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**PERSONAE, SAME-SEX DESIRE, AND SALVATION IN THE  
POETRY OF MARBOD OF RENNES, BAUDRI OF  
BOURGUEIL, AND HILDEBERT OF LAVARDIN**

by Tison Pugh

“Luxuriae vitio castissimus en ego fio,  
Quod duros mollit, hoc molitiem mihi tollit.”  
Marbod of Rennes

(“Lo, I am made completely chaste by the sin  
of lechery. / [The vice] which makes hard men  
soft takes away my softness.”)

In the Christian milieu of the western European medieval world, poets adopted a wide-range of stances—from the laudatory to the condemnatory—towards same-sex relations.<sup>1</sup> Some monastic writers, however, appear to conflate the two oppositional views, both praising male beauty in highly eroticized terms and damning men who fall to the pleasures of homoerotic desire. How is one to understand this apparent contradiction in which the right hand of the poet seems to praise what the left hand proscribes, in which the writer anathematizes what appear to be his own sexual predilections?<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I examine the paradox of holy men expressing unholy desire in reference to three Franco-Latin writers of the early twelfth century: Marbod of Rennes, Baudri of Bourgueil, and Hildebert of Lavardin. Playing at the boundaries between licit and illicit identities, these men speak taboo desire by creating a safe space for themselves through the alternative performances of sinful and of saved personae. The performance of same-sex desire

<sup>1</sup>A note on vocabulary: I refrain from using terms—including *gay*, *homosexual*, and *queer*—which some scholars consider anachronistic in a study of medieval sexuality. Instead, I employ a lexicon including *same-sex* and *homoerotic*, which I consider to be descriptive of the behaviors in question, though not presumptive of modern ideas about identity. The scope of this essay does not allow an investigation into the question of what possibilities of sexual identity were available to medieval men, as interesting a question as that might be. Rather, I concentrate on describing the poetic record and theorizing what these lyrics tell us about medieval identity, medieval theology, and their relationship to the expression of same-sex desire.

<sup>2</sup>Of course, I cannot prove that the three poets addressed in this essay were men who would today identify themselves as homosexuals; nevertheless, their passionate lyrics and spirited defenses of same-sex relationships hint strongly that they experienced homoerotic desire.

which these men embody serves as yet another sign of the fallen world order; this authorial stance permits the forbidden to be expressed in a manner which paradoxically aligns it with salvation. Thus, the persona—by distancing the author from the desire—becomes the means by which autobiographical reality is simultaneously depicted and rejected. The assumed voice can praise the male form because the sin of desire paradoxically allows both the speaker and the reader to envision themselves as chaste through the redemptive possibilities located in the subsequent rejection of the sin.

Such a performance of same-sex desire embodies the individual's desire and asserts personal objectives and goals antithetical to social conditioning.<sup>3</sup> The twelfth century, which is often discussed in terms of a renaissance, offered poets new opportunities of expression, a new "poetics of authorship," to use Burt Kimmelman's term, in which the "medieval poet strives to establish a ground for his or her own singular identity—even though to do so, to assert one's individuality, will mean having to set aside the authority of the collective, Christian community."<sup>4</sup> My study differs from preceding works by considering the ways in which the articulation of same-sex desire delineates a specific form of medieval individuality, an individuality which contains itself both inside and outside of western medieval Christianity due to the conflict between sexual desire and theological dictates.

#### THE POETS AND THEIR CULTURAL MILIEU

<sup>3</sup>Scholarship on twelfth-century individuality and subjectivity demonstrates the vast array of possibilities for the human subject to negotiate the boundaries between group and self identity. See Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200* (New York 1972); Gerald Bond, *The Loving Subject: Desire, Eloquence, and Power in Romanesque France* (Philadelphia 1995); John F. Benton, "Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality" in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge 1982); Sarah Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge 1990); Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages: New Departures in Poetry, 1000–1150* (Oxford 1970); Walter Ullman, *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore 1966); and Steven Shurtleff, "The Archpoet as Poet, Persona and Self: The Problem of Individuality in the Confession," *Philological Quarterly* 73 (1994) 373–384. For opposing viewpoints, see Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in eadem, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley 1982) 82–109; and Judson Boyce Allen, "Grammar, Poetic Form, and the Lyric Ego" in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lois Ebin (Kalamazoo 1984).

<sup>4</sup>Burt Kimmelman, *The Poetics of Authorship in the Later Middle Ages* (New York 1996) 37.

Marbod of Rennes, Baudri of Bourgueil, and Hildebert of Lavardin were contemporaries of one another who lived much of their lives within a one-hundred mile radius of France as they followed similar religious and vocational pursuits. Marbod (ca. 1035–1123) was a student at Angers. In 1069 he became the chancellor there and then served as bishop of Rennes beginning in 1096. Marbod's writings include the *De ornamentis verborum* (a rhetorical handbook), saints' lives, a lapidary poem, the moral *Decem capitula*, and personal letters in verse. Baudri (1046–1130) served as abbot of Bourgueil from 1089 until his appointment as archbishop of Dol in 1107; his literary corpus consists of 225 surviving poems, including a work of 1367 lines to Adela, countess of Blois. Hildebert was born in 1056 and died in 1134. He acted successively both as archdeacon and as bishop of Mans and subsequently as archbishop of Tours. Hildebert's writings concentrate on Rome, his exile, and the mass; his biblical epigrams were quite well known throughout the Middle Ages. Although to ascertain definitively the extent to which these three men knew one another is difficult, we do know that Baudri was a student of Marbod's. Also, the fact that Baudri dedicated poems both to Hildebert and to Marbod suggests some sort of acquaintance. Certainly, the three poets share a literary theme in their alternate praise and condemnation of same-sex relationships between men, but whether the similarities of same-sex thematics in their poetry are a reflection of their mutual acquaintance or a coincidence derived from a common cultural context is difficult to determine.<sup>5</sup>

Marbod, Baudri, and Hildebert wrote their poetry in a larger cultural context than their same-sex lyrics might imply. The three poets also

<sup>5</sup>Scholarship has demonstrated that twelfth-century clerics and their literature may have been known to troubadours and their audiences. R. N. B. Goddard traces connections between Marbod's lyrics and those of Marcabru and provocatively concludes that "If Marcabru was not simply borrowing—which already implies a clerical education on his part—but actually alluding to these mediaeval Latin poems [of Marbod of Rennes and Eugenius of Toledo], then this would have several interesting possible implications: first, clerks were perhaps also present in troubadour audiences; secondly, certain contemporary noblemen and their wives may have been so educated in the learned language that they could pick up allusions to specific Latin poems; and, thirdly, mediaeval Latin lyrics, often dismissed as 'school exercises' by modern scholars, were probably often widely circulated as works of art in their day." Thus, Marbod's, Baudri's, and Hildebert's lyrics could well have been available to a much wider readership than merely their fellow monks, though it is difficult to determine exactly which verses were known by which audiences. See Goddard, "Eugenius of Toledo and Marbod of Rennes in Marcabru's 'Pois la fuoilla revirola,'" *Medium Aevum* 57 (1988) 27–37, at 34–35.

wrote amatory verse addressed to women, although I do not consider these lyrics in this essay. These poems to and about women appear at the same time as, in Colin Morris's term, a "new cult of love and beauty" emerged, which was directed towards the female sex and which "corresponded to a marked change of social taste and convention."<sup>6</sup> This essay addresses exclusively the same-sex lyrics of Marbod, Baudri, and Hildebert, but I do not wish to eclipse the fact that they were participating both in the transmission of amorous epistolary verse to women and in a time of complex cultural change. As V. A. Kolve has pointed out, however, the allures of sexuality in any of its incarnations were threatening to the sanctity of the monastery: "The erotic choice presented in a monastery was not between what we call heterosexuality and homosexuality, but between maintaining and not maintaining chastity, between spiritual and carnal love."<sup>7</sup> My goal is to explicate the poets' conflicting attitudes toward same-sex desire, but I believe that such an understanding will inevitably enlighten interpretations of their writings addressed to women, as sexual feelings devoted either to males or to females were forbidden in the monastic milieu.

