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# Thinking Sexuality Differently: Hartmann von Aue, Michel Foucault, and the Uses of the Past

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The studies that follow . . . are the record of a long and tentative exercise that needed to be revised and corrected again and again. It was a philosophical exercise. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.

– Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*

In these words from the introduction to the second volume of his history of sexuality,<sup>1</sup> Foucault suggests that a certain kind of engagement with the past might enable us to think differently. The volume that follows, a history of sexuality, would represent then an effort to engage with the past in a way that might enable us to think differently about sexuality. Writing at the end of the twelfth century, Hartmann von Aue does something similar. He uses the Arthurian past to enable him to think differently about what he calls love but which includes much of what we would call sexuality. In an attempt to make this claim plausible, I will first review some medieval views about the use of history and then explore the extent to which Hartmann, in *Iwein*, claims to be writing a history. Second, I will try to show how, in both *Erec* and *Iwein*, Hartmann uses the Arthurian past to think about sexuality in ways that might provoke his readers and auditors to think differently. Finally, I want to show how we might use history, in this case Hartmann, to free ourselves from what we silently think about sexuality, and so enable us to think differently.

## I

King Arthur entered European letters as an historical figure. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, written in the 1130s, tells the story of the kings of Britain from the founding of Britain to the beginnings of Norman rule. A substantial portion of the text is devoted to one of those kings, Arthur. Scholars have made much of the fact that Geoffrey's history was criticized as soon as it appeared for its fabulous tales, especially of King Arthur. But the work was generally accepted as history,<sup>2</sup> and it was extremely

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 9.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Johanek, "Die Wahrheit der mittelalterlichen Historiographen," in *Historisches und fiktionales Erzählen im Mittelalter*, ed. Fritz Peter Knapp and Manuela Niesner (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 2002), 9-25, here 22-23.

popular. About 270 manuscripts survive, as well as medieval translations into Welsh, Middle English, and French.

Geoffrey's history serves not only to remind us that King Arthur was widely regarded as an historical figure but also to illustrate some of the uses that a history was meant to serve in the Middle Ages. History was not written for its own sake but to link past deeds to a particular present for a particular purpose.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Geoffrey, the most obvious purpose was, 70 years after the Norman Conquest, to strengthen the legitimacy of the Norman kings of Britain. To do so he reached back and found a great-grandson of Aeneas, Brutus, who settled in Britain. If your country was founded by a scion of Troy, then your claim to legitimacy is as good as Rome's. Geoffrey's history would also foster a collective sense of identity. He is writing a history of the kings of *Britain*. Of course, the reigning kings were not British at all, but Norman French. Still, by placing them in the lineage of British kings, he makes an argument for their British identity as well as for a greater sense of *collective* identity between the Norman rulers and their British subjects.<sup>4</sup> Finally, Geoffrey's history illustrates a third use of the past: as a treasure house of examples, good and bad, that can be held up to those living in the present. Of all the reasons given in the Middle Ages for writing about the past, this is the one most commonly invoked.<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey offers King Arthur as a model of exemplary kingship and those who attack him as counter examples, warning of the dangers of civil strife.

A medieval history could be efficacious in the ways just outlined because of the authority that the past and the writing of history enjoyed in the Middle Ages. All history is God's history, stretching from the beginning of time to the end. What we think of as world history—Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Friedrich Barbarossa—falls within this much larger Salvation History. In writing a history, a medieval writer locates his particular history within this larger chronology, the only chronology that really matters. Even Geoffrey, who is primarily concerned with what we would call secular history, makes connections to the prophecies of Isaiah, the birth of Christ, and the spread of Christianity through missionaries sent from Rome, thus setting Arthur within a Salvation Historical context.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it is only *because* the history of the kings of Britain has a place within God's chronology that it can legitimize, foster identity, and teach through example as effectively as it does. "History," writes Hans-Werner Goetz, "did not only occur according to God's providence but also revealed his intention. . . . Consequently, it contained a message for mankind that had to be investigated and interpreted."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Hans-Werner Goetz, "Zum Geschichtsbewußtsein hochmittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreiber," in *Hochmittelalterliches Geschichtsbewußtsein im Spiegel nichthistoriographischer Quellen*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 55-72, here 62.

<sup>4</sup> See Goetz, "Geschichtsbewußtsein" (note 3), 62-63.

<sup>5</sup> See: Goetz, "Geschichtsbewußtsein" (note 3), 61; Franz-Josef Schmale, *Funktion und Formen mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreibung: Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 48, 59.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude: Studies in the Poetics of Gottfried's Tristan* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1993), 30.

<sup>7</sup> Hans-Werner Goetz, "The Concept of Time in the Historiography of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography*, ed. Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried, and Patrick J. Geary (Washington: German Historical Institute; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 139-65, here 164.

*Historia est narratio rei gestae.*<sup>8</sup> According to this definition of Isidore of Seville, which was cited frequently throughout the Middle Ages, history is a narrative about things that have been done. History is not an academic discipline or an abstract notion of the past but a kind of writing: writers of history were classed along with satirists and comedy writers among the *poetae*.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, *historiae* differed from *fabulae*, since the former related true events from the past while the latter might contain events that did not happen or could not happen because they were contrary to nature.<sup>10</sup> Still, writers of history were expected to make things up in order to make the story truer to what *must* have happened. Geoffrey of Monmouth invents council scenes, speeches before battle, letters, embassies, dreams and descriptions of all sorts. It was precisely through the deployment of such set pieces that the truthfulness of his account was established, since his public *expected* such descriptions. That is what makes it so convincing as history.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, then, medieval history can claim a truthfulness that no modern history can match, since it is rooted in the history ordained by God. On the other hand, the success of a work *as history* requires the medieval writer to invent scenes for which there is no evidence to an extent no modern historian would dare. Medieval writers were aware that the rhetorical shaping of history carried the danger of undermining the truth it claimed,<sup>12</sup> but that was a risk they could not avoid.

