



Research Paper

Homosexuality Versus Heterosexuality: Analysis Of The Debate Between Helen And Ganymede

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ABSTRACT: This twelfth century poem of which we propose an analysis is actually a debate between Ganymede, symbol of homosexual love and Helen symbol of Heterosexual love. The first one defends men same sex love whereas the second one stand for heterosexual love. By studying this allegoric text, the aim of this paper is to highlight the arguments put forward on both sides to support or detract from either heterosexual or homosexual love. In fine, we are interested in the perception that is made of the existing rivalry between these two forms of love at the period.

KEYWORDS: Ganymede, Helen, Homosexuality, Heterosexuality, Debate.

Received 09 July, 2024; Revised 21 July, 2024; Accepted 23 July, 2024 © The author(s) 2024.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This text of which we propose an analysis is a poem. The author is unknown. It was first published by Wattenbach, then Lenzen proposed to give a critical edition by collecting many manuscripts (such as Houghton manuscript) discovered after the previous edition. The version we use is John Boswell's translation of Lenzen's critical text (John Boswell, 1981, p. 381-389). This Latin poem was most likely written in the twelfth century. But, it is difficult for us to determine the place of writing. One of the reasons for the lack of information on the author undoubtedly lies in the fact that the theme developed by the author, namely the parallel between the love of young men and the love of young girls, is a topos of Hellenistic and then Roman literature, illustrated in the past by authors like Plutarch (Véronique GÉLY, 2008, p.19). Thus, taking up a work already treated, the author perhaps did not consider it important to sign it. We exclude the thesis of the sensitivity of the treated subject because the author indeed took several provisions in conformity with the requirements of his era as we see it later¹.

This poem moreover falls under a context of literary effervescence around the questions of love and sexuality. It is the period of control of the Christian marriage by the Church thanks to the Gregorian reform in the eleventh century; of the courtly love which is expressed essentially in writing; but also of the development of the homosexual and homo-affective literature. It is in this precise context that the anonymous author undertakes a comparative examination of the two kinds of love (heterosexual and homosexual) and their respective merits. The outcome of the poem reveals that the author's purpose in writing the text was to highlight, first, the superiority of heterosexual over homosexual love and then to denigrate same-sex love and sexual relationships, which he describes as the sin of Ganymede. It is also a way for the author to call to repentance "the inhabitants of Sodom" (Ganymede and Helen, line 270, p.389), whose representativeness is quite visible both in literature and tangible facts.

That said, the aim of this study is to analyze the debate between Ganymede and Helen in order to highlight the arguments put forward on both sides to support or detract from either heterosexual or homosexual love. *In fine*, we are interested in the perception that is made of the existing rivalry between these two forms of love at the period studied.

In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to consult sources outside the one studied. Thus, we used poems of the same style, letters, biblical exegesis, even surveys. The analysis of these sources allows us to elaborate the plan of this study in three parts. The first one studies the general context of the debate by emphasizing the actors involved and the origin of the debate. The second axis deals with the comparison of these two forms of

¹ For more information about the context of publication of this poem, we recommend (John Boswell, 1981, p.381.n.64; p.389.n74).

love by focusing on their description and the analysis of the different arguments aiming at valorizing or rejecting one or the other of these loves. The third axis come back to the outcome of the debate.

1. General context of the debate

In this first part, we establish the general context of the debate between Helen and Ganymede. To do this, we are interested in the origins between the two protagonists before presenting them.

1.1 Origin of the debate

The conflict which rises between Ganymede and Helen has its origin in a misunderstanding between the two characters. According to the author, Ganymede and Helen, whom he sees " standing on the summer grade beneath a lovely pine", seem to sit next to each other, contemplating their mutual beauty, " astonishing to have found an equal in loveliness " (L. 10 and 15). However, their exaggerated beauty, equaling in this sense that of the gods (Greco-Roman mythology) quickly gives way to a lively discussion between the characters to know which beauty surpasses the other. This discussion seems to be so lively that the author compares it to an argument between Phoebe and Apollo. Phoebe is better known under the Greek name of Artemis and Diana in the Latin version². She and her twin brother Apollo are known for their incessant quarrelling, one being the perfect mirror of the other.

