DOGGING CORNWALL'S SECRET FREAKS: BÉROUL ON THE LIMITS OF EUROPEAN ORTHODOXY

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> Just as the countries of the East are remarkable and distinguished for certain prodigies peculiar and native to themselves so the boundaries of the West are also made remarkable by their own wonders of nature. For sometimes tired as it were of the true and the serious she draws aside and goes away and, in these remote parts, indulges herself in these secret and distant freaks.[1]

> *Dogging, n.*: The practice of watching or engaging in exhibitionist sexual activity in a public place, typically a car park, esp. as part of a gathering arranged for this purpose. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

The history of the role of fantasy in the formation of orthodox Christian identities is a fervid mix of staple ingredients and surprising twists. By way of exploring that history, this piece looks at how medieval accounts of heretical and pagan orgies may both have inspired and find a useful mirror in literary representations of sex and ritual, notably in this case in Béroul's version of the *Tristan* tale, a work that has been explored by a number of scholars as a witness to religious attitudes.[2] Dating

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[1] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. by John J. O'Meara (London: Penguin, 1982), p. 32. 'Sicut enim orientalis plagae propriis quibusdam et sibi innatis praeeminent et praecellunt ostentis, sic et occidentales circumferentiae suis naturae miraculis illustrantur. Quoties quippe tanquam seriis et veris fatigata negotiis, paululum secedit et excedit, remotis in partibus, quasi vericundis et occultis natura ludit excessibus.'

[2] For edition, see Daniel Lacroix and Philippe Walter (eds and trans.), *Tristan et Iseut: les poèmes françaises, la saga norroise*, Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1989). Translations are taken from Béroul, *Tristan*, trans. by Alan S. Frederick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967). A notable case being Tony Hunt's influential reading of the poem as a reflection of Abelard's thought on the relation between intention and deed in sin ('Abelardian Ethics and Béroul's *Tristan*', *Romania*, 98 (1977), 501–40). For more recent comment on Abelard's writings on ethics, see William E. Mann, 'Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to*

from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century and surviving in one incomplete manuscript, the story comes down to us in a tantalisingly fractured and episodic form that leaves many questions begging. The author, about whom we know nothing beyond what can be gleaned from his poem, uses sophisticated French and evident education to present the weirder court and ritual practices on the Western edge of the world, his poem much concerned with the collective and individual investments characteristic of voyeuristic pleasure. From the outset the reader or listener is a complicit observer of the illicit love affair between Yseut, wife of king Mark, and Tristan, the king's nephew. From its first surviving line 'Que nul semblant en face' ['So as to give no sign of it.'], the text investigates gaps between public show and private experience. As part of this, one of Béroul's principal interests lies in exploring the sometimes messy place of aristocratic marriage and infidelity in social organisation.[3] A key point of discussion here is how the triangle of Mark, Iseut and Tristan may reflect tensions between the emergent dominance of consensual exogamy and a range of other(ed) practices such as incest, endogamy and polyandry.[4] In addition, I will also aim to show how literary approaches and social theory can add to our understanding of what Béroul's poem witnesses and how this is shaped by cultural fantasies attested in other medieval sources, notably treated by

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Abelard, ed. by Jeffrey E. Brower and Kevin Guilfoy, Cambridge Companions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 279–304.

[3] On love in the Tristan material see, among many others, Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, trans. by Montgomery Belgion (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), esp. pp. 15–55 and pp. 108–51; Sahar Amer, 'Re-defining Marriage and Adultery in Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*', *Romance Languages Annual*, 11 (1999), 1–5; C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); J.M. Anderson, 'Romantic Love as Natural Right in Béroul's *Romance of Tristan*', *Comitatus*, 39 (2008), 41–61.

[4] For a recent overview of family structures and the role of marriage in medieval societies, see Julia H. Smith, *Europe After Rome: A New Cultural History, 500–1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 114–47. On exogamy, see among others Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). On attitudes to and prohibitions of incest in medieval societies see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 14. On Germanic sexual practices, see pp. 130–31. On prohibition, see John H. Fowler, 'The Development of Incest Regulations in the Early Middle Ages: Family, Nurturance and Aggression in the Making of the Medieval West' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rice University, 1981) as well as Mayke de Jong, 'To the Limits of Kinship: Anti-Incest Legislation in the Medieval West', in *From Sappho to Sade: Moments in the History of Sexuality*, ed. by Jan N. Bremmer (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 36–59. More ambiguous pictures are perhaps painted by Shell as well as by Alan Bittles, 'Genetic Aspects of Inbreeding and Incest', in *Inbreeding, Incest and the Incest Taboo: The State of Knowledge at the Turn of the Century*, ed. by Arthur P. Wolf and William H. Durham (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 38–60. On polyandry, see Gerald Berreman, 'Pahari Polyandry: A Comparison', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 64:1 (1962), 60–75 and Berreman, 'Himalayan Polyandry and the Domestic Cycle', *American Ethnologist*, 2:1 (1975), 127–38, as well as Jack Goody, *Domestic Groups* (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975) and E.R. Leach, 'Polyandry, Inheritance and the Definition of Marriage', *Man*, 55 (1955), 182–86.

that notoriously imaginative excavator of closets, Gerald of Wales.[5] Here outland and provincial deviances take their places in a longer history of ethnographic prurience also reflected in the tradition of the 'marvels of the West'. Even if Tristan's obedient hound, Husdent, does not feature here, by way of providing a frame for my treatment of cultural voyeurism here, I will also draw on sociological approaches to the phenomenon known as 'dogging', notably the work of David Bell.[6] Key from my point of view is Bell's use of the idea of contextualised 'technologies', whether mundanely material (e.g. dog leashes, barrier contraception, cars, SMS messaging) or social (e.g. scene-specific codes of etiquette or indeed 'technologies of the self' associated with the increasingly recreational character of sexual activity in the post-war period) in nature:

> Dogging represents a creative commingling of antecedent sexual practices and subcultures, all of which are (to different extents) enabled by different technologies. In short, I want to explore dogging as a technologically-mediated and site-specific sexual practice and subculture; or, more accurately, to see it as an assemblage of bodies, technologies and spaces.

What I will argue here is that Cornwall is dependent on the 'technological' possibilities provided by the spaces and rituals of Cornwall as well as by representations of the Celtic west. Central here are the problems, utilities and secret thrills of either keeping up or looking behind appearances, thereby lifting the veil on how Cornwall's 'secret freaks' depend on witness elsewhere.

Just as imagined orgies had featured in hostile descriptions of early Christians, so they formed a familiar part of the description of medieval heresies. Although indisputable accounts of the public witnessing of sexual acts are very much rarer, it is of course not impossible that group sex did take place in the Middle Ages. However, whether real or imagined, its indiscriminate nature was subversive on a number of levels. In the first place the Church placed any number of restrictions on sexual relations: they ranged from prohibitions based on the degree of consanguinity in marriage to bans on the act itself during fasts, feast days and in unusual positions.

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[5] On Gerald in this regard, see notably Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales', in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Cohen, The New Middle Ages (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), pp. 85–104; William E. Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050-1230*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, ?? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Asa Simon Mittman, ' "The Other Close At Hand": Gerald of Wales and the Marvels of the West', in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. by Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 97–112.

[6] For a sociological treatment of the phenomenon of dogging see David Bell, 'Bodies, Technologies, Spaces: On "Dogging"', *Sexualities*, 9 (2006), 387–407.

Against this institution of order was posited a sexual chaos which insulted the Church, mocked ideals of chastity and gave salacious zest to the work of inquisition. But there was also the hint of something more, reminiscent of a chaos of 'creative destruction' (a phrase associated with the economic thought of Karl Marx and Joseph Schumpeter) in which the order of the world is devalued, destroyed and refounded.[7] This idea is attested in various contexts and not just beyond the pale of Europe's more or less orthodox western centres, though various key examples are attested from such locations. In the Bogomil text of the *Interrogatio Iohannis*, after his unsuccessful rebellion against God has destroyed the divine cosmic order, Satan creates the forms of a man and woman from mud, animates them with angels and then orders them to do carnal deeds. Unfortunately, they are unaware of sin, meaning Satan has to go through the laborious process process of creating Paradise, instilling lust in the angel within the body of a woman, copulating with her and then likewise corrupting the angel trapped in the man's body. The fruits of this three-cornered relationship were known as *filii dyaboli*.[8] Closer to home, Guibert of Nogent also saw evidence of chaos as obscenely creative. Having dealt with the Count of Soissons, a man seemingly of the opinion that all women should be held in common, he turns to the heretics of Soissons, who at their secret meetings offer lit candles to a young woman presenting her naked buttocks under the gaze of all ('sub obtutu omnium'). Having extinguished the candles, they shout 'chaos' and copulate with the first person to hand, with any fruit of such unions roasted alive at subsequent meetings in the form of a mock sacrament.[9]