Although hundreds of manuscripts of Geoffrey's *Historia* survive, only four or five were produced in German-speaking regions, and these are quite late.<sup>13</sup> Credit for the introduction of King Arthur to these areas must go to Hartmann von Aue, whose *Erec*, probably written in the 1180s, is the first Arthurian romance in German. Although *Erec*, like most fiction, is set in a vague past, no special claims are made for the historicity of Arthur. They are, however, at the beginning of Hartmann's second Arthurian romance, *Iwein*, written in the 1190s or just after 1200. There Hartmann thematizes the temporal distance between King Arthur and the world for which he was writing.

Hartmann begins *Iwein* as the medieval handbooks of poetics recommend, with a *sententia*—a general principle that is assumed to establish a common ground between narrator and audience: Whoever directs his thoughts and intentions to that which is truly good, such a person will be accompanied by good fortune and fame (*Iwein*, 1-3).<sup>14</sup> At once King Arthur is introduced as an example of this general principle: Good King Arthur offers proof of this, Arthur, who knew how to fight with knightly spirit in a way that earned him praise (*Iwein*, 4-7). No sooner has Arthur been introduced, than Hartmann begins to distinguish past from present:

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<sup>8</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 1.42, cited from Hans-Werner Goetz, "Die 'Geschichte' im Wissenschaftssystem des Mittelalters," in Schmale, *Funktion und Formen* (note 5), 165-213, here 182.

<sup>9</sup> Goetz, "Geschichte" (note 8), 189.

<sup>10</sup> Johaneck, "Wahrheit" (note 2), 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Joerg O. Fichte, "'Fakt' und Fiktion in der Artusgeschichte des 12. Jahrhunderts," in *Fiktionalität im Artusroman: Dritte Tagung der Deutschen Sektion der Internationalen Artusgesellschaft in Berlin vom 13.-15. Februar 1992*, ed. Volker Mertens and Friedrich Wolfzettel (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), 43-62, here 52, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Johaneck, "Wahrheit" (note 2), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Johaneck, "Wahrheit" (note 2), 23.

<sup>14</sup> In order to save space, I will paraphrase rather than quote passages that are not crucial to the argument. Line numbers refer to Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*, ed. Georg Friedrich Benecke and Karl Lachmann, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Ludwig Wolff (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968). Subsequent references and citations, all from this edition, will be identified by line number in the text. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

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er hât bî sînen zîten  
gelebet alsô schône  
daz er der êren krône  
dô truoc und noch sîn name treit.  
des habent die wârheit  
sîne lantliute:  
sî jehent er lebe noch hiute:  
er hât den lop erworben,  
ist im der lîp erstorben,  
sô lebet doch iemer sîn name.

(*Iwein*, 8-17; He lived so admirably in his time that he bore the crown of honor back then, and his name bears it still. His countrymen maintain that he is still alive today, and in a sense they are right: he acquired such praise in his day that, even though his body is dead, his name still lives on.)

On the one hand, this is about praise, fame, and reputation, the topic with which we started out. Real fame is that which endures over time. On the other hand, time itself has been thematized: Arthur lived back then, but his praise lives in the present; his body died back then, but his name lives on.

Hartmann changes the subject at this point, introducing himself by name, letting us know that he is a knight who had some learning, and that he read this story in books and wrote it down for us when he didn't have anything better to do. Then he returns to King Arthur. At Pentecost one year, King Arthur organized a great festival, the most magnificent there has ever been. Hartmann describes it briefly in superlatives, then distances himself from it in these famous lines:

mich jâmert wærlîchen,  
und hulfez iht, ich woldez clagen,  
daz nû bî unseren tagen  
selch vreude niemer werden mac  
der man ze den zîten pflac.  
doch müezen wir ouch nû genesen.  
ichn wolde dô niht sîn gewesen,  
daz ich nû niht enwære,  
dâ uns noch mit ir mære  
sô rehte wol wesen sol:  
dâ tâten in diu werce vil wol.

(*Iwein*, 48-58; I regret truly, and if it did any good, I would complain about it, that now, in our time, it is impossible to have such joy as they enjoyed in those days. Still, we have no choice but go on living in the present. I wouldn't want to have lived at that time if it meant I wouldn't be alive now, when we are able to take such pleasure in stories about them. Back then, their deeds made them feel good.)

For the second time in 60 lines, Hartmann drives a wedge between the present and the past. In what appears to be a standard *laudatio temporis acti*, Hartmann does his best to make us long for the vanished world of King Arthur. Then he throws cold water in our faces. Sure, I can complain that the present isn't as good as the past, but it won't do any

good. And remember, if we lived back then we wouldn't be alive now. Then he finds a positive reason to recommend the present: we have the stories of their deeds that give us such pleasure. As it turns out, we are in luck: it is just such an account that Hartmann is about to offer. This account, however, is defined in precisely the terms of Isidore's famous definition: it is a *mare* (a story: *narratio*) that recounts *diu werc* (the deeds: *res gestae*) of a glorious past. It is a *narratio rei gestae*, in other a words, a *historia* in the medieval sense.<sup>15</sup> Hartmann has prepared us for this claim from the start. First, by placing Arthur so deliberately in the past: in no other Arthurian romance is there such an insistence on the historicity of King Arthur.<sup>16</sup> Second, by assigning Arthur, at the very first mention of his name, one of the functions that figures in histories are supposed to serve: Arthur is introduced not as entertainment but as example. Hartmann opened with the general truth: if you live right, your fame will endure. Then he invokes Arthur because, he says, Arthur "gît gewisse lère" (*Iwein* 4; provides reliable teaching) that this is true. Arthur is an example we should follow if we too wish to acquire fame.

