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The Brotherhood : Male Same-Sex Love Among the Early Modern Court Nobility

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Discussions of same-sex desire and relationships in pre-modern European context are still controversial among theorists and some historians of sexuality, who find firm assertions of exclusive same-sex desire by present-day historians a problematic imposition of modern homosexual identity on pre-modern individuals. The early modern era is especially prone to such theoretical debates, given that increasing urbanization gave rise to social networks that have been argued to be precursors to today's gay communities (such as the "mollies" of London) and an expanding print media culture provided more evidence of secular, and sometimes even value-neutral, reactions to such shadowy networks and the individuals involved in them. On the general topic, I agree with Stephen O. Murray that it is "chronocentric and ethnocentric...to proclaim that no one recognized homosexual desires before late-nineteenth-century forensic psychiatrists wrote about it" [1], even if the ways in which innate same-sex desires were conceptualized differed significantly from their presentation in modern medical discourses.

Although sources on same-sex love in early modernity that are not either hostile or satirical are very rare, the well-documented and uniquely claustrophobic environment of Versailles provides a unique opportunity for examining pre-modern, non-normative sexuality. Here I argue that the deployment of euphemistic language and terms illustrates that high aristocratic culture in early modern France expressed the concept of an exclusive same-sex desire in ways that were contingent on shared cultural and intellectual discourses shaped by humanism and the Enlightenment, providing a space in which such desires could be discussed and understood in secular and potentially value-neutral ways.

Such discursive spaces were not parallel to the sexual sub-cultures of the contemporary era, which can assert themselves through political and sociocultural language largely unknown in past eras. One could glimpse the homosexual in ancient records and the sexually fallen sodomite in modernity, to paraphrase Helmut Puff [2], but it is harder to find a close equivalent to the modern gay rights activist. Still, I believe terms such as "sub-cultures" and "communities" are appropriate since these existed alongside - sometimes in opposition, sometimes in cooperation with - the seemingly dominant ideologies of religious and social morality and legal regulation. Guido Ruggiero has discussed how masculine sexual identity in sixteenth century Italy was expressed through a firmly entrenched bachelor sub-culture that could tolerate sodomy and deliberately effeminate behavior within specific parameters. [3] Similarly the intellectual and cultural background of early modern France allowed men in the court nobility to seek out and identify themselves based on a "taste" for intercourse with the same sex, in spite of the religious and social (and, under Louis XIV, increased legal [4]) prohibitions against this particularly notorious sin. First it is important to establish how the mainstream movement of the Enlightenment simultaneously denied same-sex love as a valid or "natural" sexual outlet while articulating and normalizing intellectual assumptions that undermined traditionalist (especially theological) perspectives on sexual morality. This was in spite of the fact that late seventeenth and eighteenth century intellectuals usually treated sexuality

or sexual ethics as a secondary topic under anthropology, cultural comparisons, history, religious ethics, or so on, rather than an independent subject of analysis. For example, Spinoza rarely addressed the topics of marriage and sexuality directly, and although he wrote against legal regulations on sexuality, he still came out in favor of monogamy for the utilitarian reason that adultery and promiscuity leads to jealousy, which in turn caused civil discord. Still, as Jonathan Israel notes, for Spinoza “the libido, insofar as it is life-enhancing is a good thing and, in principle, in no way different outside marriage than within it.” [5] While Spinoza did not address homosexuality directly, his exclusion of purely moral motives for sexual regulation and his argument that sex was not only for procreation, but also for pleasure, was an assault, however indirect, on one of the major intellectual bases for the legal repression of sodomy. [6] This potential was recognized by the Dutch philosopher Adriaan Beverland, who argued that legal and social repression of the sex drive only encourages hypocrisy and ignorance. The usual response of philosophers like Beverland caused Spinozan philosophy to become linked to radical ideas about the erotic in the minds of both supporters and critics. [7] In one case, a 1719 thesis written in Copenhagen accused Spinoza and like-minded philosophers such as John Toland of encouraging sexual licentiousness, regardless of what they explicitly wrote. [8]