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[7] For allegations against early Christians see Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, rev. edn (London: Pimlico, 1993), pp. 1–15. The classic discussion of the effective spread of scurrilous allegations is Malcolm Barber, 'Propaganda in the Middle Ages: The Charges Against the Templars', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 17 (1973), 42-57. The possibility of medieval group sex and the creative potential of chaos is discussed in Peter Dinzelbacher, 'Gruppensex im Untergrund: Chaotische Ketzer und kirchliche Keuschheit im Mittelalter', in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 405–27, esp. pp. 408–09. On creative destruction in the sphere of economics, see notably Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[8] E. Bozoky (ed.), *Le Livre secret des cathares: 'Interrogatio Iohannis': apocryphe d'origine bogomile* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980), p. 58. Compare this with the account of Lucifer fascinated by the four-faced spirit: 'et [spiritus] fuit sine principio et manebat in hoc chaos, nullam habens potestatem creandi. Et dicunt quod Lucifer adhuc bonus descendit et videns speciem istius maligni spiritus, admiratus est.' A. Dondaine, 'La Hiérarchie cathare en Italie, I: Le "De heresi Catharorum in Lombardia"', *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 19 (1949), p. 310, repr. in his *Les Hérésies et l'Inquisition XIIe-XIIIe siècles*, ed. by Y. Dossat (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990).

[9] Guibert de Nogent, *Histoire de sa vie*, ed. by G. Bourgin (Paris: A. Pickard et fils, 1907), pp. 212–13 For translation, see *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent*, trans. by Paul J. Archambault (University Park PA: Penn State Press, 1996), p. 196.

There seems little doubt that the creative chaos Guibert envisaged took place in towns. In Guibert's text, the episode follows the condemned communes of Laon and Amiens and the cellars and the vaults in which the meetings were held suggest a large urban building in Soissons itself. The association of public sex, urban life and heresy was also commented on in accounts of Tanchelm of Antwerp. According to the canons of Utrecht, the preacher was able to raise funds by publicly betrothing himself to a statue of the Virgin Mary and then encouraging a competition of the sexes to provide offerings.[10] Other less decorous displays were alleged: one chronicler alleged that Tanchelm 'was of such great incontinence and impurity that he corrupted daughters in the presence of their mothers and wives with their husbands looking on and he would assert this to be a spiritual task.'[11] His followers, the townsfolk, were supposed to be similarly debauched. Manasses, a blacksmith, formed a guild with twelve men and one woman to represent the apostles and the Virgin Mary. In a sullying literal version of what Christianity practiced in spirit, the woman was led around to each one and taken by each as if in confirmation of their brotherhood.[12] The point was surely that both charismatic preachers and religious guilds were institutions that the Church had to live with in the early twelfth century. The rituals of both fitted models of power that not only pre-dated the Church but also could, in the imagination of some, outlive and succeed it. Whether preachers engaged in public sex or not, they were attractive and sustainable and, to ecclesiastical observers, with their disdainful view of lay culture, were as irresistible as public sex. In that respect, heresy's erotic rituals stand as a revealing parody of the eroticised sublimity of orthodox practice.

The writer who seems perhaps most concerned with the relationship between public sex and heresy was Caesarius of Heisterbach, writing in the early thirteenth century. Caesarius' story of the heretics of Cologne in the time when Rainald Dassel was archbishop (1159–67) offers parallels with Béroul's account of the reconciliation ritual at the Mal Pas. Once again the basic context is urban, but, as in Béroul's work, a crowd gathers in a liminal place for a solemn legal process, outside

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[10] *Udalrici Codex* 168, ed. by P. Jaffé in *Monumenta Bambergensia*, Bibliotheca Rerum Germanicarum, 5 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1869), pp. 297.

[11] 'Cum […] tantae incontinentiae et inpuritatis esset, ut filias in matrum praesentia, sponsasque maritis intuentibus corrumperet et hoc opus spirituale esse assereret.' (*Chronicon Sigiberti Gemblacensis; Continuatio Praemonstratensis*, ed. by D.L.C. Bethmann, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores*, VI, p. 449).

[12] *Udalrici Codex* 168, pp. 297–98. 'Que per singulos illorum duodecim circumducebatur […] quasi ad confirmationem fraternitatis, singulis miscebatur.'

the walls and near the Jewish cemetery.[13] Writing half a century after the events he describes, Caesarius tells us little of the beliefs or careers of the heretics. Instead the story begins as they are prepared for public burning with a large crowd to see and hear.[14]

The leader of the heretics is one Arnold, who promised his followers as the flames grew higher that they would soon be with (saint) Laurence. But out of compassion one of their number, a girl, 'beautiful though a heretic' ('speciosa, sed haeretica'), was dragged from the fire. Her rescuers offered to find her a husband or, if she preferred, a religious community, and she seemed to agree. Then, with a piece of deception worthy of Iseut herself, she asks, 'Tell me, where does that seducer lie?' On being told, this medieval Donna Giovanna slipped out of their hands and, covering her face with her dress, threw herself onto the body of the dead man, going down with him to burn forever.[15] The beautiful heretic neatly plays with the ambiguity of 'seductor' and becomes anonymous by covering her face or possibly a veiled bride for her dead master. Caesarius was clearly familiar with vernacular literature and in adding detail, true or not, for his sermon material he provided a lurid picture of the insidious charm of chaos. The crowd who came expecting to see justice and contrition are instead confused by heretics expropriating the names of the saints and by a girl sacrificing her life and virtue in the most grotesque form.

Caesarius's chapter is one of a series of accounts of heretics and acts forming a prelude to his tendentious view of for him more recent events such as the Albigensian Crusade and the discovery of heresy in the schools of Paris. He then turns to the meeting between Pope Lucius III and the emperor Frederick Barbarossa in Verona in the autumn of 1184. Here he recounts a tale he attributes to Gotteschalk, a monk and canon of Cologne cathedral. The latter's young colleague Everard, is puzzled (or perhaps intrigued) that their host, his wife and daughter leave the house almost every night. When he asks one of them, the answer is a simple 'come and see' ('veni et vide'). He follows them into a large underground house

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[13] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. by J. Strange (Cologne: Heberle, 1851). pp. 298–99. For translation see *The Dialogue on Miracles* trans. by H. von E. Scott and C.C. Swinton Bland, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1929), I, pp. 341–42.

[14] It is generally accepted that these are the same group reported by Eckbert of Schönau and other chroniclers (see Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, rev. edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 58–59). The bare outline of the woman's voluntary immolation is supported by the *Annales Veterocellenses*, P. Fredericq, *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae*, 5 vols (Ghent: J. Vuylsteke 1889–1906), I, p. 42.

[15] 'Dicite mihi, ubi iacet seductor ille? Cumque ei demonstrassent magistrum Arnoldum, ex manibus illorum elapse, facie veste tecta, super exstincti corpus ruit, et cum illo in infernum perpetuo arsura descendit.'

again suggestive of urban prosperity where what follows is an account very reminiscent of Guibert of Nogent. When the lights are extinguished, barriers of kinship, status and gender all break down in indiscriminate copulation. The watcher rapidly becomes a participant and, after six months, is considered such a keen attender that it is suggested that he teach others. Shocked at what seems a step too far beyond the pale, Everard goes no more, but confesses to his colleague: 'May you know, brother, I did not attend the heretical gatherings for the heresies, but on account of the girls'.[16] In this, Everard seems to have been slightly less favoured by moral luck than that fictional Scottish dogger, Robert Burns' Tam O'Shanter, who flees the churchyard rite in Alloa thanks to a firelight that revealed the witches making up his potential harem were not sufficiently attractive to make damnation alluring.

There is a degree of deliberate placing here. The 1184 meeting was the council at which the first co-ordinated moves were made against heresy with Lucius III's condemnation of Cathars and others in the decree *Ad Abolendam* receiving imperial backing. Caesarius puts the rather insouciant observation into the mouth of the novice in the dialogue; 'I have heard that there are many heretics in Lombardy,' to which the monk replies that it is no wonder, 'for they have their masters in different cities reading openly and perversely expounding the Bible'. If the spread of preaching and the guild was an issue for twelfth-century churchmen, then a literate laity was the threat in the thirteenth and, by presenting it in sexualised terms, full weight could be given to the seductively corrupting nature of its power.

Remembered Possibilities

> And it is terrible to know what too many do often, those who for a while carry out a miserable deed, who contribute together and buy a woman as a joint purchase between them and practice foul sin with that one woman, one after another, and each after the other most like dogs ['hundum geliccast'] that care not about filth.[17]

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[16] 'Sciatis, frater, me non frequentare conventicula haereticorum propter haereses sed propter puellas.' Caesarius, *Dialogus*, p. 308. The Scott and Bland translation is heavily bowdlerised (p. 352).