In claiming to write history, Hartmann neither references nor relies on his source. Many romance authors give long, sometimes fantastical accounts of the time and effort they devoted to finding the one true source for their story. Others highlight the challenges of translation. Hartmann does neither. In *Erec*, he names the author of his French source, "Crestiens" (*Erec*, 4629,12; Chrétien de Troyes).<sup>17</sup> In *Iwein* he merely refers, quite vaguely, to the fact that he found his tale "an den buochen" (*Iwein*, 22; in books). If one compares the passages in which Hartmann makes his claims about history to the corresponding passages in Chrétien's *Yvain*, one can identify a few tidbits that may have inspired Hartmann's elaborations. But that potential is obvious only because Hartmann exploited it. In other words, in claiming authority for his work, Hartmann eschews the familiar conventions by which romance authors usually do so: by identifying their source and asserting its authoritativeness. Instead he invokes the conventions of historiography: it is an account of past deeds, a *narratio rei gestae* that provides examples for our edification.

And yet, even though Hartmann claims the authority of history for his narrative, the story he is telling undermines that claim. History is supposed to be an account of true events that took place in the past. Yet in *Iwein* we encounter a ring that makes the hero invisible, a salve that cures his madness, a giant, a dragon, a magic fountain, and, most famously, a lion that attaches itself to Iwein with the devotion of the most faithful dog—except that, unlike a dog, it will enter the fray when Iwein most needs help and fight like a lion. I do not think Hartmann's audience really expected to encounter such things in their own world.

But just in case they did, Hartmann goes out of his way to remind them that this is fiction. One of the ways he does so can be illustrated by the account of Iwein's first adventure, which, predictably, entails a fight with another knight. Hartmann's narrator describes how the opponents spurred their horses towards each other, how their spears shattered into 100 pieces as they thrust them through each other's' shields, how they drew

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<sup>15</sup> See Rachel Raumann, *Fictio und historia in den Artusromanen Hartmanns von Aue und im "Prosa-Lancelot"* (Tübingen/Basel: Francke, 2010), 104.

<sup>16</sup> See Karina Kellermann, "'Exemplum' und 'historia': Zu poetologischen Traditionen in Hartmanns 'Iwein,'" *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift* NF 42 (1992): 1-27, here 16.

<sup>17</sup> Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, ed. Albert Leitzmann and Ludwig Wolff, 6th ed. Christoph Cormeau and Kurt Gärtner, *Altdeutsche Textbibliothek*, 39 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985). Subsequent references and citations, all from this edition, will be identified by line number in the text.

their swords and fought such a fight that God would have been honored to watch (*Iwein*, 1012-22). Then all of a sudden the narrator decides he can't continue.

Ich machte des strîtes harte vil  
mit worten, wan daz ich enwil,  
als ich iu bescheide.  
sî wâren dâ beide,  
unde ouch nieman bî in mê  
der mir der rede gestê.

(*Iwein* 1029-34; I could expend many words on the fight, but I'm not going to, for reasons which I will now explain. There were two of them there; but no one else was there with them who could confirm what I say.)

Of the two who *were* there, Hartmann continues, one is dead so *he* can't say anything, and the other is so courtly he wouldn't brag about his great bravery; all I can say is that *Iwein* was victorious (*Iwein*, 1035-50). This is delightful because it is absurd. If the absence of first-person testimony prevents him from describing this fight, then how was he able to describe all the other events in the story? There were no witnesses to them either. We know the answer of course: he can describe them because he can make up anything he wants. This is not history: it's fiction.<sup>18</sup>

The delightful absurdity of this little game is compounded by the fact that Hartmann plays it by applying the wrong standard. That standard comes from historiography. History is supposed to be the account of true events from the past. And the most reliable guarantor of the truth of past events, according to medieval commentators, was the testimony of eyewitnesses.<sup>19</sup> Here Hartmann points out that his story lacks this guarantee: his narration is *fabula*, not *historia*. Hartmann does not have to do this, since we know it—if we care to remember. But he goes out of his way to remind us, to remind us that he's making it all up.

Usually, of course, Hartmann's narrator is better behaved, telling us his story as he is supposed to, reporting what happened and adding observations and ornaments where appropriate. But, at the very beginning and in passages where the narrator doesn't seem to know what's going on (this is not the only one), Hartmann makes claims about what he is doing, and these claims pull in opposite directions. On the one hand, he insists his account is history. On the other, he reminds us that it is fiction.

Since the publication 30 years ago of Walter Haug's *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter* an immense scholarly literature has been produced debating Haug's claim that "die Entdeckung der Fiktionalität"<sup>20</sup> in post-classical European literature can be traced to the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes and his German adaptors.<sup>21</sup> The passages from *Iwein* discussed above have figured largely in these debates. They have been framed

<sup>18</sup> See James A. Schultz, *The Shape of the Round Table: Structures of Middle High German Arthurian Romance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 163-67. For a detailed discussion of the passage, along with extensive bibliography, see Raumann, *Fictio* (note 15), 119-28.

<sup>19</sup> See: Kellermann, "Exemplum" (note 16), 10; Raumann, *Fictio* (note 15), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts: Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 105.

<sup>21</sup> For a summary of the issues with notes containing relevant bibliography, see: Mark Chinca and Christopher Young, "Literary Theory and the German Romance in the Literary Field c. 1200," in *Text und Kultur: Mittelalterliche Literatur 1150-1450: DFG-Symposium 2000*, ed. Ursula Peters (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 612-44, here 612-18; Raumann, *Fictio* (note 15), 1-24.

as debates “about the nature of fictionality in medieval romance”<sup>22</sup> and, to put fictionality in context, the nature of historiography and the nature of literature. In other words, scholars have assumed that the positions adopted by a writer like Hartmann represent epistemological claims.