How are we to understand the paradoxical conflation of praising boys in eroticized terms and of damning same-sex practice, of presenting homoerotic desire both as morally acceptable and as morally reprehensible? This intriguing question has not yet been satisfactorily answered by scholarship. Ernst Robert Curtius, in his classic *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, wonders if the sentiments expressed by such poets as Marbod and Baudri are genuine or if they are modeled upon classical sources: "When poets of the twelfth century choose male homosexuality as material, it is often difficult to decide whether we have to do with the imitation of literary models (*imitatio*) or whether actual feeling is speaking."<sup>8</sup> Given the wide range of classical sources with which medieval monks might practice their grammar and rhetoric, however, why would these poets employ the sinful tropes of male same-sex desire if they were not expressing experienced emotions? As Arno Karlen has pointed out in another context, "Homosexu-

<sup>6</sup>Morris, 45.

<sup>7</sup>V. A. Kolve, "Ganymede / *Son of Getron*: Medieval Monasticism and the Drama of Same-Sex Desire," *Speculum* 73 (1998) 1014–1067, 1041.

<sup>8</sup>Ernst Robert Curtius, trans. Willard Trask, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton 1953) 115.

ality is not an infectious disease, and people who do not practice it are unlikely to borrow it from military invaders, like children presented with an irresistible sweet.”<sup>9</sup> Although the classic models of antiquity certainly did not enter the cultural milieu in the manner of military invaders, Karlen’s point that same-sex acts are likely to be lauded and engaged in by those predisposed to such activities is well-taken. The mere presence of classical models offers insufficient explanatory force for these poets’ contradictory stances on same-sex sexuality.

In considering Hildebert’s poems which condemn same-sex affection, John Boswell follows Curtius’s lead and alternately and contradictorily suggests both that Hildebert’s attacks on homoerotic acts, with their many references to classical mythology, “were considered obligatory in declamations against the mores of the times and may have been entirely facetious” and that, in the poems expressing a more accepting view of such desire, “there is still ample reason to suspect his sincerity in such lines.”<sup>10</sup> However, why are we to believe that Hildebert’s polemics against same-sex acts are merely pedantic exercises while his homoerotic poetry represents his true feelings? The reverse of this interpretative paradigm is equally likely to be true, but neither hypothesis explains how the author could hold such binary beliefs simultaneously. Thomas Stehling likewise tries to explain away the contradictions in the poets’ works by hypothesizing that “[c]onflicting attitudes in Marbod’s poems can suggest changes in his attitude as he grew older.”<sup>11</sup> Marbod’s poems, moreover, do not point to such a dramatic shift in opinion as the poet aged; rather, “*Poenitudo lascivi amoris*” (“Repentance for Lecherous Love”) suggests that the two oppositional sentiments towards homosexuality occurred quickly one after the other: “*Strictus eram loris vesani nuper amoris, / Captus eram visco, sed nunc pudet, et resipisco*” (“Recently I was bound by the whips of a mad love, / I was caught in birdlime, but now I’m ashamed, and I return to my senses”).<sup>12</sup> This passage suggests that Marbod held diametrically

<sup>9</sup>Arno Karlen, “The Homosexual Heresy,” *Chaucer Review* 6 (1971) 44–63, at 45.

<sup>10</sup>John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago 1980) 237.

<sup>11</sup>*Medieval Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, trans. Thomas Stehling (New York 1984) xxiv.

<sup>12</sup>The texts of Marbod’s lyrics are found in PL 171.1647–1736. These lines appear in the poem “*Poenitudo lascivi amoris*,” PL 171.1655. Translations are my own. I have striven for accurate translations beyond all other objectives, and thus I have not at-

opposed ideas about same-sex relations in rapid succession to each other rather than after a lengthy aging process.

I find these explanations offered for the poets' contradictory views lacking, and I propose that the authors could have believed that same-sex acts were both good and bad, both salvific and damning, without the cognitive dissonance such antithetical beliefs might imply to the modern mind. Christianity offers a paradigm of religious thought through which these contradictions can be explained. A significant strand of biblical teaching emphasizes that the mighty and powerful shall be lowered and the weak and helpless raised in the kingdom of heaven. This teaching can be found in such biblical quotations as: "Multi autem erunt primi novissimi et novissimi primi" ("Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" [Matt. 19.30, cf. Mark 10.31]) and "Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles" ("He has put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted the humble" [Luke 1.52]).<sup>13</sup> These passages—and many others which express similar

tempted to convey from Latin to English certain poetic devices the authors use which might obscure their meaning. For a more poetic translation of many of the poems in question, see Stehling (n. 11 above).

<sup>13</sup>Biblical quotations are taken from the Vulgate (*Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* [Stuttgart 1969]); biblical translations are taken from the Douay Rheims (Rockford, IL 1971), and I modernize archaic verb forms. Other passages of biblical inversion include: Job 5.11 ("[H]e sets up the humble on high, and comforts with health those that mourn"); Isa. 66.5 ("Hear the word of the Lord, you that tremble at his word: Your brethren that hate you, and cast you out for my name's sake, have said, 'Let the Lord be glorified, and we shall see in you joy: but they shall be confounded'"); Lam. 4.5 ("They that were fed delicately have died in the streets; they that were brought up in scarlet have embraced the dung"); Bar. 5.7 ("For God has appointed to bring down every high mountain, and the everlasting rocks, and to fill up the valleys to make them even with the ground: that Israel may walk diligently to the honor of God"); Dan. 5.19 ("and whom he would, he set up: and whom he would, he brought down"); Matt. 10.39 ("He that finds his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for me, shall find it"); Matt. 23.11–12 ("He that is the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled: and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted"); Luke 1.53 ("He has filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he has sent empty away"); Luke 22.26 ("But you not so: but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is the leader, as he that serves"); 1 Cor. 1.20 ("Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"); and 1 Cor. 9.19 ("For whereas I was free as to all, I made myself the servant of all, that I might gain the more"). This list is intended to be indicative—not exhaustive—of the range of biblical teachings on inversion. As is well known, the primary text on inversion as medieval social practice is Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Bloomington 1984), as well as Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top" in eadem, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford 1975) 124–151.

themes—provide moral compass for such gender-switching medieval phenomena as Bernard of Clairvaux’s assumption of a female persona in union with Christ in his *On the Song of Songs* and Francis of Assisi’s characterization as Lady Poverty; Caroline Walker Bynum provides many similar examples of inversion, most notably medieval descriptions of Jesus as a maternal figure. She interprets this religious strategy as an attempt to ensure salvation for medieval men by degrading themselves as women before Christ:

Indeed male appropriation of the notion of woman as weak sometimes became a claim to superior lowliness. . . . When male writers took femaleness as an image to describe their renunciation of the world, they sometimes said explicitly that women were too weak to be women. They sometimes implied that their own role reversal—that is, their appropriation of or choice for lowliness—was a superior “femaleness” to the femaleness of women, which was not chosen.<sup>14</sup>

Medieval men might claim a greater holiness for themselves by lowering themselves before Christ through the appropriation of female characteristics; since they often served in stations of power and authority, they could position themselves as weak and powerless in order to ensure their place in heaven.

