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Elan Justice Pavlinich (EP): Thank you, and thank you all for coming. This is an amazing turnout. Wow. I wonder if you got the memo that this is going to be all pornography and free food.

First, I want to thank Bill Zavatsky so much for your generous donation, which made it possible for me to work on a project that I'm really passionate about, and I'm excited to share that I will get to present this in just a couple of weeks at the International Congress on Medieval Studies¹ in Kalamazoo, Michigan. So thank you very much.

I also want to thank Matthew Knight, Jonathan Todd, everyone here at special collections that just made coming in every week a wonderful experience. These are great people to work with. They really took a personal interest in my work, and they know this place inside and out. It's great to be able to just mention something to them like, "I need a male nude in the middle of a daisy field." And they're like, "Oh yeah, here's 40 of them."

I also want to thank Nicole Gunther-Desenza for her continuous encouragement and for reading multiple versions of my work and offering me feedback, so thank you so much for that. And also, my colleagues Brendan O'Donnell and John Mousser, who spoke with me about some of the nuances of queer theory and recommended some excellent sources for me. So thank you to all of them.

¹Hosted by Western Michigan University's Medieval Institute, the International Congress on Medieval Studies is an annual gathering of scholars interested in medieval studies. The congress features over 500 sessions of papers, panel discussions, roundtables, workshops, and performances.

The images shown here today are all taken from our Special Collections LGBT Archives to highlight the resources available here. Focusing on a medieval text and looking at modern art, I've done my best to avoid anachronism and to incorporate images that will enhance our connections between medieval and modern same-sex desires.

So, I want to begin with some vocabulary. Those of you who are in Dr. Zysk's Brit Lit course, this may sound familiar. Auctorite, like authority in present-day English, is a word that refers to the textual authority composed of truth claims and literary traditions, namely those that can be attributed to a particular auctor.

An auctor is one who ties words together and who is worthy of trust and obedience, but not all auctorites were held in equal regard during the Middle Ages. Older texts were valued more highly and possessed greater auctorite than compositions by medieval contemporaries. Auctors were hierarchically arranged, beginning with the Bible, followed by the works of spiritual elders like Augustine of Hippo² and Gregory I.

This hierarchy would sometimes cautiously include ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, and finally, classical poets like Virgil and Ovid would take precedence over writers of historical proximity. In fact, contemporary medieval writers were admired for their appropriations, translations, or retellings of older, established texts.

At the risk of overstating the obvious, each of these auctors is identified as male. In early Western societies, men, to the exclusion of women, were privileged by material and social conditions that promote men's access to intellectual pursuits. Auctorite connotes one's participation in an intellectual—

Pause in Recording

EP: —male auctors, through reading, conversing, and retelling, manifest a cultural network of homo-social bonds. Men perpetuate texts and auctors that compose literary traditions. Auctorite is a masculine epistemology, or knowledge formation, because it is constructed by, and predominantly for, men.

In spite of the medieval hierarchy of auctorite, scholars of the 11th and 12th centuries were using reason and logic in new ways, resulting in an epistemology that questioned language and authorial agency, and that gave credence to readers' evaluation of texts based on their personal experiences.

²Also known as Saint Augustine, Augustine of Hippo was a Christian theologian and philosopher whose writings influenced the development of Western Christianity and philosophy.

Lines of demarcation that ordered the hierarchy of auctorite were crossed as the medieval church turned to classical texts to inform circumstances for which scripture did not provide clear answers. This epistemic shift that was introduced by scholasticism created rifts, one to merge new approaches and practices, and wherein authors like Chaucer composed their literary auctorite.

By the 14th century, poets like Chaucer were merely nodding at classical auctors or even fabricating a nonexistent literary heritage for their own works. Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*³ seemed to conform to heteronormative expectations established by male auctors. The poem references spring, a picturesque meadow, and the narrator's willingness to suffer for his devotion.

These cues associate the poet and his work with fin'amor literary conventions and thus, heterosexual desires. Broadly, fin'amor consists of a lover devoting himself to a beloved lady. The usual gender hierarchy, with which we are even familiar today, is inverted as the lover debases himself, proves his devotion to the beloved, and suffers extreme physical and emotional anguish.

To the noble lover, the beloved assumes a superlative, nearly divine status as the most beautiful, chaste, and honest. Fin'amor refers to narrative features and character development that we typically identify as courtly love. However, courtly love is a term that has been imposed by scholars.