The association between sexual nonconformity and the *philosophe* had become strong by at least the middle of the seventeenth century. Even in popular slang, sexual deviance was becoming associated with Enlightenment intellectualism. *Philosophique* became a slang term for sodomite as early as 1686. [9] The terminology of *amour philosophique* or *péché philosophique* (“philosophical sin”) had its origins in the association between Greek philosophy, its humanist legacy, and pederasty. Despite their specific origins, such terms did become more generalized, especially in referring to sexual desire between men regardless of age. The Parisian lawyer Edmond Jean François Barbier wrote in 1726, “It was recounted to me when speaking of the maréchal d’Huxelles that these days he had always been very infatuated with the *péché philosophique*, this vice has not stopped him from having prominent men (*grands hommes*) as friends, and that one day three of them departed from the debauchery, and that the third who was not of this taste (*de ce goût-lá*), lambasted him greatly (*le fronda font*) and did not wish to believe that he had been a buggerer (*qu’il y eût des bougres*).” [10]

One factor fueling such associations was the connection between “male love” and intellectual sociability, a contribution of Socratic philosophy that had been brought to light under Italian humanism. There was the simple and unavoidable fact that the typical elite education exposed its pupils to a wealth of analogies and images depicting not only same-sex acts, but same-sex love. In France itself, *pédéraste* had by the seventeenth century become common shorthand for all males suspected of sexual intercourse with other men, despite the age-specific connotations of the word in its original classical contexts. [11]

A relatively new element was how Enlightenment writers explored the cultural gap between their society and those of East Asia and the Americas, which chiseled away at concepts of natural law traditionally cited to legitimize persecutions of sodomites. As early as 1603, the destabilizing potential of new knowledge about foreign civilizations was acknowledged in the theologian Pierre Charron’s controversial essay *De la sagesse (On Wisdom)* :

If we had to say how many laws of nature there are, and what they ordain, we would be at a loss. The sign of a natural law must be the universal respect in which it is held, for if there was anything that nature had truly commanded us to do, we would undoubtedly obey it universally : not only would every nation respect it, but every individual. Instead there is nothing in the world that is not subject to contradiction and dispute, nothing that is not rejected, not just by one nation, but by many ; equally, there is nothing that is strange and (in the opinion of many) unnatural that is not approved in many countries, and authorized by their countries. [12]

As for same-sex love specifically, in an essay titled “Different Ideas that Diverse People Have Formed About Virtue” Claude Helvétius put forward the standard humanist example of male homosexuality being practiced without moral censure in classical Greece. However, then he adds a claim on how in Japan, Buddhist monks are allowed to have sex with other men but not with women. [13]

The implications of such cultural comparisons for sexual regulation were fully adopted by at least one *philosophe* in 1750 to the horror of the memoir writer La Beaumelle, who was shocked to hear the philosopher Nicolas Boindin pontificating that “sodomy is no more evil than masturbation and that were it ‘contrary to nature,’ it would have been condemned by all ancient and modern peoples who have

respected and venerated the voice of nature, including the Greeks, Persians, and Romans, but actually it was only condemned and punished by Christians.” [14] La Beaumelle was directly addressing the older discourse of sodomy and “Nature,” but he was using both the discourses of classicism and Enlightenment rationalism to negate its premises.

Still, Nicolas Boindin was in a small minority, one that did not breach the walls of the French Enlightenment’s philosophical celebrity. In this clique, the concern was not legitimizing sodomy, but explaining its prohibition along rational and secular lines. Voltaire asserted in a 1764 essay titled “On the Love Called ‘Socratic’”, written for the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, that since it is illogical that any society could ever approve of same-sex acts, then accounts of sexual pederasty in ancient Greece must in fact be warped accounts of completely innocent and chaste relationships between adult and adolescent males. When same-sex love does happen, Voltaire theorizes, it is the unpleasant effect of a warm climate. [15] Diderot, writing with the voice of his real-life doctor Bordeau in the dialogue *D’Alembert’s Dream*, dismisses the traditional claim that sodomy is “contrary to nature” since by definition no sex act can exist outside of Nature. Nonetheless, Bordeau is made to explain that same-sex intercourse is a deviation from the normal function of human sexuality. “Invariably they are traceable to a weakness in the nervous organizations of young persons or the rotting of the brain in old people,” Diderot writes. “In Athens they were brought about by the seductive power of beauty, in Rome [the Catholic Church] by the scarcity of women, and in Paris they are caused by fear of the pox.” [16]