Marbod, Baudri, and Hildebert appear to be operating under a similar understanding of Christian thought in their contradictory attitudes towards same-sex desire. These poets employ such inversionary tropes of Christian teaching in their performance of personae which express same-sex desire. Certainly, as Gerald Bond observes, poets often assume a persona to escape suspicion while speaking about questionable topics:

First-person discourse becomes self-impersonation only when the referent for the word “I” is seen to vacillate between one who makes the text and one who speaks the text—and their respective intentions. . . . [Self-impersonation] seems to have been particularly handy to explain/excuse aberrant texts so that topic and voice could avoid censure.<sup>15</sup>

However, although Marbod, Baudri, and Hildebert employ the voice of a persona, I believe that their lyrics could well have been received in a

<sup>14</sup>Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York 1991) 166.

<sup>15</sup>Bond (n. 3 above) 9.



theologically sanctioned interpretation. The poets assume personae which speak their desire—a desire inverted in terms of Christian morality—and infuse these poems with the very Christian morality with which same-sex desire would appear to be incongruous. Basing their poetry both in the security of a fictive persona and within biblical teachings stressing inversions, the poets not only speak their illicit desires but find redemptive possibilities through them. Lauding male beauty and same-sex sexuality and drawing attention to the inverted nature of the human world, the poets imbue their sinful lyrics with a salvific poetics.

MARBOD OF RENNES: THE REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS OF THE  
BEAUTIFUL MALE BODY

Marbod of Rennes depicts same-sex desire in terms of enthusiastic acceptance and approval in some poems but with disgust and loathing in others, and his lyrics often highlight that he is writing to and among a community of like-minded men.<sup>16</sup> In his poetry, Marbod often concentrates on the sexual favors granted by boys to their lovers, and he presents these relationships openly and without any embarrassment. In “Ad amicum absentem” (“To an Absent Friend”), the narrator admonishes a friend to hasten home so that his boy will not be tempted to leave him for another:

Perdes in hac villa plusquam lucraris in illa:  
Namque quid tanti, quanti puer aequus amanti?  
Qui nunc est aequus, fiat mora, fiet iniquus.  
Blanditiis siquidem tentatur pluribus idem;  
Et qui tentatur, metus est ne decipiatur.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>The references to a community of readers suggest a common readership of these epistles in which sexual desire could be expressed in an acceptable fashion. Such a readership appears congruous to Joan Ferrante’s description of the concurrent writing communities—often addressing sexual topics—between men and women: “In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, there seems to have been a whole circle of poets, men and women, who played an elaborate literary game, exchanging rhetorical elegance and literary flirtation, such desire as may have been felt sublimated through the poetry.” Ferrante includes Hildebert and Marbod in her descriptions of this literary play; the two poets appear to have engaged in the composition of verse for both male/female and exclusively male audiences. See Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex* (Bloomington 1997) 31.

<sup>17</sup>“Ad amicum absentem” appears in PL 171.1717.

(You are losing more in this town than you are getting in that one. / For what is as precious as a boy who is fair with his lover? / Now he is even-tempered [but if] a delay is made, he will be made wicked. / Indeed, he is assailed with many flatteries, / And [if] he can be tempted, there is a fear that he could be beguiled.)

As the speaker offers advice to his friend, the poem addresses same-sex desire in a matter-of-fact tone. No hint of censure of same-sex relationships appears; the only fear expressed is that same-sex desire will be frustrated rather than realized. The poem also hints that there are a wide range of sexual partners for the boy through its reference to the “blanditiis . . . pluribus” (“many enticements”). This passage indicates that same-sex desire and activity runs rampant throughout the boy’s community.

Marbod’s lyrics of same-sex love concentrate sexual attention on boys rather than men. In the poems, boys are depicted as the object of sexual attraction, but their prized status is threatened by the approach of age and maturity which will render them bereft of their beauty. Marbod thus admonishes the object of his affection in “*Satyra in amatorem puelli sub assumpta persona*” (“A Satire on the Lover of a Boy in an Assumed Persona”) to take advantage of sexual opportunities now because they will disappear when age takes its toll upon his fair flesh:

Haec caro tam levis, tam lactea, tam sine naevis,  
 Tam bona, tam bella, tam lubrica, tamque tenella.  
 Tempus adhuc veniet, cum turpis et hispida fiet:  
 Cum fiet vilis caro chara caro puerilis.  
 Ergo dum flores, maturos indue mores.  
 Dum potes et peteris, cupido dare ne pigriteris.<sup>18</sup>

(This flesh is so smooth, so milky, without moles, / So good, so pretty, so smooth, and so tender. / But the time will come when it will become base and coarse, / When [this] dear flesh, [this] boyish flesh will become vile. / Therefore, while you flourish, take up mature customs. / While you are able and you are sought, do not be slow to give [yourself] to a lover.)

The poem stresses the necessity of seizing earthly and sensual—rather than heavenly and spiritual—delights. As time will deprive the boy of

<sup>18</sup>Marbod, PL 171.1717–1718. The final line of this passage does not appear in the PL; Jakob Werner includes it in his edition of the poem in *Beiträge zur Kunde der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Hildesheim 1979) 6.

his sexual attractiveness, he should enjoy these pleasures when they are so readily available. This poetic trope of *carpe diem* in youth appears frequently in pre-medieval homoerotic verse; as Norman Roth observes, “The theme of the adolescent whose approaching adulthood, signaled by the appearance of down on the cheek, brought an end to his desirability as an object of love was common in Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew poetry.”<sup>19</sup>

In “Satyra in amatorem puelli sub assumpta persona,” Marbod describes the boy’s body in a highly sensualized and detailed manner. The words paint a vision of mortal beauty as the speaker’s descriptions move from the top of the boy’s head to his beautiful body below, ending with the poet’s account of what anyone would want to do with such a boy with such a body:

Undabant illi per eburnea colla capilli,  
Candida frons ut nix, et lumina nigra velut pix,  
Implumesque genae grata dulcedine plenae,  
Cum in candoris vernabant luce ruboris.  
Nasus erat justus, labra flammea, densque venustus.  
Effigies menti modulo formata decenti.  
Qui corpus quaeret quod tectum veste lateret,  
Tale coaptet ei quod conveniat faciei.<sup>20</sup>

(Over [his] ivory neck flowed his hair, / [His] forehead [was] white as snow, and [his] eyes black as pitch; / His hairless cheeks full of pleasing sweetness / When they bloomed in the light of the radiance of red. / His nose was straight, lips fiery, and teeth lovely, / The shape of [his] chin formed from a suitable model. / Anyone seeking the body which was hidden, covered by [his] clothes / Would find it comparable to that face it matches.)

This passage’s luminous description of the boy’s body is reminiscent of the imagery found in the Song of Songs’ catalogue of the beloved’s features in which the colors of ivory, red, and black highlight his beauty; the biblical vision of unity between heterosexual lovers, which is commonly allegorized into the relationship between Christ and his church in the medieval period, is here transformed into a paean to same-

<sup>19</sup>Norman Roth, “‘Deal Gently with the Young Man’: Love of Boys in Medieval Hebrew Poetry of Spain,” *Speculum* 57 (1982) 20–51, at 39.

<sup>20</sup>Marbod, PL 171.1717–1718.

sex desire.<sup>21</sup> Also, the narrator's personal involvement with the boy is evident through the use of first-person narration; the lyric voice delineates his personal fascination with the male form. And although the speaker revels in his own appreciation of the boy's body, his declaration that others would find the boy equally attractive again suggests a community of men who would find such a boy sexually desirable.