Further on, the author points out that it is the impudent boy who dares to compare himself to the damsel while the latter, unlike him, is attracted by his beauty, so much so that despite her virginity, she was already " longing for the male and ready for the bed". And the author adds that «the singular beauty of Ganymede inflames her " (L.25). Then, after having lost her virginal modesty, Helen is ready to offer herself to the young man for sexual games when, ignorant of the sexual orientation of the young man, the latter, for the sexual act, presses himself against her " as if he wishes to be passive " points out the text (L. 30). Thus, realizing that the young man is rather inclined to homosexual relations in spite of his beauty, she quickly concludes that he had a behavior against nature, rejects him, curses nature and gets carried away against the «gods that a monster should be cursed with so fair a face " (L.35). Thus, Helene's disappointment and anger coupled with Ganymede's frustration and desire for recognition brought about the debate on the comparison of homosexual and heterosexual love. Finally, as it was a question for them of knowing which of these loves is more valorous, more attractive, they judged objective to request the arbitration of gods. They summoned for this purpose Mother Nature and Reason, who led them in the palace of Jupiter where participated passively in the debate the majority of the principal gods of Olympus, which it is appropriate from now on to introduce.

1.2. Characters of the debate

This point deals with the various characters having taken part or attended the debate.

1.2.1. Main characters

The main characters of this debate are indeed Helen and Ganymede. The former is a historical-mythical character, considering that the Trojan War told by Homer is a legend not a myth (Jonathan Burgess, 2004, 320p; Robert Graves, 2011, 784p.). She was the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta, whose abduction by Paris, a Trojan prince, triggered the Trojan War (13th-12th B.C.). Once kidnapped and taken to Troy with her consent, she aroused the Greeks to rally around the king of Sparta, whose objective was to bring Helen back to her spouse and thus wash away the affront. This historical-legendary gathering is known in history as the founding act of Greek culture, hence the term "Hellenic" to qualify them. However, if Helen is chosen by the author to embody the woman in this discussion, it is inexorably due to her legendary beauty. This beauty, whose features Homer already praised, has crossed the ages until the Classical Middle Ages, where the author mentions this about her: "Her brow is proud, but her eye is playful. Her nose is beautifully shaped. Venus has seasoned her kiss with her own nectar, and some god polished her chin with his own hand. Lest her hair cover her real beauty, she moves it away from her face, pushing it up behind each ear, so her face appears like the dawn, Mixed, when it comes, with pink and white" (L. 95-100).

² The name Phoebe (and Phoebus for Apollo) was given to her in reference to her grandmother, of the same name, who was a titanid daughter of Ouranos (Heaven) and Gaia (Earth). She was considered the goddess of intellect and prophecy because she received control of the Oracle at Delphi from Themis and became the third prophet. She eventually gave her gifts to her grandson Apollo. She is often depicted with the moon as her symbol.

The text adds that her beauty made Apollo choke and Mars suffocate.

Ganymede, in Greek mythology, is a young mortal from the region of Phrygia. He was kidnapped by Zeus, because of his beauty which has become proverbial today, in order to serve as cupbearer to the gods, mainly Zeus, to the detriment of the goddess Hebe³.

He is since then considered as a lover of Zeus to the great dismay of Hera, wife of the god. His relationship with the god prefigures the competition between homosexual and heterosexual loves. Concerning his beauty, one could still read in the twelfth century through this text that he appears as:

“Like the morning star shining before the dawn. He seems to scorn all with his eyes, and his face disdains to adorn a mortal. His hair is like imperial gold cloth, which is dyed by the Chinese from pure saffron. When it tries to reach his eyebrow. It curls back coyly on the smoothness of his forehead. His eyebrows are separated by a comely space; His wide eyes sparkle with sweet rays; His mouth invites a kiss almost as a demand. His whole face glows with sweet charm”. (L. 75-80).

1.2.2. Judges and participants

The need to debate the matter of contention having been decided, it was "Mother Nature and Reason" who were appointed to "determine the issue" (L. 40). Mother Nature is one of the allegories of nature; it is an anthropomorphic representation of nature that focuses on the gift of life and the nurturing characteristics of Nature by embodying them in the form of the mother. In Greek mythology, it takes the form of Gaia, mother goddess, primordial, mother of the titans and Demeter, "Mother of the Earth" or Mother Earth, the goddess of agriculture and harvest. Reason enters the same framework as the previous definition to let appear the fact that this debate will be guided by common sense. In the Middle Ages, these notions are expressly known through works produced during the Roman period, notably those of Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. Here they serve artists to escape the Christian theological vocabulary.

These, according to the text, lead the protagonists to the palace of Jupiter (Zeus in Greek), the god of gods, the god of Olympus, so that the other deities can also participate in the judgment of the debate.