It is true that one of the major positions that was consistent among Enlightenment writers was the abolition of the use of burning as the punishment for sodomy. However, this was part of a more general critique of the use of torture and violent public punishments, not a reevaluation of the punishment of sexual crimes by both political authorities and the advocates of social norms. Montesquieu began his discussion of the “crime against Nature” in *The Spirit of the Laws* by declaring “God forbid that I wish to diminish the horror that people have to a crime that religion, morality, and politics condemn in turn” and only argued in favor of substituting legal punishments against sodomy with purely social ones. [17] Even more radical voices of the Enlightenment like the marquis de Condorcet, who was one of a very small faction of pre-French Revolution philosophers to explicitly advocate for the legal and social equality of women, maintained that even if legal penalties against sodomy were abolished, strong and omnipresent social disapproval must be preserved. [18] Despite such denials that sodomy could ever be justified according to the mainstream *philosophes’* criteria of reason and Nature, in the overview the voices of the mainstream Enlightenment were nonetheless dismantling the notions of natural law and religious authority that sanctified legal and religious prohibitions against sodomy, even if the most well-known advocates of Enlightenment thought refused to take that step.

Major recipients, although by no means the only ones, of these discussions were the court nobles. Far from their education being limited to religion and the classics, the standard curriculum for those born into the court nobility throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries encompassed the contemporary and the classical. [19] This interest in contemporary intellectual trends was not limited to their training. In his study of the literary tastes of the French nobility in the 1700s, Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret found that a majority of provincial nobles actually did not own books at all, and if they did have libraries their selections centered on theology, history, and the classics. On the other hand, the court nobility’s private libraries tended to display more interest, or perhaps just the need to display interest, in a wider and more contemporary selection of topics : literary studies, contemporary politics, modern philosophy, economics, and contemporary social and intellectual trends overall. [20]

For the high nobility of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a shared intellectual heritage provided the tools by which a revitalized aristocratic consciousness in a France that had experienced significant economic and political change could be shaped. Mark Motley has argued that over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries education became in France a basis of and justification for noble status. [21] The classical and humanist models of education utilized by the nobility brought with it, inadvertently, romanticization of pederasty and same-sex love. The ties between erotica and knowledge were encouraged, as James Turner argues, by educational theories emerging in the seventeenth century, which “posited direct, sensuous knowledge as the basis for acquiring complex ideas.” [22] It was no coincidence that many erotic works published throughout the early modern period largely adopted the same conventions as educational tracts and dialogues. An undercurrent of sixteenth century humanist literature in Italy not only acknowledged but celebrated a heavily and bluntly eroticized pederasty, or

even sexual relations between adult men. This literature not only presented an understanding of same-sex acts largely free from theological and legal condemnation, but also an association between such acts and classical and humanist knowledge. In particular, erotic scenes were often intertwined with Socratic philosophical discussion and debate. [23] This is the legacy cherished by the marquis de Sade, when in *Philosophy in the Boudoir* he has a naive young noblewoman learn libertinage and atheism through Socratic and sensual instruction.