Marbod's amatory lyrics reveal that his attentions have been directed to both sexes. In his "Dissuasio amoris veneri" ("Argument Against the Love of Venus"), the lyric speaker describes a love triangle in which he is pursued by a girl who is loved by the boy whom he loves. The girl's seductive maneuvers have no effect on the speaker, although he acknowledges that they may have succeeded in the past:

Hanc puer insignis, cuius decor est meus ignis,  
 Diligit hanc, captat, huic se placiturus adaptat;  
 Quae, puero spreto, me vult, mihi mandat: Aveto:  
 Et mihi blanditur, quia respuo, pene moritur.  
 Si fecisset idem mihi turpis femina pridem,  
 Ad Venerem motus fierem lascivia totus;  
 Pectore nunc duro, nec verba, nec oscula curo.<sup>22</sup>

(This distinguished boy whose beauty is my fire, / Loves her, desires her, changes himself to please her; / She, disdaining the boy, wants me and commands me [to] desire [her]. / She coaxes me, [but] because I scorn [her], she almost dies. / Once if a base woman had done the same thing to me, / I would have been wholly lascivious, moved to Venus; / Now with a hard heart, I care neither for [her] words nor [her] kisses.)

Marbod's words highlight the fluidity of his sexual desires as he admits that both males and females have been the objects of his affections. Repudiating Venus in this lyric, Marbod acknowledges the love which he bears the boy.

In striking contrast to these works stands Marbod's "Dissuasio concubitus in uno tantum sexu" ("An Argument Against Copulation [Between People of] Only One Sex"); in this poem, the boy's body, which was the source of such beauty in "Satyra in amatorem puelli sub assumpta persona," has become the locus of damnation:

<sup>21</sup>For analysis of the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages, see Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca 1990); and E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia 1990).

<sup>22</sup>Marbod, PL 171.1655.

Frons, oculi, nares, cervix, locus auricularis,  
Os, guttur, mammae fiunt ibi pabula flammae,  
Dorsa, latus, venter flagrant indeficienter,  
Nec frigent coxae, nec mentula conscia noxae.  
O quantum est tristis qui traditur ignibus istis! . . .

Ergo concubitus, quem sexus perficit unus,  
Culpa minor nulla punitur non minus ulla.<sup>23</sup>

(Forehead, eyes, nostrils, neck, the place of the ear, / Mouth, throat, and breasts become nourishment of the flame. / Back, sides, belly burn continuously; / Nor do the thighs or guilty dick remain cool. / O how sad the man who is given to these fires! / . . . / Thus copulation which one sex performs, / A crime less serious than none, is punished not less than any other.)

In this lyric the male body is transformed from its sublimity in “Satyra in amorem puelli sub assumpta persona” to the fulsome and loathsome incarnation of eternal suffering; the boy is now the foul source of corruption, decay, and damnation. Transforming the poetic device of tracing the beloved’s body from head to toe in a catalogue of beauty, here Marbod employs the same technique to underscore the corruptive threats inherent in homoerotic practices. More than a damnation of physical beauty, the poem explicitly demarcates the chthonic end awaiting one who falls carnally to the pleasures offered from this boy with such a beautiful body.

#### BAUDRI OF BOURGUEIL: AMATORY EPISTLES OF SAME-SEX DESIRE

Baudri of Bourgueil’s poetry evinces a similar thematic dichotomy in his considerations of same-sex desire. In “Ad juvenem nimis elatum” (“To a Youth Too Proud”), the narrative voice portrays the rapturous effects of the boy’s body upon him and his own tactile responses to it. No traces of remonstrance mar the encomium to same-sex desire:

Forma placet, quia forma decet, quia forma venusta est:  
Mala tenella placet, flavum caput osque modestum . . .  
His bene respondet caro lactea, pectus eburnum.  
Alludit manibus niveo de corpore tactus.  
Haec sunt quae debent aliisque mihi placere,  
Praesertim cum te nec agat lasciva juvenus  
Nec reprobet divam membrorum composituram.  
Haec mihi cuncta placent, haec et mihi singula mando.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>This poem appears in PL 171.1669; and Werner (n. 18 above) 5 and 89. The final two lines I quote do not appear in the PL, but they are included in Werner’s edition.

<sup>24</sup>The texts of Baudri’s lyrics are found in *Les Oeuvres poétiques de Baudri de Bourgueil*, ed. Phyllis Abrahams (Paris 1926). “Ad juvenem nimis elatum” appears on pp. 23–26.

([Your] appearance is pleasing because it is a proper appearance, because it is a beautiful appearance; / [Your] tender cheek is pleasing, [as are your] golden head and modest mouth. / . . . / Your milky flesh and ivory chest agree with these features; / The touch of your snow-white body plays with my hands. / These are the things which ought to please others and me, / Especially since licentious youth does not control you / Or condemn the divine composition of your limbs. / All these are pleasing to me: I commend each one to myself.)

The lyric voice of the speaker claims the pleasures of the boy's body for himself. The passion for the male body, expressed in terms of fleshly fascination rather than spiritual salvation, is a key theme to Baudri's poetry, and, as Gerald Bond notes, "one cannot escape the conclusion that Baudri intentionally evoked homosexual relationships in many of his poems by discussing *amor* between males in a context devoid of explicit Christian values."<sup>25</sup> Focusing on fleshly and earthly delights, Baudri concentrates on tactile pleasures rather than fraternal chastity. Indeed, fraternal chastity appears outside of Baudri's world view, as he underscores the fact that the boy's body should not only please himself, but others as well.

In his amatory verse, Baudri often stresses that his lyrics are epistolary, and these poems celebrate the literary erotics of reading and writing between men.<sup>26</sup> In "Ad amicum cui cartam mittebat" ("To a Friend to Whom He Sent a Letter"), the lyric speaker declares his desire to be the epistle which carries his words of love so that his friend will touch him:

O utinam legatus ego meus iste fuissem,  
 Vel quam palparet cartula vestra manus . . .  
 Tunc explorarem vultumque animumque legentis,  
 Si tamen et possem me cohibere diu.  
 Caetera propitiis diis fortunaequae daremus  
 Nam Deus ad veniam promptior est homine.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Bond (n. 3 above) 50.

<sup>26</sup>For analysis of Baudri's amorous epistolary verse to women, see Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1984) 84–90; and Ferrante (n. 16 above) 31–35. Although my argument focuses on Baudri's same-sex lyrics, I believe that the thesis of my essay—that these poets find redemptive possibilities through the assumption of a sinful persona which allows them to speak taboo desire—would equally apply to Baudri's suggestive letters to women.

<sup>27</sup>Abrahams (n. 24 above) 163.

(O, would that I had been my own legate, / Or that I had been the card  
which your hand touched / . . . / Then I would have searched [your] face  
and spirit as you read, / If still I was able to restrain myself for a while. /  
We would give other things to favorable gods and to fortune / For God is  
more ready to pardon than man.)

The lover imagines the fulfillment of seeing the man's face as the friend touches and reads the letter. Pondering deeper satisfactions, the lyric voice trusts himself to God's pardon, a pardon more readily available than that from his fellow man. Baudri envisions a god willing and ready to forgive humanity's sinfulness, and the sins of same-sex desire thus lose their damning force.

Although "Ad amicum cui cartam mittebat" depicts a wariness about possible censure from others, Baudri hints at an audience sympathetic to such desire in other lyrics, and his letters appear to be at least partially available to a reading public. For example, in "Ad juvenem nimis elatum" ("To a Youth Too Proud"), the speaker beseeches the letter's readers—who cannot only be the eponymous "juvenem elatum"—to determine if the boy deserves the criticism which he levels:

En dixi quicquid mihi displicet aut placet in te.  
*Censeat en lector an sit mea justa querela,*  
Justa querela quidem, vere querimonia justa,  
Tuque satisfacies si te correxeris ipse.<sup>28</sup> (emphasis added)

(O, I have told [you] whatever displeases or pleases me in you. / O, let  
the reader determine if my lament is just, / Indeed, [it is] a just lament, a  
truly just complaint, / And you will satisfy [me] if you correct yourself.)