I think it is more productive to understand Hartmann’s claims as strategic. This is the moment when literature in the vernacular is just beginning to be written at the courts of Europe. A self-conscious lay culture is developing, distinct from the ecclesiastical culture that had claimed nearly all the cultural capital for centuries. If the Church has its rituals, so does the court: festivals and tournaments, ceremonies of welcome and departure. If the Church has its architecture, so does the court: this is the great age of castle building. Does the Church make its great wealth visible in vestments and costly objects? The most important figures at court wear garments embroidered with silver and gold and encrusted with precious jewels. Has the Church monopolized reading, writing, and learning for centuries? The laity, “interested in hearing how the history of their world and their institutions fitted into the divine scheme . . . came to take possession of the history that had previously been exclusive domain of clerics.”<sup>23</sup> At the same time the court began to encourage clerics, as well as laymen who had the requisite skills, to write self-consciously literary narratives in the vernacular drawing on a wide variety of sources. This seems obvious to us: it’s what we understand by European literature. But this is the hour of its birth, and it is trying to establish itself.

This is the context in which I see Hartmann’s claims as strategic. He wants to claim for his romances the status of history, because history has great authority—the authority, that is, to provide true and binding examples that should guide our behavior, to legitimate the position of those who stand at the end of this history, and to consolidate the collective identity of those who see themselves as part of it. It has this authority because it reveals the intentions of God. Hartmann claims for his romance the prestige and the power of history. At the same time, however, Hartmann insists that his romance is fiction. Fiction gives Hartmann the freedom to introduce a host of counterfactual elements, elements that, his audience would have recognized at once, could not exist in the world as they knew it. Fiction allows Hartmann to introduce difference. The medieval historiographer is not interested in difference; he is not interested in “retrieving the pastness of the past”<sup>24</sup> but in identifying timeless truths that can be held up as a mirror to the present.<sup>25</sup> By claiming his romance is both history and fiction, Hartmann is able to present a world that is both authoritative, because it is history, and different, because it is fiction.

Neither medieval history nor Hartmann’s fiction is as “pure” as we might like. Historiography is true by definition, and yet medieval histories contain long passages that are made up. Hartmann’s *Iwein* is fiction, and yet he claims it is also a history that can teach authoritative lessons. While the historians feel some anxiety about the presence of unattested, rhetorically shaped scenes in their narratives, Hartmann seems to delight in insisting he can have it both ways, that his romance is both history and fiction.

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<sup>22</sup> Chınca and Young, “Literary Theory” (note 21), 612.

<sup>23</sup> Chınca, *History* (note 6), 26.

<sup>24</sup> Jane Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 298.

<sup>25</sup> Goetz, “Geschichtsbewußtsein” (note 3), 60-61.



## II

How does Hartmann make use of his fictional history to think about what he would call love, but which we might call sexuality? Let me give two examples from *Erec* and two from *Iwein*.

Erec's adventures begin when he rides into an unknown town and discovers that he must fight a contest with another knight. The rules for this contest require that he be accompanied by a woman he can defend as the most beautiful of all. Unfortunately he doesn't happen to have such a woman on hand just then, so he negotiates with the man in whose house he has found lodging, and ends up with the host's daughter, Enite. He promises to marry her in return for the favor. No one asks Enite what she thinks of this arrangement. After such a start it is perhaps not surprising that their love develops slowly. During the fight, Enite fears for Erec's safety, and he gains strength at a crucial moment by looking at her (*Erec*, 850-54, 935-39). After the fight Enite lays Erec in her lap to rest, but she says little since she is shy, as is usual for maidens (*Erec*, 1317-25).

It is only after they leave her father's house and head off for King Arthur's court that they actually fall in love. As they ride through a meadow, they begin to look at each other; their pleasure in one another grows greater and greater until their hearts are full of love (*Erec*, 1484-97). Although the meadow is the natural setting for amorous dalliance, they fail to take advantage of this opportunity. Instead, they ride along very quickly, because Erec had promised to arrive that very day at King Arthur's court (*Erec*, 1498-1501). Once they arrive, while waiting for the day of their wedding, the intensity of their love increases.

ouch truoc si im bedaht  
 einen willen dem gelîch,  
 daz ez wære wætlîch,  
 und hetez nieman gesehen,  
 daz dâ wære geschehen  
 ein vil vriuntlîchez spil.  
 zewâre ich iu daz sagen wil,  
 dâ was der Minnen gewin:  
 diu Minne rîchsete under in  
 und vuocete in grôzen ungemach.

(*Erec*, 1851-60; She secretly wished for the same thing he did, so that if it had been proper and no one would have seen it, a very intimate game would have taken place there. Indeed, let me tell you, this was a victory for Love. Love ruled over them and caused them great distress.)

Remarkably, through all this they never feel the need to *talk* about their love. So far as we can tell, they never utter a word about their increasing attraction, either to each other or to anyone else. The love of Erec and Enite exists entirely in the medium of glances, gestures, courtly rituals and proprieties. This is, as I mentioned, precisely the period in which courtly culture is beginning to take shape. This is a context in which self-control and the mastery of courtly forms are required for success. Riding through the meadow, Erec and Enite don't dally, since they have to get to court. Once at court, their behavior is determined by concern for what is proper and for their good names. It may seem that these rituals and proprieties constrain their love, but that is not the case. Courtly forms are the

*language* of love, its very medium. They know this. They do not utter a word about their love, because they know their love exists *as* courtly behavior. It is a kind of courtliness.<sup>26</sup>

Once the two are married and Erec has shown off his knightly skills at a tournament, Erec and Enite return to his country, where they are welcomed with great celebration. Erec's father steps aside, Erec assumes the kingship, and then all he wants to do is have sex with his wife.

alsô vertreip er den tac.  
 des morgens er nider lac,  
 daz er sîn wîp trûte  
 unz daz man messe lûte.  
 sô stuonden si ûf gelîche  
 vil müezeclîche.  
 ze handen si sich viengen,  
 zer kappeln si giengen:  
 dâ was ir tweln alsô lanc  
 unz daz man messe gesanc.  
 diz was sîn meistiu arbeit:  
 sô was der imbîz bereit.  
 swie schiere man die tische ûf zôch,  
 mit sînem wîbe er dô vlôch  
 ze bette von den liuten.  
 dâ huop sich aber triuten.  
 von danne kam er aber nie  
 unz er ze naht ze tische gie.