Thus, attended the debate, Apollo, son of Jupiter, Greek god of arts, the song, music, male beauty, poetry and light; Mars, also son of Jupiter (Ares, Greece), god of war in Greek-Roman mythology; Juno (Hera, Greece), sister and woman of Jupiter, she is the most important of goddesses of Rome, queen of gods and protector of marriage and fertility. Besides these gods, we observe the repetitive evocation of Venus (Aphrodite, Greece) goddess of Love in its broadest meaning and recognized for its great beauty.

Moreover, before the debate, we notice that Apollo and Jupiter are on the side of Ganymede and the others on the side of Helen⁴.

2. Of the comparison of the two forms of love

The subjects on which the two protagonists debate turn around several axes which it is possible to gather in two. One of them is the question of the quantitative and qualitative value of the two affective and sexual practices that are "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality". However, before studying this comparison, it is necessary to examine the vocabulary used to describe these practices.

2.1. On the description of sexual acts

The vocabulary used to describe sexual acts differs according to the practice. And the vulgarity of the remarks according to the character because the boy is much more raw and straight than the girl who remains measured and prude⁵. Thus, concerning the heterosexual acts, Helen, of a rather prude tone describes the sexual act as a moment when the " a man favors a woman in a mutual embrace!" (L. 130) or further " when the same bed joins a man and a woman" (L. 140). On the other hand, the boy, even if he does not evoke the heterosexual act directly, attacks after a remark of Helene the female sex in terms expressing all his contempt for this sex. He says exactly: "It is not a monstrous thing, if we avoid the monster: The yawning cave and the sticky bush, the hole whose stink is worse than anything else in the world, the cavern which neither pole nor oar should approach" (L. 230). This description raises the anger of Helen who demands a minimum of modesty from him: " Hush your foul and unpleasant language! Converse more modestly, you filthy boy! If you are not willing to defer to a maiden, At least defer to the gods and to Nature (L.235).

³ For further reading about this subject, we recommend this poem which tells entirely the story: “Ganymede and Hebe”, in: Boswell, 1981, p.392-398.

⁴ We know that because at the end of the poem, Apollo states that: “I have come to my senses” and Jupiter to add: “I am aflame for my Juno” (L. 255).

⁵ She frequently complains about the attitude of the boy in this term: “Oh, if I were not restrained by gentle modesty, I would not be mincing any words with you. But it is demeaning to use bad language, and foul words I’ll become the mouth of a maiden”. L. 195.

To leave the fiction for a moment, it is necessary to understand that this author unexpectedly takes into account the criticisms formulated by the Christian theologians, in particular the fathers of the Church who, in their sermons do not hesitate to demonize the female sex⁶. Therefore, by denigrating the female sex, he casts a negative light on sexual relations. But, unlike Ganymede, their aim is rather to promote continence and chastity⁷. Indeed, if the boy abhors the heterosexual act, it is because he is himself inclined towards homosexual relations, which he describes as a "game invented by the gods" (L. 120).

The most visible remark concerning the description of homosexual act is that it is forbidden to mention it explicitly. In fact, throughout the text, whether it is Ganymede or Helen, the description is limited to the use of terms such as "Mounts", "apply oneself to men", "link" (L. 140, 210, 225), so much so that when the girl decides to "speak clearly" (L.245), "a warm dew steals furtively from his eyes. Wanting an argument, he does not defend himself..." (L. 250). But to return to the words of the young girl, who described the homosexual act as "an unclean coupling in which the young men misplace the tear of Venus between their thighs" (L.240), it is necessary to note that she avoids all the same to mention the term sodomy. Indeed, there is a medieval Christian "custom" not to pronounce or describe sins that are considered "abominable". Sodomy, in this case, is the abominable sexual sin per excellence. From the outset, the text, which is the object of study, designates sodomy as "the crime whose mere mention is forbidden" (L. 245). However, it was not always so. The normative or moralist texts had taken the habit of describing the anal sexual act before condemning it. As an example, we cite the case of the penitential. In the Worms penitential, at question 120, the priest must ask the faithful this question: "Have you fornicated as the Sodomites do, that is to say, have you introduced your rod into the buttocks of a man, thus mating with him according to the custom of the Sodomites"⁸ (Cyrille VOGEL, 2007, p.80 and following; Pierre PAYER, 1984). Pierre Damian, whose purpose in the 11th century was to get the attention of the Pope to the sexual sins present within the Church, describes four types which he groups together and calls them *Sodomia*. These are masturbation, mutual masturbation, inter-femoral intercourse, and anal intercourse⁹. However, at the end of this century, especially with the Gregorian reform and the diffusion of the Manuals of Confessions, the habit was taken of not naming this sexual practice for basically two reasons. The first is due to the fact that the description of the practice, even for purposes of repression, informs those who have no idea of it, and may in fact incite them to engage in it.

