dressing to reveal more about gender sets it apart from the other texts in that the wife, through cross-dressing, reveals just as much what it means to be a woman as what it means to be a man. The two instances in the text where her weaknesses are pointed out reveal that women were not as strong as men. She recognizes this as a major flaw in her cross-dressing and therefore has to hide this tell-tale sign of her femininity with either a lie or by using her spectacular knightly possessions. It is never in doubt by the reader that she is a woman, but the only reason that she is able to deceive is through her magical possessions. Had she not had those, not even her clothes would have been able to hide her femininity. The juxtaposition between her husband's infidelity and hers also reveal more about what it meant to be a woman, as she claims that she was unfaithful because of her "human frailty"³²⁰ while the husband is being feminized by being forced into the position of a woman. To be a woman was to be on the bottom of a sexual position, which is enforced by how the first knight has sex with her³²¹ and by the wife's description of how she wishes to have the "homosexual" coupling with

³²⁰ Classen, Albrecht. P. 11.

³²¹ Ibid. P. 6.

her husband.³²² This is further evidenced by Silence's admission that she does not want to "go underneath when I am on top" when referring to the "games people play in private."³²³ In pretending to be male, the wife in *Der Borte* instead shows what it means to be female and how the feminine sex was viewed.

In *Yde et Olive*, the focus is more on Yde's masculinity rather than femininity, except when she becomes married to Olive. Yde's escalating masculinity shows what it takes to be a man, which ends in her actually becoming a man with God's divine intervention. She and Silence both have similarities in that they both become the best knights in the kingdom, showing that this was the true sign of masculinity. They both catch the notice of kings due to their knightly prowess and prove that they make even more effective men than they did women. Since Yde becomes masculine, her femininity is not a major focus towards the end, except for the fact that she and Olive are married but cannot remain married with Yde being female. Silence, however, reverts back to her feminine sex, and therefore both what makes her feminine and masculine is on display. Her specific clothing as well as her deeds in battle make her the ideal male, but it is her musical skills and her great beauty that make her female. Her potential sexual partners also signal Silence out for being either male or female. When she is dressed as a male, her beauty is successful in making the Queen fall in love with her, and her knightly prowess makes the Queen take notice. When she is finally revealed to be a female, the King as a suitable match emphasizes her femininity, which is then further emphasized when her feminine colours and beauty return to her. Yde is destined to be a man and as such the qualities about her that make her masculine are emphasized. Silence at the end returns to being a woman, so she

³²² Classen, Albrecht. P. 11.

³²³ Psaki, Regina. P. 72.

straddles the gender line between male and female until her true sex finally wins out and she becomes a wife.

Gender politics are also called into question with all of these texts. If women were indeed the lesser sex, it seems problematic that they were able to so successfully impersonate men. Likewise, the men who cross-dressed as woman should have been seen as losing honour, but instead both Ulrich and Lancelot gained honour with their actions. This creates a different view on gender than what the medieval clerics indicated that they believed. Silence parrots the medieval worldview when she admits that women are lesser than men, but by dressing as a man and dominating at masculine fields, she proves herself to be exception and better than most of the true men that she bests in battle. Ulrich is revealed to be a cross-dresser and does not try to hide it, but makes sure that his *Venusfahrt* is well advertised and that many know about it. When it is revealed that he pretended to be a woman, he does not lose honour. However, the difference in these characters is that both might have succeeded at their cross-dressing, but they still proved to be excellent examples of their true sexes. Silence was an excellent man, but she ended up when a very womanly prize, a good marriage. She may have been an excellent knight, but she proves to be a better female and is willing to give up her masculinity in order to return things to as they should be in order to marry the King. Ulrich may have dressed as a woman and been successful in his disguise, but his masculinity was never in question due to his success at the joust. He was putting on a show, and did so in such a way that he was able to show himself to be a great and worthy knight, so his honour was not lost in his womanly clothes but gained through his excellent jousting skills. The gender politics in these texts are still apparent, and they are temporarily bent in order for the plot to unfold, but at the end women are the beautiful potential wives and men are the daring and strong knights.

The importance of weapons and women's use of them is also an issue that has arisen from these texts, since women were not necessarily permitted to use weapons, yet here we have several women carrying weapons and killing with them. As Ad Putter mentioned in his article, it was improper for a woman to hold a sword, let alone use it.³²⁴ This is evidenced by the condemnation of Joan of Arc for carrying and using weapons herself. Yet in these examples of medieval literature, women who cross-dressed were not condemned for their successful use of these weapons. I would argue that the importance of intention is again at work in this. Silence, Yde, the wife in *Berengier*, and the wife in *Der Borte* are all cross-dressing with the intention of righting wrongs. In order to effectively cross-dress as a man, they must come in contact with weapons. Knightly prowess and ability in war was a major part of the masculine gender, and therefore in order to successfully pretend to be male, these women had to use weapons. If the character's intention had not been noble, these women might not have found themselves so unscathed in their narratives, as they would have been looked down upon as a deviant to their genders, much like Joan of Arc was.