(*Erec*, 2936-53; This is the way he spent the day: in the morning he lay down to make love to his wife until the bells were rung for mass. Then the two of them stood up together in great haste, took each other by the hand and went to the chapel. They remained there just as long as it took to sing mass. This was Erec's most arduous undertaking. Then breakfast awaited them. As soon as the table had been cleared he left the others and raced off to bed with his wife, where their lovemaking began anew. And he never left again until evening to go down to dinner.)

Needless to say, such behavior has consequences. Devoting all his attention to the love of Lady Enite, Erec "ritterschefte sich bewac" (*Erec*, 2955; avoided knightly contests) "als er nie würde der man" (*Erec*, 2935; as if he had never become a knight).<sup>27</sup> This affects his reputation:

die minnete er sô sêre  
 daz er aller êre  
 durch si einen verphlac.

<sup>26</sup> I have discussed this phenomenon in greater detail in James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 120-28.

<sup>27</sup> "To become a man" can mean "to become a knight." See James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100-1350* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 150.

(*Erec*, 2968-70; He loved Enite so much that he completely frittered away his good name for her sake alone).

Those who used to take pleasure in life at his court begin to find this impossible and drift away. In the end,

in schalt diu werlt gar.  
sîn hof wart aller vreuden bar  
unde stuont nâch schanden.

(*Erec*, 2988-90; all the world reviled him. His court became devoid of all joy and stood in disrepute).

Eventually Erec wakes up to the error of his ways and sets out to put things aright: he reestablishes his fame as a knight by fighting anyone who crosses his path; he restores his status as husband by treating Enite very badly; and, after a long series of adventures, in the end they return home, a loving couple, to rule wisely and happily until they die long after of old age.

Before joining them in the happy ending, we should take a closer look at the days that Erec spends in bed with Enite. To be sure, his behavior gets him into all sorts of trouble. The trouble, however, is political, social, and public. It affects his reputation and the standing of his court. There is not a hint that the problem is moral or spiritual, not a hint that he is endangering his soul. This is extraordinary. For most of its history, as is well known, the Christian church has been deeply suspicious of human sexuality. The orthodox view in the Middle Ages, and in many places still today, is that, as a consequence of the Fall, humans are burdened with concupiscence and lust. This is an intrinsic part of our human nature after the Fall, and it causes us to do that which we should not, especially with the organs of generation. If it makes any sense to speak of sexual orientation in the Middle Ages, one would have to say that, according to the teachings of the Church, all humans have *the same* sexual orientation: an orientation to do that which they should not. To be sure, there are differences in degree: masturbation and sodomy are worse sins than adultery or incest. But these are not differences in kind. A husband and wife having oral sex no less than a man having sex with a goat represent a failure to keep one's sinful nature under control. Even a husband and wife having sex in the hopes of having children are liable to get into trouble if they enjoy themselves too much. It is possible that the theology of concupiscence was not well known at court. But surely it must have been general knowledge that individuals had to monitor these dangerous urges very closely if they hoped to avoid sin.<sup>28</sup>

In such a context it is quite remarkable to encounter an episode like the one in *Erec*. Withdrawing from the world for non-stop sex may ruin Erec's reputation. It does not endanger his soul. It seems as if the lay nobility is declaring its independence of the Church. You tell us that sex is sinful, but we don't think so. To be sure, it is unruly and dangerous and can get one into lots of trouble. It must be managed properly: that is, it must conform to courtly proprieties—as Erec and Enite understood before they got married, when their unspoken love was constituted as courtly discipline. But there is nothing wrong with the desire to have sex and nothing wrong with taking pleasure in sex. Two elements are in play

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<sup>28</sup> For a useful summary of the teachings of the medieval Church, see Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 42-60.

here, neither of which could exist in twelfth-century Germany except in the world of fiction: love that comes into being *as* courtly form and sexual pleasure that is free from the taint of sin. Both posit an autonomy of secular courtly culture—love *as* courtly discipline, free *from* ecclesiastical discipline—that no Christian prince would have dared advocate in real life.

Let me return to *Iwein*, to that magnificent festival Arthur organized. A group of knights is sitting around, and one of them tells the story of how, ten years earlier, he had ridden out looking for adventure, but rather than glory he found defeat at the hands of another knight. After he has finished his sorry tale, his cousin Iwein vows to avenge this defeat. No sooner has Iwein declared his intention than he is insulted by the troublemaker Keie. It's obvious, Keie says, that you've drunk too much wine; that's the only reason you think you're so brave (*Iwein*, 815-25). The queen criticizes Keie for his insult, but Iwein takes the highroad. He tells the queen that he is not troubled by what Keie said and concludes with an explicit refusal to take up Keie's challenge.

ouch enhebet er niht den strît  
der den êrsten slac gât:  
unz in der ander vertreit,  
sô ist der strît hin geleit.  
ichn wil mich mit dem munde  
niht glîchen dem hunde,  
der dâ wider grînen kan,  
sô in der ander grînet an.

(*Iwein*, 871-78; The man who delivers the first blow does not begin the fight. As long as the other one does not respond the quarrel is put aside. I will not bare my teeth like a dog, who growls back whenever another dog growls at him.)

Iwein's response here may seem like little more than the sign of a forgiving nature. But I think it reveals something much more. I think it reveals an important shift in the standards of noble masculinity.

Fighting is the activity by which noble men defined themselves as a gender and a class. Later on, in a different frame of mind, Iwein looks back on his life as a knight and says:

ich bejagte swes ich gerte  
mit sper und mit swerte.

(*Iwein*, 3525-26; Whatever I wanted, I won by fighting with spear and sword).