[17] 'Egeslic is to witanne þæt oft doð to manege, þe dreogað þa yrmþe hwilum, þæt sceotað togædere & ane cwenan gemænum ceape bicgað gemæne & wið þa ane fylþe adreogað, an æfter anum & ælc æfter aðrum hundum geliccast þe for fylþe ne scrifað.' Wulfstan, *Sermo lupi ad Anglos*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, Exeter Mediaeval English Texts and Studies, rev. edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1977), p. x.

The noble buffalo is opposed in [Thai villager] thoughts to the ignoble dog: chased out of sleeping quarters, its name used in sexual insults, the symbol of sex out of place and out of control.[18]

Not only the Germans but the Irish and the Picts as well are summoned to explicate those social structures embedded in the text that are anomalous from the feudal standpoint. […] Another social arrangement assumed to be known, and even acceptable, to the original audience is that of polyandry, here reduced to 'three in a bed' (although, as [Roger] Pensom notes, Mark has departed from the royal couch before Tristran makes his famous leap into it). Pensom notes correctly that the triangular relationship 'has a strong effect on the modern reader', but boldly appends: 'an effect which would have been still stronger for an audience for whom polyandry was a remembered possibility' (Pensom, p. 37). […] That Béroul's (Norman) contemporaries may have had dim memories of how their Celtic forebears (if they had any) thought and behaved is rather less likely, one would think, than that they remembered much more recent oral and written stories depicting adultery and other, contemporary forms of transgression.[19]

How might representations of public sex in accounts of heretical groups be illuminated by looking to other sources? As part of an answer to this, I would like to explore aspects of Béroul's version, a text that has long been explored as a witness to attitudes regarding adultery. More boldly, Roger Pensom goes as far to argue that the work may reflect knowledge among its medieval readers of polyandrous practices characteristic of Celtic societies, a reading criticised by Barbara Sergant-Baur as depending on an implausible frame of cultural and historical reference. Disinterring this particular disciplinary conversation may add to discussion of medieval religious and social orthodoxies more generally. In part, Sargent-Baur's objection that Pensom attributes too much memory to Béroul and should instead have focused on more contemporary commentary on sexual practices and scandals is well taken: he could fruitfully have devoted more detailed attention to Gerald for one. For that matter, one might not need look much further than the troubadours for a source in that Béroul's tale clearly give narrative form to lyric denunciations of jealous gossips known as *losengiers*, but also one might look to the role played by historical figures such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, less of a patroness it seems than an inspiration by dint of the scandalous rumours of adultery and incest attaching to her.[20] Yet that said, I would defend Pensom's reading and argue that beyond its

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[18] Mary Douglas, 'Self-Evidence', in *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 276–318, at p. 306.

[19] Barbara Sergant-Baur, review of Roger Pensom, *Reading Béroul's 'Tristan'* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), *Speculum*, 73:2 (1998), here at p. 575.

[20] See Ruth Harvey, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Troubadours', in *The World of Eleanor of Aquitaine: Literature and Society in Southern France between the Eleventh and Thirteenth Centuries*, ed. by Marcus Bull

salutary cautions, Sargent-Baur's disquiet at Pensom's critical waywardness perhaps highlights how his reading mirrors twelfth century polemics on sexuality found in ethnographic accounts, as well as commentaries on rhetoric and philosophy.[21]

Partly in echo of the provocative dimension of Pensom's work, I would contend that Béroul's version can also be read as a tale about 'dogging', some discussion of which is perhaps required. In the early years of the new century, the term entered the vocabulary of British popular culture. It joined the many forms of social networking of the period and was related by commentators to phenomena such as 'flash mobs' and the rise of the mobile phone. In terms of age profile it was notable that many participants would have also taken part in the 'rave culture' of the late 1980s. The thrills were watching exhibitionist sex, the possibility of joining in and the frisson of possibly doing something illegal under the UK Sexual Offences Act of 2003. In fact, such symptoms of moral panic as there were centred on related issues rather than the act itself: the possibility of assault, the spread of sexually transmitted disease and the un-neighbourly detritus left behind in what were often public recreation areas. Despite the practice of dogging not being illegal in itself there was a social stigma. Deployed against this, the 'dog' from which the verb derived was the owner's alibi: irate spouses, suspicious policemen and even tabloid journalists could be warded off by the assertion that the encounter was stumbled upon by chance while walking said animal. Yet, at the same time, the dog also becomes embarrassingly emblematic of the indiscriminate sordidness of both acts and desires slipping the civilising leash. In that respect, though there are many modern activities that would be incomprehensible to our medieval forebears, dogging is not perhaps one of them. St Augustine would perhaps have seized on the disavowals of modern doggers as an allegorical illustration of how our animal parts shamefully lead our rational selves astray.[22] Archbishop Wulfstan (cited above) would have put it more plainly still: dogging was the apocalyptic symptom of a world going to the dogs.

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and Catherine Léglu (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 101–14 and also Karen M. Broadhurst, 'Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patrons of Literature in French?', *Viator*, 27 (1996), 53–84.

[21] Space does not permit a full listing of the many pertinent studies in this area. For a range of disciplinary perspectives, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 1999), R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)., Jan Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex: The Meaning of Sex to a Twelfth-Century Intellectual*, Speculum Anniversary Monographs, 10 (Cambridge MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1985).

[22] Various studies have examined the place of dogs in medieval discourses on identity and sexuality. For a recent discussion, see Carla Freccero, 'Figural Historiography: Dogs, Humans and Cyanthropic Becomings', in *Comparatively Queer: Interrogating Identities across Time and Cultures* ed. by Jarrod Hayes, Margaret R. Higonnet and William J. Spurlin, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 45–68.

From a modern academic perspective, dogging offers a particularly interesting instance of the complex relations between sexuality, society and visibility, of what lies at or just beyond the limits of imaginings and practices or beyond the light of day's avowable ken, in the 'queer wishes' a collective 'straight mind' can barely countenance.[23] As part of this marginal or frontier location, there is one further characteristic to be noted about the dogging phenomenon: although not urban, it takes place in public space. Most encounters are in rural or suburban locations such as country parks and supermarket car parks and, of course, they mostly take place in the dark.[24] The practice is also not uncommonly cast as provincial, as is the case in a recent BBC TV adaptation of Sherlock Holmes' most popular adventure. In 'The Hounds of Baskerville', Dr Watson (Martin Freeman) discovers that the mysterious lights out on the Devon moors are in fact a group of doggers parked on a hill, a red-herring moment that is but one part of the episode's playful pluralisation of Arthur Conan Doyle's original title.[25] Dr Watson's discovery also appears as one late scion of a long history of provincialising displacements associated with accounts of polyandry, group sex and other deviances on Europe's Western fringes.

In this context, although Sergant-Baur's criticisms of Pensom offer sensible cautions about the limits of intepretation, it hardly requires us to cast Béroul as a Cornish Ovid to suggest his poem could reflect cultural traditions clearly accessible to his contemporaries, not least Gerald, for whom, as Jeffrey Cohen and Asa Mittman show, such questions were indeed live issues. Presenting Ireland as an entire land and nation built on deviance, Gerald amplifies massively on accounts of non-orthodox practice stemming from less distant lands, this perhaps with a view to creating a dossier to legitimise Henry II's invasion as a crusade. The legitimisation is also cultural: the *Topography's* lurid character is mirrord in its stylistically and referentially florid commentary on the practices of the Irish, advertising itself through both matter and language as indebted to exoticist and ethnographic

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[23] The opposition 'straight minds-queer wishes' is used by the French avant-garde writer Monique Wittig (see *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, trans. by ?? (London: Beacon, 1992), pp. 21–x). For an application in the field of medieval literary studies, see Simon Gaunt, 'Straight Minds/ Queer Wishes in Old French Hagiography: *La Vie de Sainte Euphrosine*', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. by Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 155–73.

[24] Leander Kahney, 'Dogging Craze Has Brits in Heat' is a relatively unsensational introduction at http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2004/03/62718?currentPage=all [accessed 10 December 2011]. For the relevant UK legislation, see the Sexual Offences Act (2003), Pt. 1 §§ 66–68 at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/contents/enacted [accessed 10 December 2011].