The letter is written both to the beloved boy and to other readers who may determine the appropriateness of his actions. These lines suggest a readership beyond the addressee of the letter, a readership which would appreciate such tactics of amatory pursuit involving literature, letters, and male same-sex desire.

Baudri's poetry is more concerned with celebrating same-sex desire between men than condemning it, but he underscores the ease with which boys seduce men in his "Ad Vitalem" ("To Vitalis") in a somewhat weary tone. Here the descriptions of the boy emphasize how he conquers the will of older men. The body is alternately depicted as the

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. 25.



incarnation of an innocence which inspires Baudri's passion and a willfulness which leads him to sin:

Quem mihi complexum viscera nostra foveat.  
Visceribus nostris prae cunctis solus inhaesit . . .  
Si vero quaeris quid in hoc speciale notatur . . .  
Callidus ut serpens, simplex ut rauca columba  
Aetatem superat propter utrumque suam.<sup>29</sup>

(This one, embraced by me, our flesh embraces. / Before all others, he alone has stayed in our inmost hearts. / . . . / But if you seek what excellence is known in him / . . . / He is as cunning as a snake, simple as a cooing dove, / And with both these qualities he conquers age.)

The description of the boy both as snake and as dove recalls Jesus's command to his followers that they should follow the example of both animals in spreading his gospel. In Matthew 10.16, Jesus declares, "Estote ergo prudentes sicut serpentes et simplices sicut columbae" ("Therefore be wise as serpents and simple as doves"). Jesus employs the snake as a symbol of wisdom, and the dove has a three-fold salvific signification: it suggests the end of God's punishment of humankind after Noah's flood; it is found within the amorous imagery of the Song of Songs; and it represents the Holy Spirit. In Baudri's lyric the conflation of snake and dove conquers any resistance he might offer the beautiful boy, and the fact that his speaker would like to resist the boy indicates a change of attitude toward same-sex desire. Thus, depending upon which of Baudri's poems one reads, contrasting views of same-sex desire emerge, as the image of the conquered man certainly does not carry the same sense of eagerness as many of Baudri's other homoerotic epistles.

HILDEBERT OF LAVARDIN: THE DELIGHTS OF THE SAME-SEX PAST  
AND THE DANGERS OF THE HOMOEROTIC PRESENT

As V. A. Kolve notes, "one of the ways in which it was possible to talk freely of the love between men and boys in the world of the medieval monastery, abbey, or cathedral was in the language of mythology."<sup>30</sup> Although Hildebert of Lavardin appears not to be greatly concerned with defending same-sex practices in the present, his "Cum peteret pu-

<sup>29</sup>Ibid. 333.

<sup>30</sup>Kolve (n. 7 above) 1048.

erum” (“When he sought the boy”) locates same-sex desire in the classical past and then depicts an understanding and compassionate view of such relationships:

Cum peteret puerum Saturnius, Iphis Iantha  
 Coetus ait superum: “scelus est.” Illud voco culpam.  
 Quo prohibente nefas, ludum ridente virorum,  
 Altera fit juvenis, fit femina neuter eorum.  
 Si scelus esset idem, sententia coelicolarum  
 Alterutrum transformaret, neutramve duarum.<sup>31</sup>

(When Saturn’s son sought a boy and when Iphis [sought] Ianthe, / The council of gods said, “It is a crime.” I call that wrong. / Prohibiting a treachery in one, laughing at the game of men [in the other]: / One [of the girls] is made a young man; neither of the men is made a woman. / If the crime were the same, the opinion of the heaven-dwellers / Should have transformed one or the other [man], or neither of the two [women].)

Hildebert is less concerned with the same-sex acts themselves than with the arbitrary judgments of the gods: neither Jove’s relationship with Ganymede nor Iphis’s relationship with Ianthe is depicted as inherently sinful in this poem. The problem, according to Hildebert, is that the gods, by preventing same-sex relationships between women while allowing such liaisons between men, are not consistent in their decisions. If the same acts do not merit the same reactions from divine authority, then that authority is arbitrary rather than just. No damning judgment is rendered on the poem’s same-sex erotics.

Another of Hildebert’s lyrics which expresses an accepting attitude toward same-sex desire is set in the mythology of the classical past as well.<sup>32</sup> Similar to “Cum peteret puerum,” his “Phoebus de interitu Hya-

<sup>31</sup>The texts of Hildebert’s lyrics are found in *Les Mélanges poétiques d’Hildebert de Lavardin*, ed. Barthélemy Hauréau (Paris 1882). “Cum peteret puerum” appears on p. 177.

<sup>32</sup>Stehling sees “an attempt to place homosexual love in a respectable context” in the references to classical literature in medieval homoerotic poetry. Certainly, I agree with his assessment, but I think that the nexus between the classical past and the author’s present needs to be probed further. Gerhart B. Ladner sees in the writings of Marbod, Baudri, Hildebert, and their contemporaries “a greatly increased receptivity of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries toward the ancients in many diverse fields of human endeavor”; he proceeds to argue that in this time period “the *antiqui*, whether long known or recently rediscovered, were often thought of as still alive rather than as re-born.” Thus, although Hildebert’s classically influenced homoerotic poems are set in the past, their use of such ancient models would not in itself be sufficient evidence to dis-

cinthi” (“Phoebus on the death of Hyacinth”) contains its depiction of same-sex love within Greek mythology. The poem describes Phoebus’s tragic despair at the death of his beloved Hyacinth:

Et deus et medicus et amans, rescindere frustra  
Tentans Aebalidae funera, Phoebus ait:  
“Parcite, di, puero, si non moriatur uterque;  
Malo sequi puerum quam superesse deum.  
Si prohibetis et hoc, sit pars utriusque superstes,  
Par cadit, ignoscam sic minor esse deo.  
Quisque feret laetus propriae dispendia partis,  
Dum pars ad manes, pars eat ad superos.”<sup>33</sup>

(God and doctor and lover, in vain trying to take back / The funeral of Oebalus’s son, Phoebus says: / “Gods, spare the boy. If [we] both won’t die, / I prefer to follow the boy than to survive as a god. / And if you prohibit this, may a part of each [of us] survive, / A part fall. Thus, I would pardon that I was less than a god. / Each [of us] would happily bear the cost of a near part, / While a part [of us] went to the shadows, a part [of us] would go to the heavens.”)

Offering to share both suffering and pleasure, the underworld and the heavens, Phoebus pleads for his love at any cost. Hildebert’s depiction of the doomed love stresses with eloquence and compassion the emotional pain experienced when male lovers are separated.

Hildebert waxes eloquently on same-sex love in a mythological past, but he does not appear to condone such behaviors among his contemporaries. His “De malitia saeculi” (“Of the Wickedness of the Age”) stands in direct contrast both to the accepting tone of “Cum peteret puerum” and to the melancholic mourning of “Phoebus de interitu Hyacinthi.” This poem stresses the infernal punishment which awaits those who practice homoerotic acts:

Omnibus incestis super est sodomitica pestis,  
Dantque mares maribus debita conjugibus.  
Innumeras aedes colit innumerus Ganymedes,  
Hocque, quod ipsa solet sumere, Juno dolet.  
Hoc sordent vitio puer et vir cum sene laeno,

tance the author from a cultural influence still very much alive. See Stehling, “To Love a Medieval Boy,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 8 (1983) 151–170, at 167; and Ladner, “Terms and Ideas of Renewals” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge 1982) 9.