While fin'amor is indicative of a French literary heritage, this term was familiar to Chaucer and his English contemporaries. The narrator of *Legend* deploys the appropriate cues to orient himself within fin'amor, but he fails to fulfill the expectations of the convention as they pertain to his gendered role. Instead, he assumes a queer orientation to these heteronormative literary conventions.

Now, a queer reading invites readers to acknowledge the normative structures upon which texts are predicated and to recognize that such normativity, like literary and social conventions, are culturally constructed and that they are not essential, natural truths.

A queer reading of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* entails an understanding of the cultural contexts in which the poem was composed, while analyzing the literary means by

³Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* is a poem written in iambic pentameter and is one of Chaucer's longest works. The poem retells the stories of 10 virtuous women: Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Lucrece, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis, and Hypermnestra.

which the text destabilizes heteronormativity, opening a textual space for alternative, deviant subject positions.

Queerness often remains uncodified, resisting nominalization, functioning more often as an adjective, adverb, even a verb stressing epistemology rather than ontology. The *Legend* narrator's textual indications of same-sex desire are never fully articulated, rather, gaps in his experience and a preoccupation with male bonds continuously replace women as the objects of his desire and defer his participation in heterosexual conventions.

One of the goals of queering is to historically locate sex and gender identities, revealing them to be cultural constructions rather than essential traits of the human condition. Barry Adam explains that, while queer theory denies identity categories, there persists a desire amidst the queer community to assert identities and to assert commonalities. We desire a history, and history is an erogenous zone. We take pleasure in our historical narratives.

Some essentialist⁴ theories generally argue that homosexuality is a natural identity category that is rooted in innate sexual desires that have always been present over the course of human existence. Social constructionist⁵ theories, on the other hand, concerned with homosexuality, generally argue that identity categories are articulated through ideology. They are not natural, and therefore, there is no intrinsic homosexuality.

I am aiming for a compromise between essentialism and social constructionism. To quote from Tyson Pew, choosing a middle ground between essentialism and constructionism and acknowledging my own anxiety of anachronism, I contend that queerness existed in the Middle Ages in the disjuncture between sexual self and societal stricture.

Even if that queerness differs from the ways that we perceive homosexuality today, given such a chasm between private desire and public discourse, queerness would inevitably bleed into the narrative record at times, with a vengeance.

To exemplify this, Chaucer uses sexuality to undermine the assumptions incited by literary conventions in a number of his texts. Carolyn Dinshaw observes in the opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales* that Chaucer defies literary tradition. So all of you who are memorizing the first 18 lines of *The Canterbury Tales*, this is your spot.

⁴Essentialism is the view that for any specific entity there is a set of attributes, which are necessary to its identity and function. Commonly seen in philosophy, the perspective is also implemented in different disciplines like mathematics, psychology, sociology, politics, and gender studies, to name a few.

⁵Social constructionism is a sociology and communication theory applied to many different disciplines that explores the ways social constructs in society define meanings, notions, and/or connotations assigned to objects and events in the environment and to people's notions of their relationships to and interactions with these same objects.

Chaucer describes, “[Whan that] Aprill with his shoures soote / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote.” Typically, the month of April is a feminine persona in literature. Chaucer’s narrator creates the potential for a sodomitical relationship between two male figures who comprise the very foundation: the natural setting for the pilgrim’s experience.

Furthermore, Britton Jay Harwood has identified unconscious same-sex desire in the *Parlement of Foules*⁶. Along with Dinshaw and Harwood, I am interested in same-sex desire in Chaucer’s works. The *Legend* narrator’s heteronormativity rests tenuously on a culturally constructed assumption regarding the auctor’s sexual identity in relation to his literary production.

His author function orients the narrator within the homosocial domain of masculine auctorite, and his fin’amor literary practices presume the narrator’s own heterosexuality. I argue that the narrator of *Legend of Good Women* merely implicates himself within heteronormative discursive modes by means of his craft.

His activity, and even his inactivity within the text, opens a queer space within which the narrator’s use of auctorite and fin’amor actually facilitate homoerotic desires. Fin’amor literary conventions compose the normative structure by which we are encouraged to read and interpret the poem.