It is, of course, difficult to quantify how much the general writings on morality, Nature, and knowledge by intellectuals from the intellectual-erotic writers of the Italian Renaissance to Spinoza to Diderot shaped individual noblemen's perspectives on sexuality, especially the development of a distinct intellectual libertinism in the early modern era. It is clear, though, that the intellectual developments of the era were being linked to moral and sexual decadence. The seventeenth century Jesuit writer François Garasse defined *libertin* in his treatise *Doctrine curieuse* as "a man corrupted by misuse of his reason, led by his *curiosité* into illicit areas of knowledge, thence persuaded to reject religion altogether and to give himself over to the most damnable of acts" [24], already linking together moral behavior, religious skepticism, and intellectual trends of the day. Stéphanie Genand describes the "libertine model" as "inseparable from the nobility" in France since it sought to retain noble privilege in a changing world through intellectual and sexual privilege. [25] Certainly even noblemen who sympathized early with Enlightenment trends like Louis II de Condé and Philippe II de Orléans were infamous for both their lack of interest in religious belief or atheism and their sexual improprieties. Condé, who was enough an admirer of Spinoza that he unsuccessfully attempted to arrange a meeting with him while in the Netherlands in order to discuss his writings [26], had his atheism and alleged affairs with men widely publicized and satirized. As for the duc d'Orléans, Saint-Simon reported that he was seen reading François Rabelais at Mass, an observation that tied d'Orléans to the decline of religious observance. [27] Philippe d'Orléans also became famous for both his wine and his women. "Sometimes the Regent has his mistresses consecutively and sometimes he has them alternatively," the diarist Matthieu Marais dryly remarked. [28]

Prominent aristocratic figures like Condé and Orléans helped compose the backdrop to a series of scandals involving self-described noble *confréries* ("fraternities") dedicated to sodomy. While documentary evidence on these *confréries* is extremely lacking, and all information about them are derived from outside observers, they appear to represent the existence of a sub-culture defined chiefly by same-sex desire among the court nobility. One was comprised of seventeen young noblemen met and had sex with each other on an April night in 1722, in the gardens of the Tuileries Palace just outside the apartments of the twelve-year old King Louis XV. Their ringleader, the marquis de Rambures, was imprisoned in the Bastille, [29] while many of the others were exiled from court. For the duc de Richelieu, who left the most extensive description of the incident [30], the orgy was more than just a one-time incident, but was evidence of an organized *confrérie*. However, there is no evidence of what the motives of the organizers of the *confrérie* themselves were and whether they placed more significance to their activities than simply lust, which is yet another of the silences that riddle the shadow history of same-sex love in the pre-modern era. Richelieu had no interest in the subject except to illustrate the lack of interest in moral enforcement by the libertine Regent, Philippe II d'Orléans. By that time the gardens of the Tuileries were already known to the Parisian police as a hotbed of sexual solicitations between men, [31] so at least it was likely the choice of locale was deliberate and that there was some organization involved. In his *Mémoires*, the duc de Richelieu gives the most detailed account of the 1722 *confrérie* scandal, giving the number of men involved, the names of the leaders, the punishments of several of the men, and even a description of a meeting between the Regent and his advisers on how to handle the scandal. As a highly ranked and popular member of the court, Richelieu likely received such details from the source, if he was not an eyewitness to certain events. The only other significant narrative source is a journal entry from Mathieu Marais [32], who as Prince Charles de Lorraine's lawyer also had access to court information. However, in his version Marais only adds the claim that, when Louis XV asked why these young men were exiled, he was told that they had been caught digging up fences in the gardens. After that, Marais writes, "fence-diggers" became "another name given to these young gentlemen." Although Marais expresses the idea of a cabal at court that was discussed and understood through euphemism, he does not share Richelieu's use of the term *confrérie*. Nevertheless, the associations between the word *confrérie* and male homosexuality may be found elsewhere.

The etymology of *confrérie* in French can be traced to the late thirteenth century, when it was used to

signify a committee of clerics. When the word surfaces again in the next century, its meaning encompassed secular organizations. [33] Its first recorded association with male same-sex intercourse comes much later. Originally written in 1581, Michel de Montaigne's *Journal de Voyage en Italie* describes a group of Portuguese expatriates in Rome who had entered into consecrated marriages with each other at the Church of San Giovanni a Porta Latina :

“[In that church] certain Portuguese, all young men, had entered into a strange *confrérie*. The male couples had married each other at Mass, with the same rites that we conduct in our marriages. They celebrated Easter together, read the same marriage gospel service, and then lived and slept together. The Roman wits said that, as with a man and a woman who have been conjoined, the fact that they shared the circumstances of a marriage alone made it legitimate. To these wise folk, it seemed that any marriage consecrated by the ceremonies and mysteries of the Church would be equally right. Eight or nine Portuguese from this lovely sect were burned. [34]