[25] 'The Hounds of Baskerville', dir. Paul McGuigan, first broadcast 8 January 2012.

traditions derived from Antiquity and recycled here to fit the purposes and tastes of a new audience.[26]

That said, Gerald is not the only possible source for such stories: it might only have required passing familiarity with accounts such as Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, a work widely copied in the Middle Ages, to begin to construct the sort of horizon Pensom describes:

> The most civilized of all these nations are they who inhabit Kent, which is entirely a maritime district, nor do they differ much from the Gallic customs. […] Ten and even twelve have wives common to them, and particularly brothers among brothers, and parents among their children; but if there be any issue by these wives, they are reputed to be the children of those by whom respectively each was first espoused when a virgin.[27]

In this respect, Pensom's casting of the central triangle as polyandrous reflects a reasonably well-attested tradition in which frontier contact between Occidentalist deviance and European normativity were progressively pushed outward by the migrations and displacements of the Roman period through to the Middle Ages. In twelve hundred years, what was regarded as a barbaric if widespread custom on both mainland Europe and the British Isles had been pushed to the Celtic fringes.

Private and Public Dogging in Béroul

> La plaie saigne: ne la sent,
> Qar trop a son delit entent.
> En plusors leus li sanc aüne.
> Le nain defors est. A la lune,
> Bien vit josté erent ensemble
> Li dui amant: de joie en tremble. (ll. 733–38)
>
> [The wound was bleeding, but he did not feel it for he was too intent on his pleasure. The dwarf was outside; by the moonlight he could see that the two lovers were lying together. He trembled with joy.]

Although clearly a primal scene of courtly adultery, providing the blueprint for Lancelot's tryst with Guinevere in Godfrey de Leigni's continuation of the *Chevalier de la charrette*, Pensom presents this moment as possibly indicating a polyandrous sharing of Iseut. As Pensom argues, Béroul's staging of the triangular

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[26] On Gerald, see references above.

[27] Julius Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, trans. by W. A. McDevitte and W. S. Bohn (), V:14.

relation between the principal characters may echo not so much fashionable courtly mores associated with *fin'amor* as conflicts arising in shifts from matrilinear-based models of inheritance and kinship to patrilinearity and primogeniture.[28] Tristan is not only the king's nephew, his close adviser, but in effect his in-law, or co-husband of Iseut. This possibility Pensom sees hinted at perhaps most luridly in the episode in which Frocin the dwarf, thinking to obtain evidence of the affair, scatters flour on the floor of the royal chamber. Having noticed this behaviour, Tristan leaps from his bed to the royal one when Mark leaves the room, the effort unfortunately causing a hunting wound to reopen, leaving incriminating blood traces both on Iseut's bedclothes and on the floor following his return leap. The mere spectacle of Tristan's pleasure, sufficiently powerful to distract him from pain and blood-loss (ll. 733–34), also has the dwarf trembling with a perverse joy, stemming either from malice or voyeurism or both.[29] Béroul's accentuation of heat of the moment through the dramatic use of the historic present is lost in Frederick's translation.

But what can we and can't we see here? Béroul evidently steers toward a questioning of what exactly the 'evidence' might be said to reveal, co-opting his audience as defence lawyers against the dwarf and barons. But Béroul's dance of the veils does not end there, the discrete nature of identities problematised in various ways by the associative logic of imaginable transgressions. For one thing, the spattered blood traces in the flour on the floor episode can appear as veiled suggestions both of the prohibition of communality of congress framed in Leviticus 18. 20 ('Thou shalt not lie with thy neighbour's wife, nor be defiled with mingling of seed.') and of intercourse with women menstruating (18. 19). Similarly, although Tristan's relation with Iseut with is not specifically covered in the list of proscribed relations given in Leviticus 18. 6–17, the logic it infringes can be generalised from other injunctions: for Tristan to sleep with Iseut is to 'uncover' Mark's nakedness. Thus, the abomination that lies in the fact that one uncovering suggests or implies another amounts to an imposed voyeurism capable of an almost viral proliferation of corollary sins.

By way of seemingly putting a brake on such runaway flights, Béroul insists on the fact that Mark is gone before Tristan leaps. Sargent-Baur appears to suggest this as an obstacle to seeing the scene as a memory of polyandry, against which an actual three-in-a-bed romp would have been more convincing evidence.[30] Evidently though

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[28] Pensom, pp. x–x.[Ref required] On the relation between Mark and Tristan see also E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 203–40.

[29] See Gaunt, *Retelling the Tale*, p. 44.

[30] Sargent-Baur, p. 575.

the logic of such a criticism can be turned back: Sargent-Baur here equates polyandry with an utter abandon bereft of any ritual framing or decorum. By contrast, Béroul's laboured emphasis on Tristan's relation to the King's place suggests more might be at work. Just as Tristan's leap into Mark's place bypasses social visibility, so, as part of Frocin's ruse, the hero has been instructed to depart before dawn the next morning as secret emissary to Arthur's court. Such plot devices point insistently to a contrapuntal problematisation inherent in Tristan's oscillation between surrogacy for and difference from Mark. Whether he moves towards Mark's place (either with Iseut in the bed or diplomatically as emissary) or away from it (leaping from the bed or leaving the court as messenger), Tristan does so in the king's stead, however flickering that positioning may appear. A similar ambiguity attaches to Frocin the dwarf. Though his witness of the flour on the floor scene is evidently voyeuristic, his presence here is also prophylactic in character. Here the differing understandings of 'a la lune' (l. 736) highlight a key truth: his witnessing either of the actual act by moonlight or – as Philippe Walther construes it – by second sight in stars and moon-shadow marks him as a magical intermediary who both reveals and draws a veil over proceedings.[31] Thus this homuncular figure is charged with knowing what the man Mark cannot if he is to maintain his regal status. The underling's occult (or actual?) 'dogging' of the couple thus guarantees that the king himself is not placed in the debasing position of direct witness to his own (ritual) cuckolding, in effect allowing the king to remain ritually blind.

What Béroul creates here is a scenario in which the mechanisms of representation and delegation are both interrogated and blurred by the logic of polyandry. While son succeeds father in patrilinear societies, Béroul recreates the structures and complex 'domestic cycle' that results when a system structured around horizontal relations (uncle to sister-son nephew) combines with polyandry.[32] In matrilineal polyandry, a sister-son such as Tristan reflects two phases of the domestic cycle. First, he appears as a future ally, an agent of renewal of the fraternal group. Second, he represents the outcome of a genealogical 'cooking process' that addresses the problem of difference. By contast, the brother-in-law (Riwalin) remains an outsider, the sister-son embodies a domesticating translation of that exteriority into the body of blood kin. Herein also lies the importance of Tristan as an agent in cultural change and the assimilation of new practices: through the sister-

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[31] Compare Frederick's translation with Walther's and his p. 57 note 14: 'Le nain comprend, au seul aspect de la lune, la situation des amants dans la chambre du roi. Il ne voit pas directement dans la chambre car il fait nuit'.

[32] Berreman, 'Himalayan Polyandry', p. 128. Interestingly, Berreman's account of modern Himalayan polyandrous societies describes in terms little different from those used by Julius Caesar.

son, foreign knowledge becomes part of the communal self, the present can assimilate the future. As distinctions collapse, Tristan moves from a position removed from Mark at the centre of the clan group to being structurally interchangeable with him. Here, the acquisition of a foreign woman does little to bolster the uncertain genealogical distinction between Mark and Tristan.[33] Any issue could be both Tristan's offspring and his fellow *nepos*: either his son or, in effect, himself. Accordingly, Mark's line appears caught in an ambiguous 'developmental cycle' frozen through the barrenness of the marriage, in which respect Béroul's poem assumes its central place in Peggy McCracken's examination of literary representation of queenly adultery as barren.[34] However, the absence of change here may not simply reflect a failure of lineal succession (= the future fails/ has failed to arrive) but rather what appears from the outside as a generational confusion fundamental to the polyandrous model (= the future is already present in the now).[35]

There is a further dimension here, namely economic. If the relationship is cast as polyandrous then this suggests Mark is embarrassingly compelled to acknowledge Tristan as an equal in their relation to the material and cultural capital Iseut represents, these embodied both in her legendary golden hair and in in the occult knowledge she shares with her kin (assuming the lost opening to Béroul was not dissimilar to Gottfried of Strasburg's presentation of magical practices at the Irish court). Everyone else in the court is also complicit. Despite the endless damning evidence of the Queen's illicit liaison and whatever grumblings and plots the barons foment to drive Tristan out, on a day-to-day level they do little to stop the affair. As classic *losengiers*, they both recognise the stake they have in the uneasy stability brought about by the Queen's two lovers and perhaps, like her other suitor Kaherdin, secretly hope they might one day share Iseut's favours. In their courtly fantasy of wanting in on the action, whether political or sexual, the barons are the real 'doggers' here. In that respect, both the medieval poem and the modern phenomenon make clear that dogging is also about power. The central position of one couple 'engaging in exhibitionist sexual activity' reminds watchers who 'owns' who and the car provides an economic underpinning of the status as well as acting as a proscenium arch. Although in a heterosexual context there must presumably be

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[33] See Berreman, 'Pahari Polyandry', at p. 62.