The narrator’s poetic style bolsters his heterosexuality, a characteristic that is already presumed of most auctors. Because the narrator employs and implicates himself within the straight, male-dominated conventions of auctorite and fin’amor, scholars have generally presumed the narrator to be heterosexual or perhaps asexual.

But the auctor of *Legend* exhibits a desire for intimacy that is directed towards other men. The narrator employs heterosexual fin’amor literary conventions, evacuated of its heterosexual desires. It is a structure without intent, a simulation. Today, we witness a similar appropriation of heterosexual-dominated media. Straight signs are resignified to express the thoughts and desires of queer subjectivities.

Take, for example, the hyper-macho country song, “Save a Horse (Ride a Cowboy)” by Big & Rich. The song is a direct address to women, with a desperate assertion of the male

⁶The *Parlement of Foules* is a poem written in the form of dream vision by Geoffrey Chaucer. The poem is made up of approximately 700 lines and features the first reference to the idea of St. Valentine’s Day being a special day for lovers.

ego propped up by money, power, and a plea for sexual intercourse. The music video targets heterosexual men.

But now, let's think about what "Save a Horse (Ride a Cowboy)" means in the context of a gay dance club. The phrase "Save a Horse (Ride a Cowboy)" is intended to incite heterosexual desires, but the gender of the person to whom it is addressed is unspecified, leaving it delightfully vulnerable to the queerness that chronically threatens essentialist notions of monolithic, straight masculinity.

David Halperin hypothesizes that gay male taste for certain cultural artifacts or social practices reflect, within their particular contexts, ways of being, ways of feeling, and ways of relating to the larger social world that are fundamental to male homosexuality and distinctive to gay men.

What if gay male subjecthood, or subjectivity, consisted precisely in those ways of being, feeling and relating? Perhaps there really is such a thing as gay male subjectivity, and perhaps, gay men's cultural practices offer us a way of approaching it, getting hold of it, describing it, defining it, and understanding it.

This gay hermeneutic facilitates recognition of our kin. It allows us to look to the past and to recuperate our fore-queers, who expressed their identities and desires via subdued signs that, if interpreted properly, subvert the hegemonic order while maintaining their safety. Retrieving our fore-queers from the past is also a means of encountering ourselves.

I read Chaucer's narrator as a gay man who appropriates women's narratives to facilitate his own homoerotic desires. This returns us to contemporary gay men's practices, a scholarly trend observed by Richard Utz as the inclusion of subjective, affective, atemporal connections that medievalists make when they engage with the Middle Ages.

Self-consciously reading canonical, medieval literature from the standpoint of a gay man, I aim to expose queer desires latent in the traditional English corpus and to validate the narratives and orientations of our LGBTQIA community. In this way, scholarship is a revolutionary act.

Bringing this knowledge to bare on our contemporary practices, I am determined to make the transition from scholarship to activism. The goal of project is to authorize queer epistemologies and to enhance our LGBTQ history. My larger project consists of a queer

approach to Old and Middle English texts, which locates sexuality and gender within historical contexts as they are preformed through language.

I am interested in literary identities that assume textual authority in defiance of the literary heritage to which they lay claim and the means by which these emerging textual authorities rupture normative modes of gender and sexuality, creating a new subject position in relation to these literary traditions.

My reading of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* elucidates the narrator's potential homoerotic desires, whose orientation challenges socially constructed systems of normativity through literary production. The narrator's treatment of the women, however, is misogynist in that it appropriates women's roles for the purpose of facilitating bonds between men.

By locating these misogynist practices within broader strategies of oppression, I hope to create a dialogue about the means by which gay men's culture has been influenced by a patriarchy that values women to the extent that they facilitate relationships between men.

So, to summarize the text for those of you who haven't read *Legend of Good Women*, it opens with a debate regarding the conditions of heaven and hell. This leads to a comparison between epistemologies of personal experience and the wisdom that is gleaned from older texts.

The narrator privileges the latter, claiming that nothing can distract him from his beloved books. But then, the spring season entices him to indulge his other love: his devotion to the daisy. The narrator abandons his books and explains that he intends to spend all day and all night in a meadow populated by freshly sprouted daisies.

Night falls, and instead, he retreats to his home, where men make up a bed strewn with flowers in his garden. Nevertheless, in his dream, he encounters a beautiful woman who resembles a living daisy. You can see her off to the right. She is accompanied by the God of Love, the only one with wings. And soon, they are encompassed by innumerable virtuous ladies—or according to this painting, three.