⁶ The position of theologians in the Middle Ages with regard to her, as we know, remains versatile. Sometimes she reminds one of Eve, and she is attributed qualifiers that remind her of her fault, or else she takes on the aspect of Mary, and as such is held in esteem. But generally speaking, the first conception seems to prevail over the second. In patristic writings, for example, one can read, among other things, that the woman is the Devil's Gate, the mouth of hell, the epitaph of tomb, the source of evil, temple built on the cesspool; every woman should be ashamed at the thought that she is a woman; or again, in all the wild beasts, there are none so harmful as the woman. These Quotations belong respectively to Tertullian, Peter Chrysologus, Clement of Alexandria, etc. in France QUÉRÉ, 1997.p 105. On the other hand, Odo of Cluny in the tenth century makes the following remark: The beauty of the body lies only in the skin. Indeed, if men could see what is under the skin, the sight of women would make them nauseous...While we do not even suffer to touch spit or dung with our fingertips, how can we desire to hug that bag of dung? Odo of Cluny, *PL* 1, col 1305. However, it is necessary to be circumspect on these remarks and to distinguish the speeches are with regard to the women when the message is addressed to the clerics. It is less the case for the laity.

⁷ This seems not to be the case of the clerics of the Gregorian reform, if we are to believe the criticisms put forward by some Nicolaitan priests accusing the high religious dignitaries of the church of being inclined towards homosexual relations, and therefore hate heterosexual relations. This would be for them the reasons to forbid the matrimonial union of priests. As a proof, an anonymous married priest wrote this in the 12th or 13th century: "but you who attack our sins, have a look at your own. Leave us alone and chastie yourself, sodomite! You draw up harsh laws, enact bitter statues, and make things generally impossible for us. You deny that it is right to touch a woman's bed and to consummate the marriage rite in the bridal chamber, but it is the natural right of a man to enjoy his wife. *Married Clergy, Poem*, trans. By John Boswell, (1981), p.389-399.

⁸ As for the ladies, question 154, the following question is asked: "Have you done what some women are accustomed to do: you have made an object or instrument in the shape of a manly member, of the size you wanted; you have bound it with a belt in place of your sex, or that of another; and you have fornicated with other women, or the others with you, with this instrument or a similar one?"

⁹ *Maior siquidem penitentia illis imponitur, qui cum aliis cadunt, quam his, qui per semetipsos egesta seminis contagione sordescunt et districtius iudicantur, qui alios in posterior corrumpunt, quam hii, qui inter femoracoeunt. Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, Ed. Reindel, Munich, 1983-93, I:287, ligne 21-288, ligne 3.

The second reason is of a religious nature, because for clerics and finally the laity, the pronouncement of sodomy is so abominable that it would sin or defile their mouths¹⁰, only by pronouncing it¹¹.

2.2. Arguments to value heterosexual relations.

The positive criticisms towards heterosexual loves, as we can guess, come from Helen. Throughout her argument, she tries to convince her opponent of the merits of heterosexual love at the expense of homosexual love by insisting on several points that we will examine here.

Firstly, Helen argues that love relationships remain the most natural and harmonious thing in the world. In verse 130, she argues that: "Oh how lovely is love between different sexes, when a man favors a woman in a mutual embrace! He and she are drawn together by natural attraction." Further on, she adds that: "But No love has ever touched the heart of a boy, but when the same bed joins a man and woman, this is correct connection, the proper arrangement, for like affections arise only from different sexes" (L. 140).

The summoning of nature for justifying purposes is quite present among authors, moralists or not, in the Middle Ages. And by Nature, we must retain the primary and original character of our acts or of the environment in which we live. In the framework of her argument, we notice that Helene gives an account of a situation which has existed for a long time: it is about heterosexual love. Moreover, to support her reasoning, she associates male-female love with procreation. Thus, according to her, the heterosexual bond is all the more natural as it allows the reproduction of the human species. This is of course not the case of homosexual love which, as Pierre Damien points out, is a waste of sperm¹². The reproach that is made to Ganymede is essentially this one: "I wonder why, since you will not produce children, your father produced you?" L.115. This last one is moreover the first reproach made to Ganymede by Helen about his love¹³.