[34] Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature*, The Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

[35] Here, the Tristan story complicates matters by presenting a hero who is both an orphaned son – his support of his uncle entailing a collapse of generational distinction – and a plenipotentiary agent of his kinsman in the arrangement of the marriage. Given that the opening of Béroul's poem is lost, we have no access to the picture it painted of Tristan's parents and their place in the larger clan group, though, following other versions, he is clearly the son of Mark's sister and Riwalin.

some women doggers, the vast majority of watchers appear to be men. As with classic accounts of courtly love, the scene belongs to the men who give their women up to the imaginative consumption of collective fantasy. Handing her over for group possession as a public woman is a different if not unrelated piece of theatre.

The problems of social theatre are no less complex when Yseut is threatened with being handed over to the leper band led by Ivain of Lantyan (ll. 1155–1272) before her dramatic rescue by Tristan. Prior to this, she was of course sentenced to be burnt at the stake, a standard punishment for traitors and heretics, though now the heat shifts problematically from the purification of fire to the sullying ardour of the lustful lepers and the unspoken desires of those either watching or participating in the event:

> Li rois l'entent, si respondi:
> 'Se tu m'enseignes cest, sanz falle,
> Qu'ele vivë, et que ne valle,
> Gré t'en savrai, ce saches bien;
> Et se tu veus, si pren du mien.
> Onques ne fu dit tel manere
> Tant doleruse ne tant fire,
> Qui orendroit tote la pire
> Seüst por Deu le roi eslire,
> Quë il n'eüst m'amor tot tens.'
> Ivains respont: 'Si com je pens
> Je te dirai asez briment.
> Veez: j'ai ci compaignon cent.
> Yseut nos done, s'ert comune.
> Poior fin dame n'ot mais une.
> Sire, en nos a si grant ardor
> Soz ciel n'a dame qui un jor
> Peüst soufrir nostre convers.' (ll. x–x).

> [The king listened and said: 'If you can tell me, without a trick, how she may live and be dishonoured, I shall be grateful to you. Take something of mine, if you wish. No manner of death is so grim and horrible that I shall not love forever, by God the king, the man who today can choose the worst for her!' Ivain answered: 'I can tell you quickly what I have in mind. Look, here I have a hundred companions. Give Iseut to us and we will possess her in common. No woman ever had a worse end. Sire, there is such lust in us that no woman could tolerate intercourse with us for a single day.']

Proposed as a grotesque gang rape, the Queen's punishment, watched over by Mark, his supporters and bystanders, appears as the most diseased and grotesque form of polyandry imaginable. Speech and silence play complementary roles here. Although Mark's initial response to Ivain savours the cruelty to be done, the subsequent handover (ll. 1217–20) is preceded only by a silent deliberation ('Li rois

l'entent; en piez estut, / Ne de grant piece ne se mut.' ll. 1199–1200). Everything that could be said in this unthinkable political moment will be simply given to be seen. More than just a dramatic highlighting of Mark's vengeful determination, here the wills of king and leper are one and the same. With Ivain's company cast as proscribed outsiders who nonetheless have a voice by dint of the exceptional political utility accorded untouchables, this episode suggests a complicity in which the 'biopolitical' oppositions between Mark, Tristan and Ivain are less than simple or absolute.[36] Indeed, in this context, the public punishment appears as a hyperbolically theatrical replay of more private acts of witness, whether in the form of Frocin's voyeurism, the court fantasies of losengiers or indeed the possibly polyandrous arrangement between uncle and nephew. Here Ivain's request 'Yseut nos done, s'ert commune' (l. X) is potentially exactly the wording that could have been used to the Irish king during marriage negotiations had subsequent events been foreseen. In that sense, the leper outsiders reveal their heretic dimension in that they take the underlying premises of Cornwall's practices to their logical conclusion. That no simple disavowal is possible here is apparent in how Béroul glosses Tristan's treatment of the leper chief:

> Li contor dïent que Yvain
> Firent nïer, qui sont vilain:
> Berox l'a mex en sen memoire:
> Trop ert Tristan preuz et cortois
> A ocirre gent de tes lois. (ll. 1265–70)

> [Some story-tellers say they drowned Ivain, but they are fools and do not know the story at all well. Béroul has a better memory of it: Tristan was too noble and too courtly to kill such people.]

Tristan's mercy is more than mocking assertion kinship and community foreshadowing his own later passing as a leper at the reconciliation scene, where the licence for levity and intimacy extended to him marks him as a functionary figure in ritual space.[37] Here courtesy is extended to a distinct community with their own law ('gent de tes lois' l. 1270) or, more literally, with *such* laws, a fact Béroul claims to remember and understand better than his predecessors. In that respect, although cast as a nightmare punishment, this moment hints at a social logic in which Mark is

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[36] On leprosy in Béroul, see notably Sally L. Burch, 'Leprosy and Law in Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*', *Viator*, 38:1 (2007), 141–54. On leprosy and heresy more generally, see Moore, especially pp. 45–65 and pp. 73–80.

[37] On joking in ritual in this regard, see in particular Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 90–114 ('Jokes').

inextricably implicated, the relation between the two parties profoundly ambiguous. Does Mark position the lepers as an absolute opposite or as his uncomfortable double revealing that the King is indeed prepared to countenance something (usefully) rotten in the polyandrous state of Cornwall?[38]

Ritual Erotologies: The Politics of Public Sex

> He who is to be inaugurated not as a chief, but as a beast, not as a king, but as an outlaw, has bestial intercourse with [a white mare] before all, professing himself to be a beast also. The mare is then killed immediately, cut up in pieces and boiled in water. A bath is prepared for the man afterward in the same water. He sits in the bath surrounded by all his people, and all, he and they, eat of the meat of the mare which is brought to them.[39]

Cornwall's frontier problems can also be seen as a reflection of troubles elsewhere on the western fringe. Here again, resolution involves accommodating difference through ritual. In his *History and Topography of Ireland* Béroul's contemporary [?], Gerald of Wales, devotes a number of sections to the practices of the Irish. Gerald is particularly scandalised by the royal consecration custom of Kenelcunill (III § 102) 'in the northern and farther part of Ulster'. In this the new king has public sexual intercourse with a white mare in front of 'the whole people of that land'. Afterwards the animal is slaughtered, cut up and boiled in water. A bath is prepared from the broth and the new king bathes in it, drinking it at the same time. Meanwhile the meat is distributed to him and his people to eat.[40] Although presented by Gerald as hyperbolically repellent, the ritual's structural logic seems relatively clear. The custom positions the king as an absolute universal exception at the confluence of every cultural opposition and then rebinds that exception back into community through a sacramental feast that marries him both to the body social and, indeed, back to himself. What evidently fascinates Gerald about the Irish is that their customs are at some level either fundamentally 'raw' (e.g. the processing of milk into cheese is unknown, III § 103) or that they heretically misconstrue the transformative function of cooking (e.g. by bathing in and drinking the soup of an

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[38] In that sense the position and negotiations of the leper sub-community can be read in terms of Giorgio Agamben's discussion of the distinction between life politically recognised and 'bare life' (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998)).

[39] Gerald of Wales, III § 102.

[40] Gerald of Wales, *History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. by John J. O'Meara (London: Penguin, 1982), p. 110.

animal with which they have just had sexual congress).[41] Significantly preceding the Kenelcunil rite is Gerald's account of the barbarous misappropriation of orthodox ritual, such the place of the Mass as the focus of false treaties in which one of the participants is murdered (III, § 101). Such beastly misuse is then only further highlighted by the many tales of bestial union and hybrid offspring emanating from a place of dreams in which imagined grotesquerie is given physical form.