The God of Love, having caught sight of and questioned the narrator, rebukes him for his literary works because they have ruined fin'amor by turning noble men away from such chivalric behaviors, perverting love by inviting crude people to participate, and portraying women as unfaithful.

The beautiful woman comes to the narrator's defense, during which we learned that she is Alcestis, who offered herself to the underworld in place of her husband, only to be rescued by Hercules and later transformed into a daisy. In order to appease the God of Love, it is agreed that the narrator will compose a hagiography, or a book of saints' lives, that will briefly detail the stories of women who conducted themselves virtuously, in accordance with *fin'amor*.

The rest of the text consists of retellings compiled from classical sources like Ovid and Virgil, with some curious alterations. Ultimately, the hagiography remains unfinished, perhaps deliberately so.

So I now want to go into how the *Legend* narrator conforms to the straight male conventions of auctorite, and then we'll discuss his deviations from the norm, mostly those indications of his same-sex desires.

So the *Legend* narrator maintains the normative homosocial bond of auctorite by metaphorically describing his literary production as activities that are typically performed by men—namely, shipping and wrestling.

First, he flouts verbosity and complains that some details are far too long and tedious to describe, and to do so would endanger his narrative in the same way that men might overload a ship or a barge. In both cases, ships and narratives ought to convey neither too little nor too much. The narrator follows Love's charge that he be brief in his retellings.

Later, as he begins the legend of Ariadne, the narrator calls upon King Minos to come into the ring. The narrator relates his role as auctor to his spectatorship of a sporting event. The text itself becomes a wrestling match that will determine victory by means of the narrator's manipulation of source texts.

Masculine characters like Minos are made the subjects of the narrator's voyeurism, even while the text to which he attends ought to be privileging women. Identifying men as both signifiers and interpreters of meaning reduces women to mediators who connect men to other men.

These metaphors transfer the masculine properties of one domain, ships and sporting events, onto his writing practices. He takes up the orders given to him by a masculine authority, the God of Love, and instead of praising women as he is charged to do, he locates himself in a fraternity of masculine auctors.

The narrator uses the women's narratives to implicate himself within this fraternity of auctors. Then, he abandons them in a fashion that is similar to the untrue male lovers about whom he complains. For example, the narrator shifts focus between Philomela and Progne, explaining that, "in teres lete I Progne dwelle, / And of her suster forth I wol yow telle."

He does not merely turn the narrative away from one sister and to the other; he leaves one in stasis while his words progress the action of the other. A short while later, he abandons them completely, just like Tereus, by concluding the legend with, "thus I lete hem in hir sorwe dwelle."

The narrator's focus shifts frequently between the legendary women and the men who betray them, but when he turns the narrative away from the men, the men continue to act, whereas women were left in whatever state that men—including the narrator—have shaped for them.

So these are some of the ways that the narrator implicates himself in this sort of boys' club of auctorite. Now I want to turn to the events in the text that undermine normativity and indicate the narrator's own homoerotic impulses.

Acting on his devotion to the daisy, the narrator seeks out the meadow to "day by day, / Dwellen alwey, the Ioly month of May, / Withouten sleep," similar to his fair-weather devotion to the books, his devotion to the daisy is also upset when night comes and he hastens home to sleep. Still, he desires the experience of being in the presence of the daisies, and so he simulates the meadow experience.

In his arboretum, he "bad men sholde me my couche make...I bad hem strawen floures on my bed." The narrator undermines the experience upon which his fidelity to fin'amor is based. He substitutes his authentic act of devotion with another simulation. His devotional practice of sleeping outside for the daisy is replaced by his bed and the homoerotic imagery of men composing his intimate space.

This suggests the narrator's return to masculine contrivance in that he turns away from the feminine space of the meadow in nature, and seeks comfort in the space that is contrived by men to resemble nature. This distinction is similar to the debate earlier in the poem between textual authorities and experience, or the narrator's devotion to books versus his devotion to the daisies. This also implies his affinity for the company of men.

Superficially, the work is implicated within the heteronormative conventions of fin'amor, and the narrator's author function locates him within the male bonds of auctorite. Although auctorite is traditionally homosocial, Halperin argues that desire is stronger than intellect, and so sexual desire will override one's intellectual allegiance or beliefs because it is so foundational to oneself.