Cross-dressing in medieval literature has much to say not only about the practice of wearing the clothes of the opposite gender, but also about how clothes were viewed, how gender itself was viewed, and how medieval literature could bring up scenarios in which cross-dressing could be perfectly acceptable in a world where it was so readily condemned. The concept of using cross-dressing to amuse, the importance of the intentions behind cross-dressing, and a return to some form of normalcy in these medieval texts reveals that cross-dressing could exist, but only in circumstances that are usually only available in the imagination. While men could

³²⁴ See Ad Putter's argument on page 290 in "Transvestite Knights" in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*. See also p. 47 of this essay.

use women's dress on the theatrical space of the tournament, and women could cross-dress without being punished if they did so to right wrongs or get closer to God, cross-dressing was still a delicate balance of doing it in such a way that it could be excused. These texts all show the importance of intention, the use of clothing, and the need for some form of gender normalcy to be reached in order for cross-dressing to be accepted. Everyone but Yde returns to their former sex and continue on once their punch line has been realized or their crisis has been averted. Cross-dressing in these texts is approached as a last resort or as a source of fun, but cross-dressing to deceive, as it might have been used in medieval reality, was not allowed. Intention then separates the cross-dressers in these medieval texts from the cross-dressers who were condemned by the churchmen in medieval reality.

Appendix: Further information on clothing - Quality of Materials: Wool, Linen, and Silk

Though not mentioned specifically in my thesis, the quality of fabric is of some importance in the texts that have been studied but was not something that I pursued in full. However, Ulrich, Silence, and the wife in *Der Borte* all mention the importance of the quality of clothing in reference to their cross-dressing. In the 11th and 12th centuries certain merchant centers began to develop higher quality fabric, which began to change how clothing was made and how it was approached. Perhaps of the most importance was the rise of the English woolen industry.³²⁵ English wool was highly prized due to its thickness and the process that was used in order to work the wool. Fulling in particular made wool into a particularly fine and luxurious fabric, and wools that were not fulled were much cheaper than those that were. English wool became very expensive, due to both to its superiority as well as due to the Black Prince's sumptuary laws that forbade English merchants from importing foreign fabrics in order to generate money for the crown.³²⁶ However, it was not just the English people who were dominating the wool industry, as certain centers gained reputations for producing quality fabric. Linen, though widely available and generally inexpensive, was expensive if it came from the centers at Rheims or Paris, due to the higher quality there.³²⁷ Clothing was no longer a mere need as people wore these luxurious fabrics and it became a sign of wealth and power, eventually leading more to the importance of clothing as identifier. Ulrich, Silence, and the wife in *Der*

³²⁵ Munro, John. "Medieval Woollens: Textiles, Textile Technology and Industrial Organization, c. 800-1500" in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* ed. David Jenkins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. 186 -189.

³²⁶ See John Munro's arguments on the English wool industry, as well as Stella Mary Newton's *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*. Edward III essentially created a wool monopoly by banning imports, making the money made from creating the raw materials of scarlet remain solely in his realm.

³²⁷ Newton, Stella Mary. P. 62. See also Silverman, Sarah. "The 1363 English Sumptuary Law: A comparison with Fabric Prices of the Late Fourteenth-Century" for her discussion on linen on pages 11 and page 40.

Borte all stand out in some way not just because they are cross-dressing, but the clothes that they wear are described as the highest quality.

Silk was also an important medieval fabric, and though it did not come up specifically in this essay, in criticism it was often highly linked to gender and the message that it conveyed. Criticism about women's clothing in particular has a long history, going back to Pliny the Elder and his opinions on silk. Pliny the Elder saw silk as a strictly feminine garment, and did not approve of how it was worn. He decried it as a ruse to make women appear naked while clothed.³²⁸ Silk in particular gained criticism throughout the medieval period as well, but interestingly enough, silk changed from being a primarily feminine fabric to symbolizing masculinity with its wealth and power.³²⁹ By the 12th century, the church authorities were condemning silk for its display of excessive wealth, rather than for its scandalous thin nature and for the way that women wore it. Though silk continued to be worn by both sexes, it was seen as a luxury product and therefore was more likely to be worn by those in a high position of power, and therefore was commonly worn by men. It also shows a fascination with the East, where the majority of silk production was done. Since it was exotic it was expensive and therefore reserved for the elite. Silk finds its way in many romances, but despite its link to both sexes was not utilized in this particular study on cross-dressing.

³²⁸ Burns, E.J. *Sea of Silk: A Textile Geography of Women's Work in Medieval French Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. P. 9.

³²⁹ Burns, E. J. *Sea of Silk*. P. 10. There is much more that could be said about silk. Silk was often thought as feminine since it was mainly women who worked on it, since they were more suited to the task than men. David Herhily mentions this in his *Opera Muliera*, and this implies that women's accessories were more readily made from silk since it was a fabric that they were familiar with. However, over the course of the medieval period, the feminization of silk changed, and as the cost of silk rose, it was more commonly worn by men. Therefore silk stopped communicating the idea of femininity, but instead became associated with wealth and therefore with male rulers.

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