Of course, it was not only in Ireland that kings were reputed part horse and part human. It has been suggested that Mark's name is punningly associated with the creature (via forms cognate with Old English *mearh*), this connection forming the basis for the episode in which it is revealed he has horse's ears, Frocin's failure to keep said secret costing the dwarf him his life. Both Beroul and Gerald share a fascination with the fundamental strangeness of ritual practice. For all the sexual chaos at the court of king Mark, Béroul's text offers a complex and nuanced relationship with 'civilised' overlordship, based on a surprising degree of accommodation. The situation in Cornwall eventually becomes so tense that outside authority in the shape of king Arthur is brought in to enforce a reconciliation. He presides over an oath-taking ceremony in the presence of the political nation at the muddy Mal Pas. Although a fugitive, Tristan is also invisibly present disguised as a leper. As Iseut arrives, he offers his help and carries her pick-a-back over the mire. Yseut is then able to swear with perfect truth that no man has been between her thighs, except her husband and the leper. It seems logical that the setting should be the Mal Pas, a place of shame and soiling, mud and other contamination. It is public yet in the middle of nowhere, a place of confused or suspended identities and functions; it is the wrong place to go and therefore at some points the right one. Its wilderness setting appears as a sort of neutral territory or degree zero that is itself the confluence of different voices and senses. However, this neutrality is far from a neutral matter. In that sense, both name and topography bespeak ritual danger. Not

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[41] Gerald's account of the western frontier draws on the full panoply of classical ethnography, natural history and cosmography. In this view, Ireland appears not only as a bestiary, but even an 'alternative' one. Various sections are devoted to 'missing' species of fish (I § 5, I § 6), birds (I § 7) and reptiles (I § 21). Yet, this is not just a mapping of plus and minus, presence and absence: if some species are absent, others – such as hawks and falcons (I 8), the crow (I § 17) and the mouse (I § 20) – appear curiously or even pestilentially *over*-present. Beyond that, we also have a more Ovidian model of mobile being, a fascination with the possibilities of mingling and hybridity apparent even in descriptions of birds such as the osprey that 'belong to two species' (I § 12) and other creatures that do not conform to category. The anthropological logic of this is clear: not only do the Irish fauna operate according to a different structural logic of presences and absences (+/-), the system also exhibits a range of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari would present as 'overcoded intensities', as - - and ++. In a world whose later descendants and cousins are works such as Borges's *Book of Imaginary Beings*, the marvels of the West are evidently, as Claude Levi-Strauss put it, supremely 'good to think [with]'.

unlike Victor Turner's account of the installation ritual of Ndembu chiefs, the poem presents the trace of a liminal state in the history of an ultimately affirmed status quo, but at the same time Béroul outlines a situation in which change seems to occur even as no one is left sure exactly what they were witness to.[42] This is particularly emphasised in a preceding episode devoted to the arrangements for the Mal Pas ritual in which members of Arthur's court openly profess themselves hostile to Mark's barons, a partisan position that belies any pretence of due process or attempt to acknowledge both the rights and wrongs of the situation. Compounding this wilful blindness internal to the text, we also have the dramatic irony that Arthur is placed in a position of effecting not to see the parallel between his position and Mark's as royal cuckolds.

In this collective sleight of hand, the pace of proceedings is part of the magic. Arthur seizes control of proceedings seemingly too much determined by underlings ready to play on Mark's apparent weakness in order to mislead their lord for their own ends:

> Li rois Artus parla premier,
> *Qui de parler fu prinsautier*:
> 'Rois Marc', fait il, 'qui te conselle
> Tel outrage si fait mervelle:
> Certes', fait il, 'sil se desloie.
> Tu es legier a metre en voie:
> Ne dois trover parole fause!
> Trop te feroit amere sause,
> Qui parlement te fist joster!
> Mot li devroit du cors coster
> Et ennuier, qui voloit faire.' (Béroul, *Tristan*, ll. 4139–49, my emphasis)

> [King Arthur, always quick to speak, spoke first: 'King Mark', he said, 'whoever advised you to make this accusation did you a terrible wrong and certainly acted disloyally. You are easily influenced, but you must not believe false words. The man who made you convene this meeting was preparing a bitter sauce for you. Whoever brought this about deserves to be severely punished.']

The fundamental issue here is one of speech and the timing and weighting of speech acts. The paradigm in medieval literature for transcendent outside authority is Charlemagne, most notably in the *Roland*. The difference in Arthur's behaviour is notable. The latter's peremptory intervention and directive stance in the oath and reconciliation ceremonies (ll. 4139–40) marks a coded break with Charlemagne's

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[42] See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

characteristically measured style, one of the most obvious instances to be found in the opening scenes of the *Chanson de Roland* (see above). If there is a parallel here, then in this difference, Arthur announces a new mode of self-presentation at court that shows little concern with the truth of interiority.[43] It is in the capacity of language to manufacture consensus that we see most clearly the detail of Béroul's Carolingian memory, a recall that asks how Charlemagne speaks to Europe in the cultural imagination of the twelfth century.

Arthur's peremptory intervention stands in contrast to and seeks to remedy Mark's failure to take a lead in a matter where speech and language were of central importance. The assembly of his barons is a 'parlement' (l. 4147), a talking-shop, at which there is every danger that Mark's questionable judgement and capacity for *inventio* will lead him to either produce or endorse falsity ('trover parole fause' l. 4145). However, the contrast with Mark is not the sole or the most important doubling in this scene, Charlemagne's gravitas provides the contrary model for Arthur's utterance. One sense to be given to this scene may be simply that of parody: where the court of Charlemagne was characterised by sober dignity, by a concern with truth, Arthur's court is a domain where partiality and spin dominate and where appearance is all. In that sense, Arthur and his followers become the internal porte-parole of the unconditionally partisan Béroul, invading and colonising the latter's text on his own behalf.[44] In this context, Mark's seemingly abashed response offers the most convenient of pretexts:

> 'Ha! sire Artus, qu'en pus je mès?
> Tu me blasmes, et si as droit,
> Quar fous est qui envïeus croit.
> *Ges ai creüz outre mon gré.*
> Se la deraisne est en cel pré,
> Ja n'i avra mais si hardiz,
> Së il après les escondiz
> En disoit rien së anor non,
> Qui n'en eüst mal gerredon.
> Ce saciez vos, Artus, frans rois,
> C'a esté fait, c'est sor mon pois.
> Or se gardent d'ui en avant!' (ll. 4170–81, emphasis added)

['My lord Arthur, what can I do? You reproach me and you are right, for only a fool believes an envious man and I believed them against my will. If the queen is vindicated in

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[43] On this subject, see in particular Marcus Bull, *Thinking Medieval: An Introduction to the Study of the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[44] On the position of the narrator in Béroul and Thomas, see especially Gaunt, *Retelling the Tale*, pp. 45–46 and pp. 128–46.

this meadow, no one will ever be so bold again. If anyone after the trial speaks of the queen otherwise than to her honour, he will suffer for it. Arthur, noble king, know that this has been done against my will. From now on let them take heed!']

In Alan Frederick's handling the king presents a question that might well have given inquisitors into heresy pause for thought: how exactly does one *believe against one's will*? Although it is possible to render the line, 'Ges ai creüz outre mon gré', less enigmatically (e.g. as 'I accepted their views though I did not want to'), Frederick's rendering neatly highlights the element of contradiction. In a sense, this renders Mark's expression of his faith in his barons a reluctant conversion or concession to their view of social and political orthodoxy, the fundamental tensions underlying the resulting monarchical persona captured in this speech. Yet there may be something more assertive than obfuscation and a grab at plausible denial at work here: although bound by the law, the king ultimately has the freedom to defy its constraining rationality. Thus, as Ernst Kantorowicz glosses John of Salisbury, the oppositional conundrum of *legibus alligatus / legibus solutus* yields a sort of judicially 'indivisible remainder' as the core of the king's legal persona.[45] At a certain level then, Mark's apparently position here is no more than a somewhat disguised local translation and reaffirmation of what is being affirmed as a general principle slightly further east.[46] The possibly polyandrous relation between Mark and Tristan may look like an embarrassing Celtic throwback, but at the Mal Pas it is the barons who are revealed (and outmanoeuvred) as literally 'stuck in the mud' conservatives.

Through the obstinate unreadability of his formulation it seems Mark looks outward for a 'theological' solution to the Cornish problem, a historical refounding that tears up the previous contract between himself and his counsellors by means of what is in effect a replay of the marriage itself, and indeed a double wedding of husband to wife and king to state, a quasi-sacramental scene presided over by Arthur:

> Li consel departent atant.
> *Tuit s'asistrent par mié les rens,*
> *Fors les deus rois; c'est a grant sens:*
> *Yseut fu entre eus deus as mains.*

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[45] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 68.

[46] For another instance of the marginalisation of barons and magnates in legal procedure see White's reading of the trial of the Persian soldier who attempted to assassinate Alexander in the *Roman de Thèbes*, an episode White sees counterpointed in the account of the trial of Daire in the *Roman d'Alexandre* (White, pp. 94–98).

> Près des reliques fu Gauvains.
> La mesnie Artus, la proisie,
> Entour le paile est arengie.
> Artus *prist la parole en main*,
> Qui fut d'Iseut le plus prochain. (Béroul, *Tristan*, ll. 4182–90, emphasis added)

> [Then the counsellors separated. Everyone sat down in rows except for the two kings, for Yseut was between them holding their hands. Gawain stood near the relics and the household of Arthur was seated round the cloth. Arthur, who was nearest Yseut, began to speak.]