The narrator uses the homosocial nature of his author function to facilitate his personal, homoerotic desires. Now, let's look more closely at the indications of same-sex desire in the narrator's literary style. When the God of Love does finally notice the narrator, the god criticizes his work. Alcestis, Love's companion, defends the narrator's contribution to fin'amor poetry by listing some of his works.

Pew explains that, included within this list of literary works, Alcestis cites the love of Palamon and Arcite, which signifies Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" but omits Emily from the title. Alcestis names only the two men of the love triangle, citing the love of Palamon and Arcite within a list of poetry that ought to exemplify fin'amor suggests a same-sex love story between the two male protagonists.

Although the work is referred to by Alcestis, she attributes a romance about two men to a narrator who gravitates towards male companions. Similarly, the narrator performs a ballad that is intended to honor the beautiful woman who accompanies Love, Alcestis.

And yet, here too, the narrator's poetic style is indicative of his homoeroticism. He does not yet know that the woman about whom he sings is Alcestis, and so he references other exemplars of fin'amor with whom he is familiar.

In two conspicuous citations, he supplies masculine icons to represent some of her noble qualities: Absalom, known for his golden curls, hints at her beauty, and Jonathan, having protected David from Saul in the Old Testament, indicates a fraction of her friendliness. The narrator describes her beauty and decorum as it relates to the aesthetic and acts of masculine-identified exemplars.

I am particularly interested in the narrator's reference to the bond between Jonathan and David to suggest, perhaps ironically, fin'amor intimacy. From Late Antiquity through the early Middle Ages, Jonathan and David had become "the biblical counterpart of the Pagan Ganymede as a symbol for passionate attachment between persons of the same gender," according to John Boswell.

The homoeroticism associated with them must have been maintained by the cultural memory, as it was used metaphorically to describe the scandalous intimacy between Pierce Gaveston and King Edward II, who was deposed and died only 16 years before Chaucer's birth.

I argue that the narrator associates Alcestis's qualities with masculine, homoerotic exemplars to undermine the heteronormativity of fin'amor and to indicate his own homoerotic desires. Closing the legend of Phillis, the narrator warns, "trusteth, as in love, no man but me."

This self-proclaimed fidelity to women presents another rupture in the text that cannot be settled due to the narrator's queerness. Catherine Lynch explains that the narrator's exemption of himself from the category of man elicits more distrust than affirmation of his honest nature. I observe that the matter of the narrator's fidelity incites polyvalent interpretations—this line has two meanings.

One interpretation is that he may be untrustworthy because he is just like every other man in the legends who manipulates women for his own purposes. In his case, however, he does not deceive them as a lover. Rather, he co-opts women's narratives to promote his own auctorite. He can be trusted in matters of love only as an auctor.

His masculine occupation insists upon a different sort of conquest, but conquest of the good women nonetheless. An alternative interpretation of this passage suggests that the narrator is the only man in the fin'amor tradition who actually maintains fidelity to women.

However, this is not because he is interested in preserving the virtue of the beloved ladies. If his sexuality may be inferred from his intimacy with women, that intimacy is continuously deferred, and even substituted, by his proclivity for the company of men.

The matter of his sexuality opens a fissure within the text that queers his orientation to fin'amor conventions and the homosocial bonds of masculine auctorite. Therefore, he may only be capable of maintaining his fidelity to women because he bears no sexual desire for them.

Polyvalent interpretation of his rhetoric is in effect of the narrator's queer orientation, rendering his personal adherence to fin'amor persistently unstable. Now, picture, if you will, the narrator's spatial orientation within the dream frame that opens the *Legend of Good Women*.

Once the company of women has come to surround Alcestis and the God of Love, Love finds the narrator indistinguishable from the women within whose company he is situated. The narrator's spatial orientation and identity, with respect to Love's point of view, incites comparison between the narrator and the women.

This spatial orientation and identification suggests that, regarding matters of love, there's a commonality between these women, whose love for men has gone unrequited, and the narrator, who concerns himself with male relationships. Let me explain a little bit more about this subject position between the ladies of fin'amor and this homoerotic narrator.

I will use Halperin's understanding of gay men's ability to make meaning and quell desires within a predominantly heteronormative society, a gay hermeneutic, as a means of reading the author function of Chaucer's homoerotic narrator in *Legend of Good Women*.