That's what knights do. But the court was a place of peace. Armed men cannot be allowed to take whatever they want with sword and spear or to respond with blows when they think they have been insulted. So men who wanted to get ahead at court had to control their habit of fighting. This constraint on male violence at court paralleled historical developments that were placing restraints on knightly violence outside court. The great princes were gathering more and more power into their own hands, and as they did so, they were able to force knights in their jurisdictions to keep the peace. This was a very gradual process, but a real one. In his response to the queen, Iwein places himself on the side of civilization. It's almost as if he's bragging to the queen: look, I'm not going to fight back

in the old manner, which he characterizes as violent and animalistic. He trades the ancient right of vengeance for the symbolic capital that accrues to those who are courtly.<sup>29</sup>

There are other constraints, however, as we will discover if we accompany Iwein for a bit longer. Iwein sets out, follows the course that his cousin took, and ends up fighting the very knight who defeated his cousin. Unlike his cousin, however, Iwein is able to deliver a mortal wound. Iwein pursues his wounded opponent, who turns out to be a king, into his castle, where Iwein ends up trapped in a small room. Trapped in this little room wondering what is going to happen to him, Iwein glances out the window and sees the dead king's widow following her husband's bier, beside herself for grief. He falls in love instantly. His senses are so completely disordered by love that he wants to rush out and seize her hands so that she will stop tearing her hair and her clothes (*Iwein*, 1331-54). Soon, however, he has the assistance of the widow's confidante, Lunete. Not surprisingly, it takes a good deal of work on Lunete's part before she can convince the grieving widow she should marry the man who just killed her husband. But in the end she does succeed. In the process, however, Iwein places himself in a very unheroic position. Just before he meets his bride-to-be, he tells Lunete:

ich wil gerne daz mîn lîp  
immer ir gevangen sî,  
und daz herze dâ bî.

(*Iwein*, 2242-44; I will be happy to be her prisoner always, both my body and my heart.)

When he does come before her, he throws himself at her feet and says:

. . . rihtet selbe über mich:  
swie ir welt, alsô wil ich.

(*Iwein*, 2289-90; Render judgment on me: whatever you want, that's what I want too.)

You know, she says, I could kill you. To which he replies: ok, if that's what you want (*Iwein*, 2294-95).

Perhaps Iwein's behavior is not so surprising: he has a lot to answer for, after all. The only way he is liable to attain his goal is to place himself at the mercy of the woman he has wronged and beg for mercy. But is it? The episode type on which all of this is built is much simpler. Iwein has killed his opponent and won the woman. An old-school hero would throw her over his shoulder and ride off or take possession of her and her castle and that's that. But this is not that world. The standards of appropriate masculine behavior are shifting. Indeed, they seem to have shifted so far that gender roles are reversed: Iwein throws himself at the feet of Laudine, saying he is her prisoner. This reversal is not unfamiliar to readers of medieval romance: many of its greatest heroes place themselves at the service of the women they love and commit themselves to carrying out her every wish and whim. Many heroes, that is, voluntarily, eagerly, accept a position that turns medieval assumptions about proper gender relations completely on their heads. Why do they do this?

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<sup>29</sup> For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see Schultz, *Courtly Love* (note 26), 175-79.

Why do they eagerly accept a position of subordination in literature that the men in their audiences would have found profoundly shameful?

The constraints I noted above on noble men's freedom to fight and take whatever they want by force of arms were not the only ones affecting them at this time. They were also experiencing new constraints on their behavior towards women. At court, the new standards of courtliness required men to exercise greater restraint in their behavior towards women. From outside the court, the Church was becoming more actively involved in regulating marriage, and this too affected men's behavior towards women. Noble males had long regarded it as their prerogative to keep concubines or mistresses if they wished. And they had long felt entitled to repudiate one wife if they felt inclined to take a different one. The church, however, insisted that marriages be monogamous and that a marriage, once joined, is indissoluble. It is easy to see how noble males might have felt these new requirements constrained them in ways that challenged their understanding of themselves as men.

This was the case for the restraints on fighting as well. What better way to represent these threats to masculine status than by subordination to a woman? No noble male would have countenanced such shameful behavior in real life. But by pushing these constraints past their historical conditions of possibility, romance authors draw attention to them and offer them for reflection. The romance authors represent not only the constraints and the gender anxieties they provoke, but the rewards as well. By accepting the discipline of courtliness, men acquire distinction and status at court. By throwing himself at the feet of the young widow, Iwein is rewarded with her hand in marriage and the kingdom that is hers. She, on the other hand, becomes a wife and loses most of the power she enjoyed. This too is a reward for the men: accept these constraints in the short term, and you will come out on top in the end.

This is only possible in fiction, and that is true of most of the things I have been considering. Only in fiction could the love of two individuals be manifest so completely as courtly form as is that of Erec and Enite. Only in fiction could sexual pleasure, and lots of it in the case of Erec, be portrayed as completely free from the taint of sin. Only in fiction could the constraints on masculine behavior be as exaggerated as they are in Iwein. And only in fiction will the rewards for accepting these constraints be as glorious and reliable as they are in these romances. Hartmann uses the freedom of fiction to imagine a world in which sexuality and gender relations are quite remarkably different from those obtained in his own world.

Hartmann also insists that he has written a history, and this is just as important as the fiction. As history, the figures that he represents, Arthur above all, but his protagonists as well, become authoritative examples for emulation. As history, the innovations of this idealized version of courtly life can be advanced with an authority they would otherwise lack. And as history, these romances offer to the lay nobility of the high Middle Ages, who would recognize this world as an idealized version of their own, a legitimacy and identity that can only be had from a history of one's own. The more they do recognize themselves in the fictional world, however, the more they will have to grapple with that fact that that world is different from their own, that it offers alternative versions of themselves. Inviting them to grapple with alternative versions of themselves will make them think differently *about* themselves and their world. This then is Hartmann's strategy: the claim that he is writing fiction allows him to imagine a different world, something medieval history, with

its commitment to universal truths, does not encourage; the claim that he is writing a history allows him to recommend this different world with the authority that medieval history enjoyed, but that fiction, not anchored in God's truth, did not.