The *Journal de Voyage en Italie* was not published until 1774, suggesting that Montaigne was already drawing from a wider usage that was turning or had turned *confrérie* into a convenient euphemism. However the word gained its secondary meaning, during the reign of Louis XIV it was used to describe a clandestine meeting of male same-sex lovers, strikingly similar to the 1722 scandal. In 1682, a group of noblemen who had male lovers at Versailles became organized and referred to themselves as the *confrérie italienne*. The designation of *italienne* alone is revealing. Italy, especially the city of Florence, was associated with male same-sex love since the Middle Ages. These stereotypes were certainly not unfamiliar at Versailles. In 1683, the marquis de la Vallière attempted to seduce the Italian visitor Primi Visconti by "reminding" him that in Spain all the monks, in France all the most prominent noblemen, and in Italy all men committed the "Italian vice" with each other. [35]

Besides invoking well-established associations involving Italy and same-sex love, the *confrérie italienne* decided to model themselves after religious orders by designing a code of rules and dividing members between the ranks of "grand priors" and "novices" while everyone in the group were called "brothers." The fraternity met and carried out their "holy mysteries" in an unnamed country estate, far from the carefully maintained state of constant surveillance at Versailles. [36] The pamphlet *Les intrigues amoureuses des rois de France*, written by the comte du Bussy-Rabutin, even claims to record the group's constitution in a chapter tellingly titled "France Becomes Italian." The constitution was strict about forbidding intercourse with women, demanding that "they keep their vow of obedience and of chastity in regard to ladies ; and, if any breaks this rule, he would be hounded (*chassé*) from the company without the ability to return to it under some pretext presented" and "if any of the brothers are married, they are obliged to declare that it was for the good of his affairs, or because his parents had obligated them, or because it was necessary to gain an inheritance. That he would swear at the same time to never love his wife, and to only sleep with her until there is a son, and however he must ask permission, which will only be granted for one day of the week." [37] These rules were apparently embraced enthusiastically by a majority of members : "It was then that the rulers were established, and, having read in the presence of everyone, they were generally approved" except that a few wanted association with women to be treated as a "crime that they not only wished to not only be treated with the utmost seriousness (*à la dernière rigueur*), but for which they would reluctantly be promised (*souhaitoient*) forgiveness, after nonetheless they had been interrogated on the entire issue (*qu'on l'auroit demandée en plein chapitre*), and that they had observed some form of penitence." [38]

There is a blatant conflation of exclusive same-sex intercourse and chastity made by paralleling a vow of chastity with a vow for sex excluding women, and certainly all accounts of the *confrérie italienne* may be read as an elaborate anti-clerical joke. At the same time, the insistence on exclusivity, not just in the act of homosexual sodomy itself but in denying the engagement of opposite-sex intercourse for any reason not made by class demands, suggests more than just an elaborate anti-clerical satire. This *confrérie* included the chevalier de Mailly, the king's cousin the prince de Conti, and one of Louis XIV's illegitimate sons, the comte de Vermandois. All of the members belonged to the high aristocracy and some with ties to the court at Versailles. It was the inclusion of two members of the royal family that finally incurred the wrath of the Sun King. The group was forcibly dissolved while Vermandois was beaten before the king, exiled from court, and forced into marriage. It is this last punishment that is most interesting, but there are no

remarks elaborating on its rationale from any source. Was it a deliberate blow against the laws of the illegal fraternity, or was marriage genuinely intended as a "cure" for, or at least as a check against, Vermandois' inclinations ? Or was it only thought that marriage was the only way to salvage Vermandois' respectability ? Again, there is only silence.

The implication that there were other *confréries* that did not come to light is made in another work by Richelieu, *Le Chronique Scandaleuse de la Cour de Philippe, duc d'Orléans*. [39] While writing about his affair with the duc de Bourbon's sister, mademoiselle de Charolois, and his nocturnal visits to her, Richelieu recounts his encounter with a man in a public garden, which like the gardens of the Tuileries were mostly well-known hotspots for male homosexual activity. Although here Richelieu does not describe a specific alleged *confrérie*, the note of clandestine activity formed in his *Mémoires* is made even more explicit :

"Richelieu arrived at the meeting a little later than usual. The garden was deserted. The duke thought he was alone when he saw under the moonlight, twenty yards from him, a man who appeared to be an adolescent without a beard worth mentioning. The man followed him eagerly. He was one of the individuals from the sect which the late king [Louis XIV] had so consistently waged war against, saving his nation from the evil that they could cause it and the reputation that they would give it...