Halperin argues that gay liberation in the United States allowed for an open, dignified, male sexual and social life, and significantly altered the ways in which the gay male identity was performed.

Halperin explains that, "gay men my age," and Halperin is now 63 years old, "prided themselves on their generational difference. Female stars or divas whom older gay men identified with, apparently because those doomed, tragic figures reflected the abject conditions of their lives, resonated with the archaic form of gay male existence that we ourselves had luckily escaped.

"In short, post-Stonewall gay male life was defined by the emergence of a new, masculine, non-role-specific practice of gender and sex, embodied by the gay clone or butch gay man. Those developments betoken the proud triumph of an undifferentiated gay sexuality over an earlier, discredited, effeminate gay culture, from which the new sex-centered model of gay male identity offered a long overdue and welcome refuge."

Now, for the record, this is taken out of context. It sounds very much like Halperin is disparaging effeminacy in people who identify as male, but that's not at all the case. He is actually just trying to draw attention to the fact that each generation of gay men has sought to differentiate themselves as much as possible from the previous generation.

But he is actually pushing for a queer reading of history that really allows identities to flourish regardless of any sort of social structures. Halperin identifies the resonance

between gay men of a particular generation with the roles of women because the male-female binary was normative, and it was the abject social position of women that most closely resembled that of a silenced gay minority.

Therefore, the lives and narratives of starlets were read by gay men as a role through which they could achieve gratification, even if only in fantasy. Understanding our recent LGBT history provides our hermeneutic for recuperating our fore-queers from the medieval past. Male-female binaries and patriarchal hierarchies dominated Western culture during the Middle Ages, and, for the most part, they continue to do so.

Amid social structures that endorse the male-female gender binary, a medieval man who experiences same-sex desires could participate in fin'amor literary conventions while identifying with the feminine role, just as modern gay men in America preceding the Stonewall riots gravitated towards Hollywood starlets and musical fantasies.

I suggest that the medieval *Legend* narrator expresses frustrated sexual desires through the pathos of the women's lives who comprise his hagiography. His same-sex desire finds no literary heritage or social acceptance through which it can be expressed openly. Here, in *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator's author function grants him access to the company of male auctors.

Due to the abstract nature of auctorite's homosocial bonds spanning spatiotemporal boundaries, this bond can only be achieved in fantasy, but the pathos of his narrative, the tragedies that are propelled by the impossibility of maintaining a romantic relationship with men, provides the narrator with a medium through which expresses his own frustrated longing.

I want to acknowledge that I am reading the narrator's literary practices through my contemporary understanding of gay men's culture, but the systems that produce these subject positions are different and historically contingent.

Mindful of these ideological differences, we can observe the similarities or overlaps between medieval and postmodern experiences, particularly the ways in which masculine-dominated ideologies enact misogyny through men who experience same-sex desire.

Composing a distinct gay man's identity, some of our contemporary permutations have gone so far as to disparage women and sexual attraction to them. Recently, gay icons like

Perez Hilton have founded careers on slut-shaming women, openly objectifying their bodies on the grounds that they are evacuated of sexual desire from his gay standpoint.

Rose McGowan is disparaged for criticizing the gay community's failure to support women's rights, particularly when equal pay for women was voted down by every male Republican and there was no LGBT outcry.

Generally, gay men are diametrically opposed to lesbians, and they inhabit distinctly different social spheres, which is a sad development considering their communal activism during the 1980s, when groups of lesbians tended to gay men during the inception of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Some medievalists are still reeling from the recent attack on feminism by prominent Anglo-Saxon scholar Allen J. Frantzen, who is best known for *Desire for Origins* and tracing same-sex desire from *Beowulf* to *Angels in America*.

He refers to feminism as a fog, privileging a warped understanding of masculinity that, as I understand it, Halperin attributes to post-Stonewall gay men's culture that rejected the effeminacy of the previous generation.

Masculine social power, and attraction to it, compose a fantasy, and when this fantasy is indulged uncritically, it promotes patriarchal systems that objectify women to further male sexual desires, even when those desires are for other men. Desires seek material realization.

Through this materialization—or, in this case, textual transmission—we are afforded opportunities to trace similarities across cultures, to produce new readings that recover nuance from our histories, and to inform our contemporary social practices.

While queer readings of canonical authors and texts continue to garner criticism, it is this kind of work that is necessary to give credence to our LGBT community. By writing our history as one that intersects with the foundations of national identity and literary tradition rooted in revered authors like Chaucer, we establish an LGBT presence that precedes the homosexual subject position codified in the mid-20th century.