### III

Here is where Hartmann's poetic strategy approaches Foucault's philosophical exercise. Hartmann writes a history of an imagined world that is an idealized version of his own world. Foucault wants to "think [his] own history," that is, critically think through the history of that has led to his own world. Both adopt an active relation to the past. Hartmann holds up King Arthur, and by implication the Arthurian world, as an example to be emulated; since he wants his world to emulate an Arthurian world that is different from his own, he must want his own world to *become* different from what it is. Foucault wants to think his own history to see the extent to which doing so "can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently." By engaging actively with the past, both Hartmann and Foucault want to help themselves and to encourage their contemporaries to think differently, and perhaps act differently, in the present. To this extent, at least, they are similar.

I believe Foucault's project is a crucially important one, especially for those of us who are professional students of the past. To illustrate some of the ways this might be true, I will try to perform his philosophical exercise, taking Hartmann as history: Hartmann will represent medieval ideas about love that are incontestably part of the history of sexuality in the west. Using Hartmann, I want to see the extent to which "the effort to think" medieval sexuality can free *our* thought "from what it silently thinks" (about sexuality) and "so enable [us] to think differently" (about sexuality). I will focus on the middle link in Foucault's chain of thinking, which is where he differs most clearly from Hartmann. Hartmann invites his audience to think differently by proposing a fictional alternative to their own world. Foucault wants to enable us to think differently by freeing "thought from what it silently thinks." He wants to use the past to help identify the things that go without saying, the things we take for granted. If we can identify what we take for granted, then we may free ourselves, to a certain extent at least, from this unacknowledged constraint. This will free us to think differently. I will give three examples of ways in which "thinking medieval sexuality" might do this.

First, Hartmann can enable us to think differently about desire. Recall how Iwein falls in love. He has just killed a knight and is trapped in a small room, afraid for his life. Sex is the last thing on his mind. But he happens to see the bier of his slain opponent being carried along, followed by the dead man's widow, a beautiful woman overcome by grief. Instantly Iwein is her captive. He finds her so beautiful

daz im ir minne  
verkêrten die sinne,  
daz er sîn selbes gar vergaz

(*Iwein*, 1335-37; that love for her robbed him of reason so that he forgot himself entirely.)

This is the way it almost always works in romance: knight is going about his business, riding through the forest fighting giants, killing people; he sees the right woman and falls in love at once. Or a lady is going about her business welcoming guests to court, watching a tournament; she sees the right man and falls in love at once. Love takes possession of the individual from without. In this regard the infamous love potion that gets Tristan and Isolde into so much trouble is a perfect symbol of falling in love: something external takes over completely. Such love is, literally, a passion: something that one suffers.

As much as we might suffer in love, we do not think it invades us from outside. To be sure, we acknowledge the possibility of accident and surprise and falling in love at first sight. But we also believe that we all have something called sexual desire, that it is an innate force that motivates us to seek out sexual objects or to engage in sexual activities.

Erec and Enite fall in love more slowly. Although this ought to give them time to talk about what they are experiencing, they do not seem to feel the need to do so: throughout the entire time between the moment they fall in love until after their wedding they never say a word about being in love. Their love exists neither in the form of spoken language nor physical contact but entirely in the medium of courtly gestures. I want to contrast this with the widespread assumption nowadays, not only that human beings are motivated to seek sexual relations by an internal force, which we usually call desire, but that this internal component can take rather specific shapes. Some of us prefer sex with women, others with men, some seek one-night-stands, others want lifelong commitment, there are those who want dinners by candlelight, others have a taste for bondage and discipline. Many believe that these sexual preferences are an essential part of who we are, deep down, and that we should be free to realize who we really are in our sex lives.

Iwein's sudden subjection to love and Erec and Enite's love that exists only in social forms represent two instances from the history of medieval sexuality that, I believe, warrant attention. They challenge our assumption that desire comes from within, that our "sexuality," even what we regard as rather personal tastes and preferences, is something intrinsic to us. The contrast between Hartmann and us, of course, corroborates Foucault's well-known argument that we have come over time to look more and more inside ourselves for the truth of ourselves, which is to be found in our sex.<sup>30</sup> At the very least, the medieval examples can help free our thought from what it silently thinks: namely that our beliefs about desire are universal. Hartmann seems to have had no concept of anything like our sexual desire. The difference is striking. Erec and Enite are overtaken by a love that, to be true to themselves, they can only experience *as* courtly form. We have a desire within us that we must express, to remain true to ourselves, even if it means *challenging* social forms.<sup>31</sup>

Second, Hartmann can help free us to think differently about the sexed body. When Erec and Enite ride through the meadow, Hartmann describes their falling in love in this way:

Êrec begunde schouwen  
sîne juncvrouwen.

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978) 59-61.

<sup>31</sup> For a fuller discussion of the issues raised by our use of "desire," see James A. Schultz, "Love without Desire in Mären of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries" in *Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext*, ed. Mark Chinca, Timo Reuvekamp-Felber, and Christopher Young, Beihefte zur *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 13 (Berlin: Schmidt, 2006), 122-47.



ouch sach si vil dicke an  
 bliuclîchen ir man.  
 dô wehselten si vil dicke  
 die vriuntlîchen blicke.  
 ir herze wart der minne vol:  
 si gevielen beide ein ander wol  
 und ie baz unde baz.

(*Erec*, 1486-94; Erec began to look at his young lady. She too looked very often, but shyly, at her husband. Over and over they exchanged tender glances. Her heart filled with love. Their pleasure in one another grew greater and greater.)

Looking plays a large role, but we have no idea what they see. This is not the case in Hartmann's source, Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, where we get quite a detailed picture—at least of what Erec sees:

. . . son chief le blont,  
 ses ialz rianz et son cler front,  
 le nes et la face et la boche,  
 don granz dolçors au cuer li toche.  
 Tot remire jusqu'a la hanche,  
 le manton et la gorge blanche,  
 flans et costez et braz et mains.<sup>32</sup>

(. . . her fair hair, her laughing eyes and pure brow, her nose, face, and mouth; and he is touched to the heart by a great tenderness. He gazes at everything down to her hips: the chin and white throat, the waist and sides, arms and hands.<sup>33</sup>)

We have no idea what Enide sees, although we do know that she returns his gaze.