The duke, fearing that he would be discovered, was ignorant that there was a *confrérie* in France whose actions were bold and unpunished. He could not believe that the gardens of the princes of the blood were the sites of their activities. He did not fail to tell this adventure to his princess, who told him that nothing was able to dissipate and remove these sorts of *confréries*, which were protected by powerful people... [40]"

Like Montaigne, Richelieu draws on the terms *confrérie* and *secte*, words that carry the idea of a significant scale and degree of organization and of self-imposed segregation from the wider society. Also Richelieu manages to paint the *confrérie* as something that is simultaneously secret and notorious ; even hidden they still pose a threat on a country-wide scale.

This perspective was not unique to Richelieu, and in fact there was an array of euphemisms and terms deployed by early modern French writers to project similar anxieties and display a multitude of ideas about homosexuality. These concepts were expressed through a discourse reliant on allegory and classical and historical allusions to define the concept of exclusive same-sex desire, which would include *confrérie* as it was used by Montaigne and Richelieu. While the language of sodomy and "crimes against nature" was still dominant, the elite had also adopted ways other than the language surrounding the term "sodomite" to conceptualize homosexual desire.

One of the most frequent subjects of such discourses was Louis XIV's brother, Philippe I d'Orléans, who was known simply as *Monsieur*. Even though Louis XIV was widely remarked to have had an exceptional antipathy toward sodomy, Monsieur's affairs with men were an open secret at Versailles. Madame de La Fayette wrote a biography of her friend, Monsieur's first wife, Henrietta Anne Stuart, in which she delicately described the situation : "The miracle of inflaming the heart of this prince was reserved for no woman in this world." [41] Monsieur's own wife, Elizabeth-Charlotte d'Orléans, also resorted to euphemism to describe her husband's activities :

"Monsieur is still the same as he was in his youth. This very winter he purchased 200,000 guilders' worth of charges in the regiment of the guards with which to reward some young fellows who have entertained him in not exactly an honorable fashion. When it comes to that, no expense is spared, and this is the most annoying part, for otherwise I should not care at all and would happily say to these fellows : 'You are welcome to gobble the peas, for I don't like them.'"

Likewise, the duc de Saint-Simon remarked, "The taste (*goût*) of Monsieur was not for women, and he never hid this." [42]

It must be noted that *goût* was used to signify sexual preferences in general. Madame de Caylus remarked in her memoirs that Philippe II d'Orléans had "confided his tastes (*goûts*)", meaning his many affairs with women, to his daughter Louise-Élisabeth. [43] However, the same term is also used to signify desire for

adult men. When Visconti had tried to leave Vallière's bedroom after the noblemen had tried to seduce him, Visconti joked that because he was twenty-five years old and had a beard he could be of no interest to Vallière, who replied, "Frenchmen of good taste (*goût*) do not regard years, nor hair." [44] Such euphemistic and circumventing language, while not inherently approving, was also intrinsically value-neutral, quite unlike the terminology of sodomy and "Nature" with its historical and theological baggage. Outside the court, morally neutral phrases like *amour des mâles* (love of men) and *amour masculin* (masculine love) were used as early as the sixteenth century. [45] Other terms drew heavily on classical literature that would have held neutral or even positive connotations and would have been very familiar to the culturally refined members of the court and high nobility, such as *mœurs des grecs* (Greek customs), *ganymede* (the cupbearer of the Olympic gods and in certain myths Zeus' male lover), and *corydon* (the name of a shepherd with a male lover in one of Virgil's poems). [46] Although a few classical terms like *ganymede* were previously used as shorthand for same-sex desire in the Middle Ages [47], the use of such classical terms expanded vastly with the spread of humanism in the sixteenth century and with the increased education and refinement of the nobility in France over the course of the early modern era. The broader terminology likewise reflected the dominance of classical and humanist discourses in the early modern era, not unlike how medical and scientific languages shaped present discourses about sexuality. Even the French use of *pederast*, which was the preferred term of police authorities, carried within it the dominant intellectual culture's positive views of the Greek and Roman past and the philosophical heritage of antiquity and the Renaissance. At the same time, it became a secular alternative to sodomite, with its explicit and well-known connotations of biblical sin.