This has real consequences. In 2011, the Fair Education Act passed in California, requiring LGBT history to be taught in accordance with the state's definition of

inclusionary education. Because California controls much of the textbook market, the Fair Education Act could potentially inform curriculums across the country.

Unfortunately, to date, no textbook has fully incorporated LGBT history before the mid-20th century, when we became a political identity. Furthermore, it was reported that despite a significant increase in the number of PhDs produced with a particular interest in LGBT history, university history departments have not made proportionate changes in hiring scholars to tenure-track positions.

This first came to light in 2001, yet institutions have maintained this trend to this very day. So access to these LGBT collections and an LGBT research award, made possible by Bill Zavatzky, is the sort of revolutionary academia that gives our queer experiences the auctorite that they deserve. As we work to validate our LGBT historical narratives, let us be mindful of those groups who are also still struggling for recognition.

Let us openly support the rights of other marginalized people. We ought to fight in favor of equal pay for women. We ought to rally to maintain Planned Parenthood facilities. We ought to march with Black Lives Matter protesters. And it is critical that we fight for the free gender expression of every individual, in support of our trans brothers and sisters.

The *Legend* narrator was compelled to write a hagiography, a book of martyrs, about marginalized people because they were silenced and disparaged. Let us be sure that we have no need to document any more martyrs. Let us cultivate a community in which each of us is empowered to articulate our truest, best selves. Let each of us authorize our own legends. Thank you.

I can respond to questions, comments, concerns. And if you're interested, I don't know if you saw, at the back of the room there should be a handout that has my works cited for this paper if you're interested in some of the sources and also all of the image credits if you want to come look them up later. Yes?

Audience Member (AM): Can you talk about your research process and some of the challenges you faced?

EP: Oh, that's a good question. I'm going to say, it started with the text, looking at Chaucer. If you're familiar with Chaucer, there are just so many blind alleys and roads to take, and it's trying to make meaning. And one of the things that I find so fascinating is, you can identify trends, right?

And one of the things that I've seen—you might've seen, a couple of times I touch on simulations, and what is authentic and what is not—and it really seems like a lot of his queer characters, or those who have been studied in that way, are very much interested in this problem of what is authentic? What can you work through?

People like the Pardoner in *The Canterbury Tales*, who I know some of you just finished reading, is referred to in the general prologue as a mare? He is described as a horse, and it's either a castrated male horse or a female horse. So he inhabits a sort of queer subject position.

And what he says is, I don't have to believe what I'm saying, but I can still tell a really good tale. And I see the same thing here with this narrator, where he doesn't really seem to align himself with fin'amor conventions, but he is going to do it. He is going to try and do it.

And it's up to the audience, I think, to question those motives. So the first place I start is the text, and what a beautiful mystery Chaucer's works are. And how they're just open to so many interpretations, and he's just perfect for a queer reading. And then, looking at some of the criticism that's already been done by some medievalists.

It's been going on for a while, but it's still a battle. Carolyn Dinshaw was one of the pioneers, and she had to fight for tenure because it was an emerging field to look at this kind of stuff. So starting there—but there's so much room to really bring your own interpretation, I think partly because Chaucer is so fascinating, but also because so little has been done.

Medieval studies needs more women's and gender studies interested scholars. So I think, looking at what we have available here in our collections and seeing the kind of connections that you can make across cultures to sort of elucidate some of the theoretical positions and just really trying to understand what Chaucer was doing is just a lot of fun. Does that answer your question?

AM: Yes, that's great. Thank you.

EP: Thank you.

Caroline: Now, obviously we can't ask Chaucer of his purpose in doing this. But in your opinion, is it more the narrator talking, more satire like Chaucer's known for, as commentary, or is it possible Chaucer himself was forced to hide some of these feelings?

EP: That's good, Caroline. I hesitate to dive into the intentional fallacy, even though it's making a comeback, sort of. I want to say, for Chaucer, it's a game. It's the game of writing. I can't guess what he's getting at, what he's doing all the time, but he leaves some really good clues.

I will say, if you're interested, Britton J. Harwood's piece on *The Parlement of Foules* is very much interested in unconscious same-sex desire. So those are the kind of works that are looking at intention and are saying things like, Chaucer is messing with these texts. He's actually rewriting Ovid, but he's doing it in a way that is so homoerotic.