<sup>33</sup>Hauréau (n. 31 above) 192.

Nullaque conditio cessat ab hoc vitio.  
 Quisquis ad hunc morem naturae vertis honorem  
 Et Venerem licitam negligis ob vetitam,  
 Nonne recordaris quod per Sodomam docearis  
 Hoc scelus ut caveas, sulphure ne pereas?<sup>34</sup>  
 (The sodomitical pestilence is above all others lewdnesses. / Men give  
 what is owed to their wives to men. / Innumerable Ganymedes tend in-  
 numerable hearths, / And Juno laments those things which she was ac-  
 customed to manage. / Boy and man with old man [and] panderer pollute  
 [themselves] with this sin, / And no creation refrains from this sin. / You  
 who turn the honor of nature to this custom / And neglect licit love for  
 forbidden, / Do you not remember what you were taught through Sodom,  
 / That you should beware lest you perish in sulfur-fire?)

In no uncertain terms, Hildebert presents same-sex activity as a sin which will inexorably lead to the damnation of its practitioners: the fires of Hell await the sinners of Sodom, and the only escape from such a punishment is to repent immediately for such sins. Furthermore, Hildebert stresses that the sin of homoerotic activity is widespread and has many practitioners; as such, it is a sign of the world's sinful nature.

#### SALVATION THROUGH SAME-SEX SINFULNESS

Marbod's, Baudri's, and Hildebert's poetic excursions on same-sex desire and the paradoxical viewpoints expressed therein can be seen as attempts to establish a pathway to God's forgiveness and salvation when interpreted in the light of biblical teachings of reversal and inversion. The poets underscore the topsy-turvy nature of same-sex desire through their depictions of an inverted world order; the poems which condemn same-sex relationships describe a world turned upside-down, inverted in regard to right and wrong. In his "De malitia saeculi," Hildebert bemoans the moral quagmire which surrounds him in which the public and the private, the proper and the improper, the religious and the irreligious have changed roles:

Omne bonum marcetfoedumque pudor nihil arcet;  
 Quod decet hoc fugitur, quod pudet hoc editur;  
 Subdola laudatur mens, simplex stulta putatur,  
 Et sentit pietas quid queat impietas.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Ibid. 68–69.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. 68–69.

(All good [things] wither; shame prevents nothing detestable. / That which is proper has fled; that which shames is proclaimed. / The crafty mind is praised, the simple is thought foolish, / And piety senses what impiety can do.)

Hildebert describes a world washed over with reversals in which nothing receives its proper due. The poem then ponders the future if such a topsy-turvy state continues and asks God either to punish the wicked or to restore the lost order of the universe. With their eschatological focus, biblical passages of inversion highlight the sinful nature of the world; this sinfulness is readily delineated in terms of an inverted world order in which same-sex desire signifies a fallen state both of individuals and of the wider Christian community.

In the same poem, Hildebert characterizes the prevalence of homoeroticism as a sign of the world's inversion and beseeches God to overturn the inversions, to correct the wrongful state of his earthly society:

Da, qui cuncta regis, per quem stat sanctio legis,  
Cui placet ille jocussit sibi poena focus;  
Aut homini parcens, sed quod tibi displicet arcens,  
Evacuata suis instrue corda tuis,  
Et, vice mutata, caro jam nimium dominata  
Mentis ad imperium, det sibi servitium!<sup>36</sup>

(You who rule all things and through Whom the rule of law stands firm, / Give to him whom this sport pleases that [his] hearth may be a punishment to him. / Or, sparing the man but preventing what displeases You, / Empty these hearts of their own [affairs] and fill [them] with Yours. / Turn things around again, and let flesh, which has excessively dominated, / Give service to the command of the mind.)

Hildebert constructs same-sex relations as the dominance of the earthly flesh over the heavenly spirit. Same-sex desire is the sexual incarnation of the fallen world, and it can only be conquered by the flesh being ruled by the spirit. Hildebert's prayer that the world be turned around again suggests his belief that the inverted world is the home of same-sex desire and that this sin would disappear if God's salvific force appeared. Also, Hildebert imagines this cleansing in terms of ironic reversals: the man who feels homoerotic desire is to be burned not with

<sup>36</sup>Ibid. 68–69.

the sulfurous fires of Sodom, but with the heat of his own hearth. The site of his homely pleasures becomes the rack of his eternal torments.

Baudri's epicediums for deceased youths mirror the reasoning which Hildebert expresses in his poetry. His prayers for God's forgiveness of dead boys detail a similar understanding of Christian thought in which the fallen earthly world is the scene of a sin that ensnares men in illicit sexual liaisons. Baudri, however, beseeches God to grant indulgence to such a young man in "Super Alexandrum Turonensem" ("Upon Alexander of Tours") specifically because of the sin:

Canonicus Turonensis erat, puer indolis altae.  
Flos olim roseus, nunc cinis est luteus.  
Sique sibi maculas species attraxit et aetas,  
Tu tamen indulge rex utriusque dator.<sup>37</sup>

(He was a canon of Tours, a boy of great talent. / Once a rosy flower, now he is ash and clay. / If his appearance and age attracted stains to him, / Nevertheless forgive [him], You, King, Bestower of both.)

According to Baudri, a sin in the inverted physical world should not prohibit the boy's spiritual salvation; thus, the stains of sin are the means by which the poet establishes his prayer for mercy. And as God's gifts of beauty and youth to the boy are the source of his moral corruption, Baudri exhorts his Lord to forgive sins founded upon ephemeral and worldly traits, traits which God Himself gave the boy. The boy's sins are indicative of a fallen world, but not of a lost soul.

Another of Baudri's prayers for Alexander—"Item de eodem" ("For the Same Boy")—employs similar themes in its depiction of Alexander's fall into sin but worthiness of salvation:

Contuleritque licet quaecumque decora putantur,  
Mortuus attamen est; ecce cinis jacet hic.  
Supra quindenos vix quattuor attigit annos,  
Illi cum pariter omnia mors rapuit.  
En foetet vilis speciosae gloria carnis  
At Deus indulge quod male promeruit.<sup>38</sup>

(And though [Nature] brought [him] whatever is deemed beautiful, / Nevertheless he is dead; behold, here lie [his] ashes. / He had scarcely

<sup>37</sup>Abrahams (n. 24 above) 89.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid. 90.

reached over nineteen years / When death snatched all things at once  
from him. / Lo, the vile glory of [his] attractive flesh stinks, / But God,  
forgive what he badly earned.)

Again, Baudri concentrates on the necessity of God's forgiveness for sins: the rotting flesh signifies the earthly sins Alexander committed as he fell to corruptive practices on earth, but the focus on the earthly gives way to the hope for God's mercy in the closing lines of the poem. Although Alexander's transgressions may merit his punishment, Baudri's plea for salvation attempts to free the sinner from eternal punishment for sins committed in an inverted world. The beautiful flesh begins to stink, both marking its corruption and earthliness and stressing the transformation of the fair into the foul.

Similarly, Marbod describes an inverted world in his poems which express disapprobation of acts of same-sex love. "Dissuasio amoris Veneris" paints a picture of an inverted world order in which human appetites have lost their accustomed domains:

Versa natura mutantur pristina jura,  
Si cibus impastum facit, et lascivia castum,  
Si metus audacem, si mens secura fugacem.<sup>39</sup>

(Nature is reversed, and ancient laws changed / If food makes [man]  
hungry and lechery [makes him] chaste, / If fear [makes him] brave, if a  
steadfast mind [makes him] ready to flee.)