The association between homosexuality and intellectual discourses was not lost on contemporaries. Although the Church and the State still punished same-sex acts between men, events like the 1722 *confrérie* scandal still heightened fears that social deviance was going unchecked and even being legitimized by political elites uninterested in preserving a traditional moral ethos. For Richelieu, part of what made the events of April 1722 appalling was that it represented a break in the willingness of the monarchy to contain sexual deviance. Richelieu writes, "Louis XIV had finally succeeded in making that vice [sodomy] rare and disgraceful. He forced them to hide, to disappear in a manner of speaking from society, and to find refuge in the darkest shadows. But, under the Regency, all was permitted..." [48] Further, in Richelieu's depiction of Philippe II d'Orléans' council meeting, the Regent displays both a disinterest in the monarchy's role of monitoring sexuality and the often remarked religious indifference of Philippe d'Orléans :

"The light shone on that orgy convinced the duc d'Orléans, Dubois, monsieur le Duc, and the marshal of Villars to hold a meeting on what should be done to, they said, 'pacify the devout.' The Regent, who did not stop smiling, was satisfied that it was necessary to give the nobles a harsh reprimand and tell them that they do not have the best taste [*goût*] in the world. Yet, when it was said that these gentlemen had formed a *confrérie*, he called for their dissolution. [49]"

As might be expected, Richelieu did have a political ax to grind against Philippe d'Orléans. Richelieu was once involved in a conspiracy to remove Philippe d'Orléans from the office of Regent and replace him with his cousin, King Felipe V of Spain, a fact conveniently left out of the *Mémoires*. Terminology pointing toward the existence of sub-cultures centered around same-sex love has a longer history than has been suggested in recent scholarship of sexuality in early modern western Europe. Several historians such as Bryan T. Regan [50] and Randolph Trumbach [51] have argued that male homosexual sub-cultures only emerged in the 1690s at the earliest. Yet they do not consider how such an emergence may also be explained by a rapidly expanding print culture and the growth of the bureaucratic State. The apparent absence of these sub-cultures before the end of the seventeenth century could be explained by these factors alone, rather than a significant and fundamental shift in sociocultural discourses. [52] Regan admits that the vast majority of evidence about this "new" French sub-culture is culled from police records, a source that largely did not exist until late in the seventeenth century. [53] As Caroline Gronda and Chris Mounsey remind us in their introduction to the essay collection *Queer People : Negotiations and Expressions of Homosexuality, 1700-1800*, "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." [54]

In a treatise published in 1690, a priest named Touron already denounced men "who have these sorts of

friendships” and who “are usually set apart from the rest of the community by secret conversation...They talk without scruple against the laws, against order, and against the demands of the community. They insult, they mutter, and they complain. They form small leagues, they create secret societies, they arrange meetings with each other...” [55] Touron is both exaggerating the sodomite threat and associating sodomy with the organization of heretics and political malcontents, but his words echo elsewhere, even outside France. For example, the characteristics that Regan attributes to eighteenth century homosexual sub-cultures - the use of words and gestures for identification [56] - can be found not only with Touron but also with the sixteenth century Spanish friar, Pedro de León, who wrote a treatise claiming that sodomites “knew each others’ identity...by certain other signals they made to each other” and that one could spot sodomites by looking at the way they walked and gestured. [57]

Unfortunately, much of this shadow history has been lost and can only be connected together through conjecture, and the pieces can only be found within the records of hostile observers from late antiquity to the eighteenth century at the earliest. However, I would argue that the testimonies concerning the *confréries* and similar sources do demonstrate a social consciousness and a type of deliberate solidarity founded on an exclusivist understanding of same-sex love, even if there was no "scientific" categorizing descriptor such as "homosexual" or "gay" available, and that it was the intellectual discourses of the early modern era that enabled such solidarity.