And so, if you can read these allusions to Ganymede and the Eagle and other things that are coming up, you can see, if we trace them back to their classical origin, whether he's conscious of it or not, the text is showing that you can see same-sex desire here. So, I don't know. I just can't say for sure. Thank you for that, though. Collin.

Collin: What other texts do you want to investigate and include in your project, like where do you want to go forward?

EP: Thank you for asking that. Well, I'm getting ready for my dissertation. I think the first place I want to start is Alfred's Old English *Beoethius* because there is the figure of wisdom, who, if you're familiar with the constellation of philosophy, is supposed to be Lady Philosophy, but wisdom is represented with masculine pronouns in a feminine body.

And most people gloss over this because, in Old English, wisdom is a masculine noun, so it makes sense linguistically, but there is something about the way that the language and the metaphors of the text resist anything really coherent. With figures like wisdom, we're really asked to keep returning to the text and keep thinking through these things to make sense of it.

And in this way, it actually facilitates this dialectical, philosophical pattern. So queerness actually promotes the very philosophy of the text. It gets the audience, whether they're conscious of it or not, at a literary, poetic interpretation level just to perform what the text is asking of them. So, that's where I would start in Old English.

And then I want to look at *Dream of the Rude*, another text that uses biblical references and spatiality, I think, to privilege Anglo-Saxons who are decentered. They're not quite the edge of the world. There are other places out there, but they're very much not the center.

They're not Jerusalem, Rome, Constantinople, but they're using these normative, dominant signs, and they are re-signifying them in ways that privilege their position, geographically and historically, within this soteriology, this sort of understanding of salvation.

So they're sort of like the last to convert, so they're the ones who are really pioneering the end of times. I think that's my argument. And you just heard my piece on *Legend of Good Women*. What else am I doing? That's a good question. I'll get back to you. Anybody else?

Audience Member 2 (AM2): Question. As a historian, I liked the fact that you called history an erogenous zone. There's desire that gay people have to know about our history and establish a history. I was particularly interested when you mentioned David and Jonathan because that, of course, so many gay people would claim in 19th and 20th centuries. Is that mentioned in other medieval texts? This sort of homoerotic—

EP: Yes, yes it is. I know it comes up in a couple of places, but I see it mostly in relation to Pierce Gaveston and Edward II. And again, the reason I make that connection is because it's so close to Chaucer.

And so, even while scholars like Jonathan Boswell are saying it's kind of going out of fashion—people in the Middle Ages aren't so much identifying the homoerotic relationship between Jonathan and David—we can see textual traces of it that are coming right up to just before Chaucer's birth. And I don't think that those sorts of things and the cultural memory fade so quickly if they're being promoted textually, especially in English texts.

Audience Member 3 (AM3): The David and Jonathan imagery is found continually in the illuminated manuscripts and that continues through this period on and beyond. But you will find that David and Jonathan fought two or three battles in every Old Testament illuminated manuscript.

EP: And it's explicitly homoerotic?

AM3: No.

EP: Oh okay.

AM3: But it's Jonathan, and they are the focus and their story is prominently told.

EP: Okay. Yeah, I'm fascinated by the fact that this narrator doesn't know who this woman is, but she's really, really beautiful, and he's a poet, so he's going to sing a song about her. But the only way he knows how to describe her is through these male exemplars that he seems to know a little bit more about. Thank you for that.

Matthew Knight: There's no other questions before I ask you all to thank EJ for a wonderful talk. I just wanted to say a couple of things about the LGBT initiative. First off, our deepest thanks to Bill Zavatsky for his generous and ongoing support of the LGBT initiative and to all of you.

We are growing but we can grow faster, we can grow better. And we ask for all of your help. If you can reach out to the community for donations, if you can tell some of your professors, "There are collections that can be used in the library. Let's go in there. Assign something for us." Anything you can do to help.

It's important that USF and the community get together to help build the LGBT initiative here at USF. So feel free to contact me. My name's Matthew Knight. I'm the assistant director of special collections here at USF, and I'm happy for a knock on the door or a call or an e-mail any time.

So we deeply appreciate that, too, but enough about me and enough about us. Please join me in thanking EJ Pavlinich. And enjoy some snacks and refreshments in the back, please.

End of Interview