Subsequently, she convokes, sexuality in the animal world, to prove and convince her opponent of the natural and superior character of heterosexual love. She says precisely on this subject that: "Birds, wild animals, boars, all enjoy this union" (L.130). The question of animal sexuality is a key argument in discussions comparing the two models of sexuality. Indeed, to this day, this argument is still used to either deny homosexuality or to endorse heterosexuality. Thus, even if for medieval authors, animals are not the best model on which to base the "naturalness" of heterosexuality, it must be noted that some animals, most of them domestic, contribute to it.

Finally, as a last reproach, she finds that in homosexual relations, because they are non-natural, some men are led to behave like women, to be penetrated like women. From the outset, it is this tendency to play the passive role in front of the damsel that has triggered this debate as we have pointed out. Subsequently, Helen reproaches the young man with this: "You try to be smooth and hairless below so that your temple there might be like that of a woman, so that in defiance of nature you might become a girl. You have declared war on nature with your filth" L.185. This argument against homosexuality has also been repeated since at least antiquity. The ancient Hebrew, Greek, Roman and Islamic civilizations abhorred homosexual relations between adults especially because one of the characters, citizens played in this case, the role of a woman¹⁴. In this sense, the book of Leviticus is exemplary: "You shall not lie with a man as you would lie with a woman. It is an abomination"; *Cum masculo non commiscearis coitu femineo, quia abominatio est* (Lev 18:22; Louis Segond and Vulgate version). On the other hand, homosexual relations between unequal (master - slave; man - boy; man - servant...) were admitted. In this case it did not bother the passive one to play the role of the woman. In contrast, in the medieval period, all these practices are officially proscribed and denounced. Clement of Alexandria in the third century found that "Nature herself should, rather, be obeyed, who discourages [such things] through an arrangement of

¹⁰ Matt. 15: [17-20] Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. King James Version.

¹¹ This tradition of refraining from naming deviant sexual relations or dysfunctions related to sex is also present in Africa, precisely in the Baoulé language. In fact, for questions relating to venereal diseases, infectious diseases of all kinds, there is the term "bôbôdouman", which literally means, "one does not pronounce the name" (bé boman i douman), to qualify them.

¹² Helen adds that : "Venus joins men only in a fruitless union" L. 155. Again, L. 225 : « Your Venus is sterile and fruitless ».

¹³ At L. 155, She states: "it is not the intention of Nature that men be bound to teach other".

¹⁴ For the Islamic civilization, read the following work (Jelena Čvorović, 2006, p.88).

the parts which makes the male not for receiving the seed but for sowing it” or again “ The best course of all is never to have sexual intercourse with boys as one would with a woman”(paedagogus, 2.10)¹⁵.

2.2. On the defense of homosexual love and the rejection of heterosexuality.

In this discussion, the character of Ganymede, playing the role of the male homosexual, makes his point by defending himself from the attacks made by Helen. Thus, the boy defended himself on all the points of discussion raised by Helen except the last one.

On the issue of the unnaturalness of homosexuality, the author contrasts nature with culture. He claims, for example, that the origin of homosexual intercourse is not to be sought in Nature but, rather, “the game we play was invented by gods, and is today maintained by the brightest and best”, L.120. Then, Helen had claimed that animals are heterosexual, thus reinforcing the natural thesis of heterosexuality. On this argument, Ganymede maintains that: “ Humans should not be like birds or pigs: Humans have reason. L.135 “. Concerning the imitation of animals, the Church's tendency, far from supporting homosexuality, is to agree not to imitate the sexuality of animals, which it considers unbridled, unreasonable and naturally debased; other animals are even known to be inexorably inclined towards animals of the same sex. Thus, beyond the fact that animals are not aware of kinship, others such as hyenas or hares are considered forbidden because of their “sodomite behavior”¹⁶.