Of course, the intention of this essay is not to infer that only those pre-modern individuals with access to an elite education and an intellectual background could construct a language and a self-identification centered around sexual preference. Rather, I would argue that the court nobility of early modern France is a useful and well-documented focal point for an investigation of pre-modern ways in which a same-sex preference were expressed through social, cultural, and literary discourses. More specifically, it is a rich field for understanding how intellectual trends and euphemistic language provided a lexicon by which an aristocratic sub-culture, whose participants were unified by both shared intellectual and cultural reference points and by the attempt to express same-sex preferences, could construct itself.

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Notes

[1] Stephen O. Murray, *Homosexualities* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 8.

[2] Helmut Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400 - 1600* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7.

[3] Guido Ruggiero, "Marriage, Love, Sex, and Renaissance Civic Morality" in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe : Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. James Turner (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23-5.

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[6] Alexandre Matheron, "Spinoza and Sexuality" in *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*, ed. Moira Gatens (College Park, PA : Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 91-103.

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- [17] Baron de Montesquieu, *De l'esprit de lois* (Paris, 1748), 12.6.
- [18] Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, "Notes inserees par Condorcet dans les Oeuvres completes de Voltaire," in *Oeuvres complète* (Paris, 1804), 7:374
- [19] Mark Motley, *Becoming a French Aristocrat : The Education of the Court Nobility, 1580-1715* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 68-81, 140.
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- [21] Motley, *passim*.
- [22] James Turner, *Schooling Sex : Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France, and England, 1534 - 1685* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 20.
- [23] For example, see Antonio Rocco, *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola (Alcibiades the Schoolboy)*, Antonio Vignali, *La Cazzaria (Discourse of Pricks)*, and Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, *In lode di sodomia (In Praise of Sodomy)*.
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- [27] Duc de Saint-Simon, *Mémoires* (Paris : Gallimard, 1983), 2.441.
- [28] Matthieu Marais, *Journal et mémoires* (Paris : Firmin Didot frères, 1863-8), vol. 2, decembre 1720.
- [29] Confirmation of his imprisonment in the Bastille, where "he was allowed all liberties except being able to leave the fortress", is in *Archives de la Bastille*, vol. 13, ed. François Ravaissou (Paris : A. Durand and Pedone-Lauriel, 1882), 323.
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de Boffe et al., 1790), vol. 3, 178-80.

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[35] Primi Visconti, *Memoires sur la court de Louis XIV, 1673-1681*, ed. Jean-François Solnon (Paris : Perrin, 1988), 81.

[36] Comte de Roger de Bussy-Rabutin, *Histoire Amoureuse des Gaules* (Paris : Librairie Gernier Frères, 1930), 299-311. See also Maurice Lever, *Les bûchers de Sodome* (Paris : Fayard, 1985), 156-67.

[37] Bussy-Rabutin, 302-3.

[38] Ibid., 304.

[39] *Pièces Inedites sur les Regnes de Louis XIV, XV, et XVI...*, ed. Jean-Louis Soulavie (Paris : Léopold Collin, 1809), 50-3.

[40] Ibid., 52-3.

[41] Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, comtesse de La Fayette, *Histoire de Madame Henriette d'Angleterre*, ed. Gilbert Sigaux (Paris : 1982), 36.

[42] Saint-Simon, 1.60-1.

[43] Madame de Caylus, *Souvenirs*, ed. Bernard Noël (Paris : Mercure de France, 1985), 119.

[44] Primi Visconti, *Memoires sur la court de Louis XIV, 1673-1681*, ed. Jean-François Solnon (Paris, 1988), 81.

[45] Couvouve, 52-3.

[46] Ibid., 91-4, 113, 121.

[47] Several examples of this usage are discussed in Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality & Civilization* (Cambridge : Belknap Press, 2003), 181-3.

[48] Richelieu 1790, 178.

[49] Ibid., 180.

[50] Bryan T. Regan, Jr., "The Enlightenment Confronts Homosexuality" in *Homosexuality in Modern France*, eds. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryan T. Regan, Jr. (Oxford University Press, 1996), 12-3.

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