In this poem, human desires and conditions are reversed with their ordered goals; the bodily appetites have lost their natural ends. These thematics of the inverted world are also found in Marbod's "Poenitudo lascivi amoris" ("Repentance for Lecherous Love") in which the narrator laments his loves of both sexes and describes himself as a victim to a world in which all order has been overturned:

O bone Salvator! quam decipit omnis amator!  
Turpia pulchra putat, pro nigris candida mutat.  
Coeni fetorem pigmenti credit odorem;  
Dulcia sicut mel testatur amara velut fel;  
Dum comedit lapidem, se pane frui putat idem,  
Et serpentinum virus potat quasi vinum. . . .  
Sicut odor floris sic tunc odor illius oris

<sup>39</sup>PL 171.1655.

Esse videbatur, qui nunc secus esse probatur,  
 Ut rosa candorem miscens simul atque ruborem,  
 Sic mihi tunc vultus qui nunc pallore sepultus;  
 Non quia mutatus fit odor, vel vultus amatus,  
 Sed mutatus ego, quondam mihi chara relego.<sup>40</sup>

(O good Savior! How all lovers are deceived! / He considers the detestable beautiful and changes white for black, / He believes the stink of filth to be the aroma of spice; / He swears that things sweet as honey are as bitter as bile. / When he eats a stone he thinks he enjoys bread / And he drinks the venom of serpents as if [it were] wine. / . . . / Then the smell of his mouth [was] like the smell of a flower, / He appeared to be [one way], who now is proved to be otherwise. / A rose mixing at once white and red, / So then [his] face [was] to me, which now has the pallor of death. / It is not because the odor has changed, or the beloved face [has changed]; / But I have been changed; I reread things formerly dear to me.)

Marbod describes himself as awakening to the sinfulness of the world's inversion; whereas he previously delighted in his sinful relationships with both sexes, he now knows that all such couplings are immoral. In a world in which nothing is what it appears to be, where everything is both itself and its complete opposite, how is a lover to know on whom he should focus his desires?

Significantly, Marbod distances himself from same-sex practices. The following lines of "Poenitudo lascivi amoris" condemn same-sex desire in stronger terms than they condemn male-female relationships:

Displicet amplexus utriusque quidem mihi sexus,  
 Sed plus me laedit qui plus a jure recedit.  
 Omnia sunt foris vitae delicta prioris.<sup>41</sup>

(Indeed the embrace of both sexes displeases me, / But he harms me more, he who departs more from the law. / All delights of my former life are cast out!)

Sex either with a woman or with a man is an iniquitous act, but Marbod proclaims that same-sex desire is his greater transgression against God's will and that, to ensure his salvation, all such sexual practices

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. 1655–1656.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid. 1656.



will be cast aside. The rejection of homoerotic affection is essential for a rejection of the inverted world in its entirety.

The redemptive power of Christianity is found when, in his repudiation of sexuality, Marbod is able to cast himself in a holier light: through his former sinfulness, he envisions himself as closer to his own salvation. In "Dissuasio amoris Venerei" ("An Argument Against Sexual Love"), the poet finds salvific power through his sexual experiences: "Luxuria vitio castissimus en ego fio, / Quod duros mollit, hoc mollitiem mihi tollit" ("Lo, I am made completely chaste by the sin of lechery. / [The vice] which makes hard men soft takes away my softness").<sup>42</sup> Thus, the excessive sexuality of Marbod's past is resignified to suggest his redemption. In the inverted world order, the degradations inflicted upon himself through his sex acts are the means by which Marbod may visualize himself as a better, stronger Christian, one who is completely chaste before God. The sinful joys of homoeroticism are resignified into the basis of a claim to holiness in this inverted world; the sin itself is resignified into the seed of salvation.

SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE: IDENTITY AND PERSONAE  
IN THE EXPRESSION OF SAME-SEX DESIRE

The poets' constructions of their sexual proclivities as salvific due to the very fact of their sinfulness may appear odd, yet other concurrent practices founded upon Christian inversion show the saliency of the concept to the medieval mind. Bernard of Clairvaux's assumption of a female persona so that he may view himself as the Bride of Christ may be equally odd to the modern mind, but for him the adoption of feminine characteristics was a powerful method of expressing his holiness and devotion to Christ. One must note, however, a significant difference between Bernard's assumption of female traits and Marbod's, Baudri's, and Hildebert's relationship to same-sex desire: Bernard was not a woman, whereas Marbod, Baudri, and Hildebert may or may not have been those whom we recognize today as homosexuals. The debates over homosexual identity in the medieval period are vast and complex, and to delve deeply into them is beyond the scope of this article. However, a brief overview of the two most prominent positions in the on-going dialogue is in order: one position, supported by Boswell, believes that

<sup>42</sup>Ibid. 1655.

homosexuality is an innate and essential characteristic of human life and that gay people have always been a part of human society; the other approach, vigorously represented by David Halperin, argues that all sexualities are cultural constructions and that no intrinsic homosexuality exists.<sup>43</sup> I believe that the answer may be found somewhere between these two viewpoints: certainly cultures do construct sexualities, but these constructions could well take place upon biological realities. For example, obese people have been culturally constructed as beautiful (e.g., in the paintings of Rubens in the seventeenth century) and as unattractive (e.g., the current emphasis on hyper-emaciated fashion models). Regardless of how they are viewed, larger people have existed in the past and continue to exist in the present. Furthermore, scientific research has pointed towards a genetic predisposition toward fatness; thus, the cultural construction of obese people may be founded upon an innate fact of their biological make-up.<sup>44</sup> I believe the same could well be true for the people we recognize as homosexuals today: various cultures have constructed both homosexual people and societies' reactions to homosexuality in myriad ways, but the culture is responding to a core truth of these individuals' identity which leads to homosexual activities. The point of this digression is to illustrate that Marbod's, Baudri's, and Hildebert's paradoxical descriptions of same-sex desire may well have been attempts to make sense of the conflict between their bodily desires and prevailing theological mores. As Bernard constructed himself as a woman to find himself with Christ, these men could likewise find redemptive power in same-sex relations, whether real or imagined, by envisioning themselves as engaged in sinful behavior which would lead them closer to Christ through their subsequent rejection of the desire. By positioning themselves as sympathetic to homoerotic longings and then rejecting such thoughts of desire, they attain a higher state of holiness than before. Scholarship will never know for certain whether Marbod, Baudri, and Hildebert had sex with other men; regardless of whether they did or did not, such paradoxical identification with and rejection of same-sex desire allows

<sup>43</sup>See David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York 1990).

<sup>44</sup>For an analysis of the biological and genetic roots of obesity accessible to the non-specialist, see W. Wayt Gibbs, "Gaining on Fat," *Scientific American* 275.2 (1996) 88–94.

them to see themselves as saved due to their final rejection of real or imagined homoerotic sex acts.

In the final section of this essay, I would like to return to the title of Marbod's "Satyra in amatorem puelli sub assumpta persona." The narrative voice which waxes so eloquently about male beauty is an assumed one, and this use of a persona suggests that Marbod was consciously adopting an authorial position which frees himself of contamination from the sins so amorously described. Again, I would like to stress that we cannot know whether or not Marbod experienced same-sex desires, but that he specifically assumes a persona other than his own voice and that he clearly directs the reader's attention to this persona through the poem's title signifies that he was fully aware of the contradictions of a Christian monastic lauding beautiful boys. The poetics of a persona serve to occlude the individual behind the mask: as Steven Shurtleff notes in regard to the contemporaneous Archpoet's Confession, "This identification of a type with a persona is highly literary, removed and impersonal, qualities not ordinarily associated with autobiography."<sup>45</sup> The assumption of a different voice—a voice expressing taboo desire—is key to Marbod's treatment of same-sex desire; by emphasizing that he is playing the part of a sexual sinner in a world turned upside-down, Marbod not only speaks his desire, not only creates a safe space for speaking it, but develops an authorial position in which the voicing of same-sex desire becomes the basis of his future salvation.<sup>46</sup>

The assumption of a different voice by which one can distance oneself from own's own works is a literary technique which Baudri likewise employed: as he declares in a letter to his friend Godfrey, "Non est in triviis alicuius amor recitandus, / Quisquis amat, cautus celet amoris opus" ("Love ought not be recited in the public spaces of another / Whoever loves, let the cautious one conceal the work of love"). The

<sup>45</sup>Shurtleff (n. 3 above) 374.