In the same vein of opposing Nature to Culture, Ganymede affirms that homosexuality is only practiced by “the first and best”, or by “the people with power and position in the world, the very censors who decide what is sin and what is allowed” (L.160). Is it possible to confirm this reasoning? Is homosexuality elitist? At first glance, we can see that this impression is shared by many, and this, until today, when it is believed that homosexuality is dedicated to people whose wealth has led their sexual taste and desire to excess (the Greek *hybris*)¹⁷. Like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, economically weak men are content with satisfying their libido through heteronormative relationships¹⁸, unlike the rich whose financial means lead some to adopt “excessive” morals, which deviate from the norm. However, this conception has no scientific basis. Homosexuality is not the prerogative of a class or an affluent society. Today, we observe that coming-out comes from different strata of society. To return to the debate, it should be noted that there is an important element of objectivity in the words of Ganymede when he maintains that “ the very censors who decide what is sin and what is allowed; these men are not immune to the soft thighs of a boy”. By censors, the author is referring inter alia, to clerics. Indeed, during the classical medieval period, it is not uncommon to find cases of sodomy in the clerical milieu, so much so that John Boswell, one of the most prolific historians of sexuality, describes the period between the eleventh and twelfth centuries as the “centuries of Ganymede”, where the Church “willingly maintained this sin in its ranks”. To illustrate our remarks, let us examine the case of Peter Damian. Indeed, in a book addressed to Pope Leo IX (1002-1054), Peter Damian expresses all his anger and disgust to see that within the clergy lies groups of clerics (from the priest to the high dignitaries), who willingly indulge in sodomy, and confess among themselves, not to be detected. The aim, obviously of Peter Damian, was that the Pope, whom he considered to be the highest religious authority, should be made aware of this and above all that he should punish the “sodomites” by administering penalties that went as far as their excommunication¹⁹. In fact, he was afraid that: “if the hand that

¹⁵ Saint John Chrysostom thinks that : “for it is not the same thing to be changed into the nature of a woman as it is to become a woman while yet remaining a man or, rather, to be neither one nor other”. (Commentary on Romans, Homely 4).

¹⁶ Clement of Alexandria develop this idea on hare then hyena: “The hare, for example, is said to grow a new anus each year (Bernabas 10; Pliny 8:5; etc.), so that he has the same number of openings as the number of years he has lived. Hence the prohibition against eating the hare represents a rejection of pederasty; “ This thing occurs in the case of both the male hyena and the female, because of their exceptional passivity. The males mount each other, so it is extremely rare for them to seek a female”; Concerning the nasty sexuality of hare, he puts forward that: Moses forbade eating the hare because the hare copulates in every season and does so from the rear, with the female consenting. That is, it is one of those animals which mount from the rear. The female conceives monthly and gives birth, copulates and begets children, and as soon as she has given birth, she is immediately mounted by any nearby hare (for they do not limit themselves to one mate), conceives again and gives birth yet again”. (Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, 2. 10).

¹⁷ In Islamic culture as well, it is possible to admit from studies led on this subject, that homosexual practices are most prevalent among the wealthy and elite Muslims and regarded as a mark of superiority among the highest ranking clergymen (Stephanie Lee Martin, 1997, p2-3).

¹⁸ This argument is furthermore puts forward by Ganymede. He states that: “Peasants, who may as well be called pigs- These are the only men who resort to women”. L. 135.

¹⁹ He ends his letter by mentioning that: “We ask you, we implore you, to examine carefully the holy canons which you know well; take the advice of holy and prudent men, in order to enlighten you, as it is necessary, and answer us to dispel any kind of doubt”, Peter Damian, *Opuscula*, VII, 26, *PL*, CXLV, 189.

should hold him back does not act immediately, the sword of the divine fury will mercilessly mow down a great number of us"²⁰. This sin that he thinks that God did not describe, so much, it is horrible, Peter Damian names it sodomia; and this sin gathers four practices judged *contra naturam*. In response to his little book, Pope Leo IX first let him know that he admired with great fervor "his intention to take his place in the holy fight". He then thanked him, but the measures taken against these "sodomites" did not measure up to what Damien was asking for. In fact, the pope only asked that these last ones, according to the type of "sodomy", that they committed, make penance and find their rank in case of minor faults or be demoted in the extreme case²¹. The second case is that of Arnaud de Verniolle, a cleric, and Guillaume de Rous, a 16-year-old grammar student, in Pamiers (southern France). The facts are told by the student, after an interrogation by the Inquisitor Jacques Fournier in 1323. According to him, the cleric proposed to put him at the service of a canon, who in return, would provide him with the necessary, "place, food, clothes" for his studies. However, among other services which consisted in providing him with girls for his sexual pleasure, or to take care of him when he would be drunk, Arnoul asks him that: "in winter that I sleep with the canon in the same bed, and that I accept all that he would like to make with me". In the same impulse, he proposes to the student "to sleep with himself as with a woman". When the latter refuses, he leaps on him and sleeps with him by "putting his manly member between my thighs, and making the same movement" until ejaculation (Benedictus, 2012, 1041-1042).