The ceremony positions Iseut between brother kings. Yet for all its carefully choreographed appearance of univocity, of a relentlessly affirmed 'on-message' support, the scene seems riven with contradictions. How can Arthur be 'closer' to Iseut than Mark when both of them are holding her hands? Moreover, this productive confusion then extends to language itself, literally taken in hand: 'Artus prist la parole *en main*' (l. 4189, my emphasis).

If 'sense' is perceived as something largely pertaining to content, then here by contrast we are invited to look at the formal construction of 'truth', the social framework of the scene. In that respect, it is crucial that the scene revolves around the social production of *sens*: the positioning of the queen during the central section of the ordeal procedure is highlighted as showing *great sense* ('c'est a grant sens', l. 4184), a detail omitted in Frederick's translation. Crucially, the door Arthur opens allows Mark to devolve responsibility to his malign counsellors through a surprising and unmanning admission of fallibility counterweighted shortly afterward by emphasis on the fear his rule instils in his subjects (ll. 4244). However, Arthur's footwork with regard to his own position is no less shifty. His challenge to Yseut's accusers involves his personal assumption of any antagonism directed at the queen: even as he makes himself her champion to function as a distraction from the actual conflict. At the same time Arthur adroitly forestalls any opposition that might be directed at himself by transposing it onto Yseut and Cornwall itself, any objection to his role tantamount to an attack on Yseut, Mark and the stability of the kingdom. However, in taking the position of her champion, Tristan's possible role, what the moment then represents, in the sublimated disguise of ritual form, is the polyandrous union, a moment that could only be presided over by the lord of the marches, Arthur. In that sense, as Sally Burch emphasises, Tristan is certainly not absent from the stage: 'the Queen's crossing of the Mal Pas has as many witnesses as the oath ceremony itself'.[47] Finally, if the Cornish barons are part of the *universitas* that is

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[47] Burch, p. 146.

Mark's body politic at the beginning of his pronouncement, they finish outside it: the arrangement is quickly taken over by the two kings and Iseut herself.[48] Like the Kenilcunill bath, the Mal Pas ritual dissolves and recooks community, but the resultant brew is not necessarily a recipe for health. As the text itself says, 'the man who made you convene this meeting was preparing a bitter sauce for you' (ll. 4145-46, cited above).

Béroul's text explores ambiguities and mirrorings in the opposition between licit and illicit witness, between public decorum and private scandal. If a sorcerous dwarf presides over the union in the flower on the flour episode, it is his Arthurian contrary and other master of court spin, the once and future king himself who officiates at the reconciliation scene. The weight thrown behind the order of appearances is apparent in the cultural firepower brought to bear on the oath ceremony: as Béroul emphasises, every last relic in Cornwall is brought there and laid out on a silk cloth from Nicaea embroidered with animals (ll. 4125–37). Nicaea was not just a reference to the exotic east, but also to the site of the Council of 325 which condemned Arianism and defined Christian belief. Cornwall's local claims to its particular place in the history and sphere of European orthodoxy, even its place in the diversity of nature ('Ovrez fu en bestes, menuz.' l. 4127) – stand or fall here.[49]

Tristan's disguise as a leper, a condition he helpfully explains was acquired from another woman's husband, points to massive overlayering of meanings and oppositions. The disease of the body politic in the state of Cornwall seems to be an open secret for the entire community. Iseut's proclamation is both a promise and a threat across Charlemagne's Europe: she offers to make an oath to which everyone can subscribe, uniting her supporters against all comers, from Cornwall to Saxony ('Cil me voudroient escondire / […] /*Vers un Cornot ou vers un Saisne.*' ll. 3232–34, emphasis added), from one end of Charlemagne's empire to another. In that respect, Iseut's position in the liminal focus of ritual also locates her at the heart of Europe, the focus of an attempt to subdue and refound the Carolingian world from its Western to its Eastern extremes. As we have already seen more starkly in Gerald's Ireland, provincial perversity is both hideous and filled with the vigour of

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[48] Mark's commentary reads rather like the argument Thomas de Kent attributes to Tholomé in his version of the Alexander romance: Alexander has the right to execute the Persian, even by throwing him to the dogs and lions, but not by appeal to the judgement of his barons (ll. 3220–96). See Thomas de Kent, *Le Roman d'Alexandre ou le roman de toute chevalerie*, ed by Brian Foster and Ian Short, trans. by Catherine Gaulier Bougassas and Laurence Harf Lancner, Champion Classique Moyen Age, 5 (Paris: Champion, 2003).

[49] In that sense, this scene raises similar issues to those the list of 138 relics claimed as belonging to the church of Exeter in 1050, a list associated with accounts of visits of Aethelstan. On which see Julia M.H. Smith, "Treasure On Earth, Treasure in Heaven"', in *Relics and Remains*, ed. by Alexandra Walsham, Past and Present Supplement, 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 73–96.

simple logic, reducing overlordship to a cautious mediation that at the Mal Pas sometimes descends into slippery equivocation.

Historical Context and Anthropological Meaning

> We are the things that once were and shall be again![50]

As I remarked above, the curious ambivalence marking the relation between sexual regulation and 'European' cultural identity has a long history. Instances such as Hermione's derision of the degeneracy of Asia (Euripides, *Andromache*, ll. 174–76) show groups defining themselves against barbarously exotic or peripheral neighbours.[51] In this ongoing play on oppositions between virtuous Athenians and swinging Spartans, incest recurs as a theme, classical traditions informing the attitudes of early Christian writers such as Lactantius, who characterised paganism as a domain of licentious depravity.[52] However, the turbid echoes of such topoi in medieval texts suggest they saw that there would be no clean end to the curious pull of deviant alterity. Accordingly, allusions in Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* to sexual scandals from Ovid, Juvenal and Virgil to the *Roman d'Eneas* speak of a Middle Ages knowingly haunted by historiographical and ethnographic fantasy.[53]

Gerald's lurid accounts of the cultural marches show that as its universalising ambition increases, so the orthodox self seems driven by its consuming fascination with outlandish form and practice to 'dog' the messy and freakish play imputed to a recalcitrantly deviant other. The logics of identity, difference and exchange evident in Gerald's representations of totemism are symptomatic of a long-standing problem in European Christianity's cultural DNA, one tying back to Old Testament prescriptions against the worship of idols. As Mary Douglas argues, through strictures applying to both contact and representation Judaeo-Christian cultures find

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[50] Sam Raimi (dir.), *The Evil Dead* (1981).

[51] 'That is the way all barbarians are: father lies with daughter and son with mother and brother with sister, nearest kin murder each other, and there is no law to stop any of this. Do not introduce such customs into our city. For it is also not right for one man to be in charge of two women. Rather, everyone who wants to live without pain is content to look to a single mate for his bed.' (ll. 169–81).

[52] On Lactantius in this regard, see Marc Shell, 'The Want of Incest in the Human Family: Or, Kin and Kind in Christian Thought', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62:3 (1994), 625–50.

[53] See James R. Simpson, *Troubling Arthurian Histories: Court Culture, Scandal and Performance in Chrétien de Troyes' 'Erec et Enide'*, Medieval and Early Modern French Studies, 5 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 171–86, as well as ' "Not that Innocent?": Singing to Daddy's Little Treasure in *Erec et Enide*', *French Studies Bulletin*, 32:1, vol. 118 (2011), 1–4.

themselves discursively proofed against thinking through relations between them and their neighbours, especially at the point at which the neighbour conceives its relation to the world through forms such as totemic belief. As she observes:

> A people who have nothing to lose by exchange and everything to gain will be predisposed towards the hybrid being, wearing the conflicting signs, man/god or man/beast. A people whose experience of foreigners is disastrous will cherish perfect categories, reject exchange and refuse doctrines of mediation.[54]

Douglas's discussion here posits a sort of desert cultural crossroads. Wandering in the cultural wilderness and beset from all about, communities either bind themselves through collective denial and proscription of a kind prototypically articulated in Leviticus 18 or through more 'positive' identificatory solutions whose history runs from worship of the golden calf to Gerald's totemic rituals.[55] However, this is not simply a binary distinction: it seems orthodoxy cannot construct itself within bounds. The theatricised apparatus of pagan ritual frames spaces in which collectives seek to negotiate their own transitions, orchestrate their own energies and sublimate their own scandals, sometimes through staging them in plain view.[56] The troubling persistence of totemic practices in early medieval Ireland evoked in William Lanfranc's *c.* 1074 rebuke of Toirrdelbach ua Briain, high king of Ireland, points to what, following Julia Smith, we might see as a tension between the syncretic nature of early medieval 'localisms' and later medieval universalism.[57] Supplanting the diversity of pre-conversion practices of various kinds and their early medieval Christian accommodations (not least the 'barbarisms' deplored by William Lanfranc and, later, Gerald), orthodox sacraments sought to provide a readily deployable cradle-to-grave package of complementary apparatuses.[58] Béroul subversively suggests to a cosmopolitan francophone audience through his sympathetic depiction of Tristan and Iseut, that such arrangements might be both attractive and sustainable. The attempts to subdue the Celtic West by force

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[54] Douglas, p. 307. Problematically, of course, Jewish practices of endogamy were central to anti-Semitic discourses imputing to this a genetic basis of Jewish 'character' and neurotic degeneration in fin de siècle Germany and Austria. On this subject, see Sander L. Gilman, *Freud, Race and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. x–x.