<sup>46</sup>Such a posture requires Marbod to visualize homoerotic sin as repentable, although Mark Jordan has demonstrated how Peter Damian's construction of sodomy renders it "as a sin that cannot be repented. [Damian's] conception violates the fundamental Christian teaching about sins of the flesh, namely, that they are always repentable. To conceive of a fleshly sin that cannot be repented is to set in motion an interminable dialectic. The dialectic can be stopped only by admitting that what has been categorized as an unrepentable fleshly sin is either not a sin or not fleshly." Marbod's poetry removes

importance of such posturing is that it allows the poet to address topics which would otherwise be forbidden. As F. J. E. Raby notes,

There are, [Baudri] goes on to confess, love-dialogues among his poems, but his own life is pure, and he is using only for amusement the characters who speak their own words and not his. And, after all, as he says to Godfrey, is it wrong to write about love if it gives pleasure, and one's own life is above reproach? No clergyman, who was really in love, would publish the fact in verse.<sup>47</sup>

Baudri, by positioning himself as separate from the speaking voice of his poems, frees himself from the moral culpability implicit in such secular odes to love. Speaking as a monk who is speaking as a lover, the poet walks a literary tightrope in which expressed desire is avowed and disavowed concurrently and the inverted world is exposed.

Hildebert similarly constructs an assumed voice for himself by casting his laudatory same-sex poems safely in the mythological past, rather than in the present of his polemics against same-sex desire. Figuring homoerotic desire as contained in a fictional past allows the poet to praise same-sex desire but to save himself from its implication. In his "Lumina, colla, genae" ("Eyes, Neck, Cheeks"), Hildebert describes same-sex kisses but frees himself from aspersion:

Iliacum tulit ad superos, ad sidera sidus,  
Et se tunc tandem credidit esse deum.  
Utque puer pelex visu tactuque liceret,  
Oscula nocte Jovi, pocula luce dabat.<sup>48</sup>

([Jove] raised the Trojan to the heavens, a star to the stars, / And then at last he believed that he was a god. / And so that the boy-mistress would be available to sight and to touch, / He gave kisses to Jove by night, cups by daylight.)

Hildebert's views of homoerotic acts vary according to the authorial stance taken. He is able to vacillate between poles of acceptance and intolerance because he demarcates two separate worlds in which two separate voices speak, even though the two voices belong to the same

the fleshliness of the sin by delineating his rejection of the male body. See Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago 1997) 66.

<sup>47</sup>F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Christian-Latin Poetry*, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1953) 279.

poet. As Hildebert presents Ganymede's kisses to Jove with no hint of disapproval, the poet also damns his contemporaries who participate in such expressions of desire.

Thus, the "I" which speaks in these poems plays with different personae, but who is the "I" who speaks? Is it the "I" of the individual author, or is it representative of a collective set of voices in the body of one? The answer is both. The "I" represents the author, but it also represents the plurality of personal possibilities which that author embodies: as Eugene Vance declares, "'I' is a specific signifier whose referent necessarily varies with the circumstances of its enunciation. . . . [It] modulates, then, with the conditions (speaker, code, audience) of its enunciation."<sup>49</sup> Even more than modulating among the various subject positions of one individual, the "I" also serves as a shorthand indicator of a collective "we." Judson Allen refers to this construction as the "easy medieval plagiarism of first person pronouns [which] loosen[s] the poet] from autobiographical reference . . . and does therefore tend toward the achievement of a discourse which is that of generic rather than particular man."<sup>50</sup> In these lyrics, the poets create virtuoso performances of the self in which the "I" both speaks individual same-sex desire but encapsulates this desire within the Christian theology of their communities at large. The performance of the "I" is both the performance of an individual "I" and a collective "we," as the redemptive possibilities of sin are open to all.

The paradoxical performance of a sinful self offers explanatory force for other puzzling instances of monks publicizing their own sinfulness. For example, Abbot Guibert de Nogent details in his memoirs, completed circa 1116, both the sinful pride from his writing and the writing itself; Martin Stevens observes that "There is, thus, in the very existence of the *Memoirs* a reminder of Guibert's self-confessed sin of 'frivolous writing,' as well as the vanity of authorship for which he berates himself repeatedly. The quest of identity and the power of self-revelation are simply too large to be contained with the prescribed pie-

<sup>48</sup> *Anthologia Latina*, ed. Franz Buecheler and Alexander Riese (Leipzig 1894–1921) 1.273.

<sup>49</sup> Eugene Vance, "Augustine's *Confessions* and the Grammar of Selfhood," *Genre* 6.1 (1973) 1–28, at 3.

<sup>50</sup> Allen (n. 3 above) 205.

ties of the day.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Leo Spitzer suggests that Juan Ruiz, arch-priest of Hita,

wished to depict that potential sinner which existed in himself, as in all human beings: he reveals himself, not as having committed the sins he describes, but as capable, in his human weakness, of having committed them. . . . [H]is is still the poetic ‘I’ of the medieval tradition, which speaks in the name of man in general.<sup>52</sup>

As Jesus promised greater rejoicing in heaven for one redeemed sinner than for ninety-nine righteous men and women, medieval monks saw in the inverted nature of the world a direct path to salvation through the promotion of their very sinfulness.

Thus, are Marbod of Rennes, Baudri of Bourgueil, and Hildebert of Lavardin speaking the truth of their desires for same-sex relationships in the guise of a lie? It is impossible to say definitively. Stephen Jaeger, in his analysis of virtuous and chaste love as an ennobling force in the medieval world, points out that

Love as sexual discipline was a social form as important as courtesy, central to the social and political functioning of many European courts, cathedrals, and monastic communities. Of course, like any social form, it was also a mask, and behind it the whole spectrum of sexual practice could play itself out.<sup>53</sup>

We can see the many masks worn by Marbod, Baudri, and Hildebert, but it is virtually impossible to see what exactly lives underneath the mask. Regardless of whether the poets are speaking about what they do or do not really desire, their poetry paradoxically revels in the damning joys of homoeroticism in order to sanctify the writers before their God. Writing with two voices in an inverted world, Marbod, Baudri, and

<sup>51</sup>Martin Stevens, “The Performing Self in Twelfth-Century Culture,” *Viator* 9 (1978) 193–212, at 199.

<sup>52</sup>Leo Spitzer, “Note on the Poetic and the Empirical ‘I’ in Medieval Authors,” *Traditio* 4 (1946) 414–422, at 419.

<sup>53</sup>C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia 1999) 26. Jaeger demonstrates that many medieval male-male relationships, although perhaps appearing highly sexualized to modern readers, conceive of love as an ennobling force through a chaste eroticism. He provides analysis of many poems by Marbod, Baudri, and Hildebert. An interesting complementary view can be found in the articles by Elizabeth A. R. Brown, Claudia Rapp, and Brent D. Shaw in “Ritual Brotherhood in Ancient and Medieval Europe: A Symposium,” *Traditio* 52 (1997) 259–381.

Hildebert are able to embrace and to castigate, to love and to loathe male same-sex desire simultaneously.

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