On the other hand, we record erotic poems elaborated by high-ranking clerics intended for young boys which allow us to advance that this phenomenon was relatively practiced even if today the constructivist thesis seems to reject this evidence as belonging to a homosexual culture in the Middle Ages²².

On the feminine character that the young boy tries to take on when he indulges in sodomy, Ganymede takes up Helen by arguing that the character he embodies is particular and does not try in any case to imitate women that he has besides in horror, comparing her to an ass (L. 190). He reproaches her for defiling the pleasures of the bed when she is married, through infidelity, and when she is not married, she voluntarily makes herself available to everyone (prostitution) (L. 150). Moreover, in the frame of justification, Ganymede recalls that: "Whom it delights to be filled with feminine filth, When Thaïs²³, recumbent, reveals herself to you, you know what her bilge water smells like." (L. 13), L. 215. We note through these verbal attacks, that the competition between passive male homosexuals and heterosexual women is not *sui generis* in our contemporary time²⁴. Also, we notice that this rivalry also exists between lesbians playing the role of man and heterosexual men.

On the subject of procreation, unceasing criticism against the homosexual practice, Ganymede takes again the counterpart of the thesis of Nature and advances that of the Culture, by affirming that: " Let the old produce sons, for the enjoyment of the young: The young lust to have those in their prime" (L.120). He adds then: "I have no interest in replacing my face, But only in pleasing individuals with my individual being" (L.125). To the thesis of the culture, Ganymede adds that of the egoism. Beyond these arguments, the young boy also puts forward financial gain as an additional reason for engaging in homosexual practice: "The fragrance of profit is pleasing; no one avoids gain. Wealth, if I should speak plainly, does have a certain appeal. Anyone who wishes to grow rich is willing to play this game: If a man desires boys, he is willing to reward him" (L.165). This consideration is still in vogue today, especially in Africa, where it is noted that due to lack of financial means, some boys engage in sodomy, expecting in return, a substantial monetary reward from their point of view. We

²⁰ Peter Damian, *Opuscula*, VII, 3, *PL*, CXLV, 162 ; p191. This leads Dyan Elliott to consider that Peter Damien's denunciation is primarily aimed at restoring the ritual purity of the clergy, the ministry and the sacraments in the Church. His concern is not primarily with these sodomites but with the impurity they introduce into the Church of Christ. Dyan ELLIOTT, 2020, p. 65-66.

²¹ Pope Saint Leo IX, *We more Humanely*, Response to Saint Peter Damian's *Liber Gomorrhianus* (1051).

²² **Marbode, Unyielding Youth:** "This vision of a face, radiant and full of beauty, Kindled with the torch of love the heart of whoever beheld him. But this boy, so lovely and appealing, a torment to all who looked upon him, was made by nature so cruel and unyielding that he would die rather than yield to live. Harsh and ungrateful, as if born of tiger, he only laughed at the soft words of admirers, laughed at their vain efforts, laughed at the tears of sighing lover. He laughed at those whom he himself was causing to perish. Surely he is wicked, cruel and wicked (Marbod, Bishop of Rennes, *Poems*). / **Hilary the Englishman, To a boy of Anjou:** "Beautiful and singular youth, kindly inspect, I implore you, these writings which are sent by your admirer; look at them, read them, and profit by what you read. Prostrate at your knees, on bended knee, with clasped hands, as one of your suppliants, I spare neither tears nor prayers. I am afraid to speak face to face; (...) Enough, wretch! I barely bore it when I tried to hide my love; now that I can no longer dissemble, I finally extend my hands, bound together. Oh, how I wish you wanted money! Mine is the pain! Mine the suffering! It is ignorant of you to have decided such commerce constitutes vice. Surely, youth, this is foolishness, to be so unyielding" (Hilary the Englishman, *Love Poems*).

²³ Thaïs is the Greek word for prostitute.

²⁴ A Challenge which leads Ganymede to say to Helen that: I only hope that beauty of yours fades with age, since I think it causes me to be loved a little less. L. 125

know from surveys conducted in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa that the majority of clients are Europeans and Arabs who obtain this pleasure through crooked pimps whose purpose is to make more money²⁵. To return to the Middle Ages, it should be noted that several stories and poems show that young boys were paid in kind or in cash for their service. Elsewhere, parents often became accomplices to this venal sexuality in order to receive a reward in return. This can be seen in Venice and Florence in the late Middle Ages (see the works of RUGGIERO Guido, 1989, 223p; Michaela ROCKE, 2010, 371p.). In the Muslim world, we have several records showing that the most beautiful boys were put at the service of kings, emirs, sultans or even caliphs, where they constituted a kind of Harem, disposed to the sexual satisfaction of their mentor (Stephanie Lee Martin, 1997, p. 1-32 ; Jelena Čvorović, 2006, p. 85-103).