By eliminating the list of body parts, Hartmann equalizes the lovers and makes them conform to what seems to have been a German ideal: in every case where one can compare a German romance from this period with its French source, the German writer changes the descriptions of his young lovers so that their bodies are more or less identical. Sometimes he adds, sometimes (as Hartmann does in *Erec*) he subtracts. But in every case he ends up with bodies that are virtually identical, bodies that do not seem to reveal their sex. In Wolfram's *Parzival*, for instance, we know that the hero and his beloved are ravishingly beautiful. Beyond that, all we know is that they have red lips and radiant complexions. Both of them. In none of these texts do the bodies with which one falls in love have sex-differentiating elements—beards or breasts, for instance.

Our world is saturated with displays of all sorts, highlighting the sexual specificity of male and female bodies. They play an important role not just in fashion and advertising, but also, we believe, in our sexual response. Our hegemonic system of sexual classification depends on sex difference. You can only tell if someone is heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual if you can tell the sex of the bodies of the people to whom that person is attracted.

The sexually identical bodies of medieval lovers suggest that our commitment to opposite sexes may not be universal. To be sure, Hartmann's lovers are able to *tell* the

<sup>32</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. Mario Roques, Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, 1 (Paris: Champion, 1973), vv. 1471-77.

<sup>33</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. D. D. R. Owen (London: Dent, 1987), 20.

difference between women and men. Somehow they manage to keep themselves straight. But they seem to be coming at it differently, at least when it's a matter of falling in love. They seem to assume that courtly bodies are basically the same, inflected by gender, perhaps, but that these differences are not what matters when one falls in love. That they ignore sex difference at precisely the moment when we think it is most exciting ought to unsettle our belief, so obvious that we never need to mention it, that the sexual specificity of bodies is key to sexual response.<sup>34</sup>

Remarkably, these bodies that do not reveal their sex do reveal their class. Towards the end of *Erec*, there's a scene where Enite thinks Erec is dead. She weeps, tears out her hair, beats herself, calls on death to take her, and is about to plunge Erec's sword through her breast when a count comes riding up, snatches the sword from her hands, takes one look at her, and declares:

si ist benamen ein edel wîp:  
daz erziuget ir wünnelîcher lîp.

(*Erec*, 6192-93; She is in truth a noble woman; that is proved by her most beautiful body.)

The body itself declares its nobility. No sooner has he made this determination than he continues:

ouch hât si mir erkorn  
mînes herzen rât ze wîbe.

(*Erec*, 6203-4; My heart has counseled me to choose her as my wife.)

The body that has shown itself to be noble moves the heart to love.

Not only bodies but other attributes of class have the same effect. When Enite enters Arthur's court for the first time, she has been dressed in the most magnificent garments the queen has at her disposal. When she appears

von ir schœne erschrâken die  
zer tavelrunde sâzen  
sô daz si ir selber vergâzen  
und kapheten die maget an.  
dâ enwas dehein man,  
ern begunde ir vür die schönsten jehen  
die er hæte gesehen.

(*Erec*, 1737-43; Those who sat at the Round Table were so taken aback by her beauty that they forgot themselves and stared at the maiden. There was not a single man there who did not assert that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.)

This is not falling in love in the same sense that Erec falls in love with Enite. It is a collective erotic response by the men at court to the staged appearance of a woman whose nobility has been corroborated by fine fabrics, gold, and jewels: an image of courtly perfection.

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<sup>34</sup> For a fuller discussion of the identical bodies in Middle High German texts, see Schultz, *Courtly Love* (note 26), 3-15.

One of the most striking illustrations of how courtly perfection can provoke love occurs in *Iwein*. Although the woman Iwein has made a widow does agree to marry him, it is hardly surprising, considering their history, that her affection for him is muted. Only later, when Iwein's bravery brings King Arthur to her castle, does she fall in love.

alrêst liebet ir der man.  
dô ir diu êre geschach  
daz sî der kûnec durch in gesach.

(*Iwein*, 2674-76; Now for the first time she loved her husband, when, thanks to him, she was accorded the honor that the king saw her.)

The fact that Iwein is able to heighten her *honor*, which confirms her class position, is what makes her love him. It seems that at this moment courtly society was carried along by a sort of “gesellschaftliches Hochgefühl,”<sup>35</sup> and that this caused them to eroticize their class status. As they elaborated a courtly culture that both displayed and legitimated their hegemonic position, they found it turned them on. For this reason, I have called them aristophiliacs.<sup>36</sup>

This then is a third way Hartmann can help us think differently about sexuality. If pressed, we may acknowledge that class plays a role in our erotic response. We have been so tyrannized, however, by the regime of hetero- and homosexuality, this impoverished binary, that we have a hard time acknowledging, much less talking about, all the other, complex vectors of human sexuality. We don't even have useful terms for most of them. The medieval aristophiliacs can challenge our silent assumptions. They suggest there may be an eroticism of class that we should consider more seriously and, further, a whole range of eroticisms that we might start talking about. By drawing attention to those things about which we are silent, the world of medieval sexuality may enable us to think differently.

By now the point I am trying to make must be obvious. As Hartmann uses an imagined past to think differently about sexuality in his world, so we can use the medieval past to think differently about sexuality in ours. Hartmann uses the freedom of fiction to imagine a past world—to which he then adds persuasive power by calling it history. We can use the world that Hartmann imagined—which is part of *our* history—as Foucault proposes: to help free us from what we silently think and so enable us to think differently.

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Ganz, “‘hövesch’/‘hövescheit’ im Mittelhochdeutschen,” in *Curialitas: Studien zu Grundfragen der höfisch-ritterlichen Kultur*, ed. Josef Fleckenstein, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, 100 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1990), 39-54, here 42.

<sup>36</sup> See Schultz, *Courtly Love* (note 26), 79-98.

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