[55] On the 'plague of fantasies', see, of course, Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, The Essential Žižek, rev. edn (London and New York: Verso, 2008).

[56] For a helpful discussion of the history of scholarship on ritual in this regard, see Jon P. Mitchell, 'Ritual', in *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. by Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer, World Reference (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 490–93.

[57] On Lanfranc's correction of the Irish, see Smith, pp. 238–39.

[58] Smith, pp. 218–52.

demonstrate that others may have come to the same conclusion. Adrian IV's encouragement of Henry II to invade Ireland is an example of Smith's dictum that 'when diverse local Christianities yielded to a single, standardised, normative Christianity at sword point, the early Middle Ages were truly over'.[59]

Yet at the same time, the memory of the early Middle Ages remained a live issue in many domains and shaped later concerns. In this regard, Béroul's treatment of the business of social and sexual orthodoxy can also be read as a distant recollection of Carolingian ideals of a pan-European universalism. As Rosamond McKitterick emphasises, the emperor's bold enterprise sought to acknowledge local identities while providing a robust underpinning that could allay concerns about understanding.[60] Accordingly, Béroul's later meditations on the cherished specificity or troublesome deviance of local practices are cast in a marginal literary vernacular that, through his possible nods to other Old French traditions – notably the *Chanson de Roland* – may serve as tribute to Charlemagne's own position at various frontiers.[61] In this vision, the emperor stands between a carefully-policed Latinity and a diversity of vernacular religious expression of which he was an early defender or between European self and barbarous other, between saved and lost. As one later recollection of such initiatives, Charles' comment on the treacherous and irascible Saracen emir Marsilie, 'he may yet be saved' ('uncor purrat guarir', Oxford *Roland*, l. 156) reflects a man commemorated in vernacular literature for his saintly and even infuriating patience faced with both Christians and non-Christians either obdurately unwilling or tragically unable to align their words with their hearts. In face of this, the emperor is thoughtfully deliberate in his consideration, refusing to be rushed into any hasty response to Marsilie's ambassador, Blancandrin: 'De sa parole ne fut mie hastifs / Sa custume est qu'il parolet a leisir' (Oxford *Roland*, ll. 139–40). In Charlemagne's world as now, peace and mercy come dropping slow.

As I have argued elsewhere, this dual and conflicting mission of merciful openness and defence of the faith leaves Charles uncertainly positioned. Caught between a waking world of political reason and the revealed nightmare of

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[59] Smith, p. 239.

[60] On the initiatives associated with Charlemagne and his circle in this regard, see notably Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[61] This of course trespasses on the massively problematic and much debated terrain of what it is the chanson de geste 'remembers' and how. Although a considerable cultural and historical distance divides the actual productions of Charlemagne's inner court circles and later vernacular witnesses such as the Oxford *Roland*, from Joseph Bédier (*Les Légendes épiques: recherches sur la formation des chansons de geste*, 4 vols (Paris: H. Champion, 1908–1913)) onwards, scholarship has returned recurringly to mapping that cultural divide and the dizzying problems of transmission and contact it raises.

(un)accommodatable political and ontological difference, Charles is haunted first in his dreams by quasi-human beasts and then in his waking by the exotically feral peoples making up the emir Baligant's army, this episode thought to be a subsequent addition to an earlier shorter poem, and which effectively brings the emperor's nightmare to life.[62] The vernacular poem may even offer a blurred recall of the scandals that dogged the emperor in his own lifetime and after, rumours of sexual transgression given form in satirical-religious vision poetry that showed the emperor in hell mauled in his genitals by savage animals.[63] What may have been ecclesiastical disapproval of the emperor's keeping of concubines in the latter part of his life translates in later memory into the myth of Roland's incestuous origins, a sin expiated by Charles's living purgatorial nightmare of loss, isolation and burdensome duty.[64] This dimension then provides a link between the literary matters of France and Britain. Marie de France shows the kings of the matière de Bretagne – ancestrally guardians of the empire's Western fringes by gift of Charles the Bald, the emperor's grandson – following and supporting Charlemagne in his visionary tradition.[65] The difference is that in Marie's werewolf tale, *Bisclavret*, the monster is not some figment of the king's solitary imagining, but rather a subject of rational interrogation plainly visible to the court. With this in mind, I will suggest that Béroul offers account of what either a king or an orthodox community may or may not be given to see.

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[62] See Simpson, ' "Uns uers si mals": H.R. Giger et les animaux de cour dans la *Chanson de Roland*', in *In Limine Romaniae: Chanson de geste and European Epics*, ed. by Carlos Alvar and others (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. x-x.

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[65] As Bernard Bachrach shows ('Some Observations on the Origins of the Angevin Dynasty', *Medieval Prosopography*, 10:2 (1989), 1–24), Tortulfus is not referred to as the first of the Angevin line in any of the principal genealogies associated with the house of Anjou. However, he appears to have been no invention, even if his existence has a somewhat 'conjectural' status. Surviving evidence indicates he was appointed royal forester by Charles the Bald and granted possession of the lands of Limelle, a status corroborated in charters from Charles's reign. This sense of both appointed mission and a privileged relation with the kings of France continued. Thus, although Geoffrey Greymantle's activities would bring him into direct conflict with the Capetians, there is some sense of an original claim to those Western territories deriving from a history of privilege and service dating from the Carolingian period. Such a strategy of asserting continuity seems to have been practiced by more than one Angevin household. On this, see Richard Hogan, 'The *Rainaldi* of Angers: "New Men" or Descendents of Carolingian *Nobiles*?', *Medieval Prosopography*, 2:1 (1981), 32–62.

This receptivity appears as an internalised counterpart for the corrupting contagions of both heretical ideas and physical disease, notably that great medieval STD, leprosy.[66]

In conclusion, there may indeed have been both public and group sex in the Middle Ages: a squint at the period avoiding the lens of pagan denunciation of the early Christians reveals quite enough variations to suggest a cultural familiarity with the idea. Moreover, the enforced intimacy of court and much urban life suggests that a large proportion of sexual activity was inevitably public to a degree. Ritualised group sex is a central problem for Christianity in that it makes most dramatically and disturbingly visible the libidinal bases on which both power and collective belief are organised. Medieval Christian communities needed to shape and police themselves while not only at the same time keeping the deviant other close at hand but also being aware that they needed a language in which to describe the unhallowed thrills on which the rituals and identificatory processes underpinning secular political cultures also depended. Thus, although Sargent-Baur finds Pensom's reading of the three-in-a-bed scenario of the flour on the floor episode overly fervid and far-fetched, Pensom's remarks perhaps oddly echo discourses of sexual deregulation from the Middle Ages in a manner that may illuminate something of the context of Béroul's poem. What binds Béroul to Gerald and both with accounts of heresy is the frank admission of the fascination of chaos and the insidious attraction of an underlying different order. In a world where such a discussion was taboo then the reader became the alibi. As a figure of the reader in the text, a related problem there is that of what a Christian king 'sees'. If Charlemagne looked to acknowledge the full diversity of European vernacular religious expression and practice, then Béroul's Arthur appears as his swinging modern counterpart, prepared to turn a blind eye for the sake of both personal loyalty and political expediency. Though for his part Mark appears as an implicated weakling far removed from their lofty position, Béroul presents him as showing considerable savvy in his distancing of himself from his counsellors and their exhortation to root out the menace of sexual abandon in his kingdom. As Bell puts it, 'it is important to see media reporting of dogging as constituting part of the scene itself', a remark that both sums up medieval Christendom's engagement with sexuality generally and has considerable implications for a reading of the relation between Gerald and Béroul.[67] For modern

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[66] Of course, as John van Engen emphasises, 'medieval Christendom was defined only in part by notions of centre and periphery' ('Illicit Religion: The Case of Friar Matthew Grabow, O.P.', in *Law and the Illicit in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Ruth Mazo Karras and others, The Middle Ages (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2008), pp. 103–16, at p. 103.

[67] Bell, p. 391.

researchers and medieval inquisitors alike it is an awkward, but inescapable fact that we are also in the car park.