3.The outcome of the debate

The denouement of this debate occurs when Helen tries to describe the homosexual act with words that cannot be more explicit. Until then, she had refrained from doing so. However, the impertinence and vulgarity of the young man's language prompted her to "throw off the veil of modesty and speak clearly". Then she says: "When that impure coupling joins you, and you lose the tear of Venus between your thighs, there, if you do realize it, is the offense to mankind! The words are nasty, but the deed even more so " L. 245. In this case, we can see that the author describes inter-femoral sex. According to medieval understanding, until recently, all these practices, including masturbation and fellatio, were considered to be Sodomy (Mark Jordan, 1998, p.37-40). The practice mentioned consists of the adult inserting his penis between the thighs of the young boy until ejaculation; the tear of Venus designating here, the penis. In spite of everything, the author avoids describing the anal sexual act well known at the time but judged much more serious. In following event, the poem reports that when "the boy hears the unmentionable crime, a stupor seizes his tongue, a blush rises to his cheeks. A warm dew steals furtively from his eyes. Wanting an argument, he does not defend himself. He is silent. Reason rises to speak. She prudently limits herself to a few words: There is no need of a judge, she says, "the matter speaks for itself. I say to the boy, enough. The boy is conquered." L.245-50. subsequently, the gods having attended the debate rally the cause of Helen by recognizing their error for some (Apollo, Jupiter) and others rejoice. Ganymede ends up asking for the hand of Helen as a sign of repentance. It is the triumph of heterosexuality.

The outcome of this debate was conceivable given the context of the period studied. However, Ganymede's marriage proposal draws particular attention to the fact that for the author, homosexual inclinations are perhaps more serious sins to be repented of and not, as is the case today, a sexual orientation. He considers that there are only "heterosexuals" and that those who have homosexual relations sin seriously *mutatis mutandis* in the same way as heretics of any kind. There is no question here of a different sexual orientation; in fact, this term belongs to "modernity". This conception supports and confirms the constructivist thesis of sexuality.

II. CONCLUSION

The analysis of this poem has allowed us to understand that there was a significant rivalry between homosexual and heterosexual forms of love in the Middle Ages. The debate ultimately focused on several key points, which the analysis showed to be still relevant today. It was a question of determining the superiority of one form of love over the other. Thus, concerning the natural character or not of these forms of love, *in fine*, the heterosexual argument was to put forward the natural and productive aspect of this love, reducing of the same fact, the homosexual love has a character against nature and unproductive. To this invective, it has been demonstrated that homosexual love belongs to the world of culture. It was invented by the gods and is practiced by aristocrats and even high-ranking religious people. This would justify its importance and value. The debate then turned to the imitation of animals. The heterosexual argument was to emphasize on the fact that this form of love is natural, especially since it is shared by animals. Ganymede's retort was to point out that men should not imitate animals, because of the intellectual superiority of men. He was joined in this by several theologians who considered the sexuality of animals to be excessively unbridled and sometimes sodomite. The discussion also revolved around the feminization of the young boy when he engages in sexual play. For Helene, young sodomite boys imitate or transform themselves into ladies when they have homosexual intercourse. This represents an infamous act. The answer of Ganymede to this effect is expeditious. In no case, this latter thinks of imitating the women that he takes besides in horror. He only prefers men, hates heterosexual relations and considers that love and money are sufficient motives to indulge in homosexual pleasure. The discussion curiously ends with Helen's victory when she explicitly describes a component of sodomy, namely inter-femoral sex. Perhaps, a part of the poem has been cut off or lost. Boswell suggests that at the end of the poem, the writer either changed its mind or had before him two versions of it (John Boswell, 1981, p.389.n74).

²⁵ I invite the reader to watch this documentary realized by France 2 Television", « Nouvelle escale du tourisme pédophile ». First Broadcasting : 02-03-2006, Available on Url: <https://youtu.be/8vcLPsGXfN8;> <https://youtu.be/9jD8U5zHRoM>. Visited the 22-04-2023 and Jelena Čvorović, 2006, p.98.

Anyway, the arguments reiterated on both sides are representative of the perception that society, through this poet, has of homosexual and heterosexual relations. A vision of Sodomy considered as unnatural, unproductive, degrading, whose name or description of the act is forbidden: the exact opposite of heterosexual love.

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