

Between Guinevere and Galehot: Homo/eroticism in the Lancelot-Grail Cycle

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As Elspeth Kennedy has pointed out, the first half of *Lancelot Proper*, the long central branch of the Old French Lancelot-Grail cycle, has “a firm thematic structure in which the love of Lancelot and Guinevere and the making of a name intertwine” (247). This twin theme, however, is complicated by the potential uncertainty and plurality of the hero’s love and identity, which, though manifest in the text itself, have somehow eluded scholarly attention so far. What Lancelot does early on in his career is not only to earn the identity he is entitled to through the service of love, but also to explore which love to settle on and what identity to pursue—or, more specifically, to choose between his lady Guinevere and his friend Galehot and thus between heteronormativity and the male bonding verging on homoeroticism. The present essay aims to demonstrate that a homoerotic reading of Lancelot-Galehot relationship is instrumental to the understanding of the ideological process by which love and sexuality are

constructed, channeled, and circumscribed in the Old French Arthurian prose cycles, including the Lancelot-Grail Cycle.

1. Her Majesty's Secret Rival

Even a casual description of Lancelot's friendship with Galehot will be enough to show the presence of homoerotic motif in *Lancelot Proper*. Galehot, young lord of the Lointaines Iles, is waging war against King Arthur in an attempt to seal his great career as a conqueror when he is fascinated by the prowess of a knight fighting for Arthur, who turns out to be Lancelot incognito. Eager to secure Lancelot's friendship, he ends up surrendering himself to Arthur according to the request of the former even though he is on the brink of winning the war. Owing to this unheard-of act of soliciting friendship, he succeeds in keeping Lancelot as his companion. His affection for Lancelot, nonetheless, is far from typical by the standard of common male-male friendship portrayed in the medieval romance. One night, Galehot sneaked into the room where Lancelot was sleeping and "lay down beside him as quietly as he could" (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 136-37); later, as he headed for Arthur's camp, leaving Lancelot behind, "he embraced him and kissed him, commended him to God" (2: 139); still later, when he was reunited with Lancelot after a brief separation, "they lay down together in one bed, and spoke all night about what brought joy to their hearts" (2: 147).¹⁾ According to Gawain, "he is more jealous of [Lancelot] than any knight is of a young lady" (2: 237), and the narrator makes

1) "se couka dalés li al plus coient que il pot" (*Lancelot* 8: 80); "l'acole et baise en la face et le commande a Dieu" (8: 88); "se couchant ambedoi en .I. lit et parolent toute nuit de ce don lor cuer sont moult a aise" (8: 118).

it explicit that “he had put into his love for Lancelot everything a man could put: heart and body and, most precious of all, his honor” (2: 241).²⁾

While he helps Lancelot win Queen Guinevere’s love and assumes the role of a confidant between the two lovers thereafter—it is he who offers a shelter to her when she is repudiated by Arthur in the False Guinevere episode—Galehot is always afraid that he might lose Lancelot, on the one hand, due to Guinevere’s possessive desire, and, on the other, because of Arthur’s growing dependence on him. As the narrative goes on, therefore, he gets increasingly fatalistic about the future of their relationship—especially after Lancelot is inducted to the Round Table (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 241; *Lancelot* 1: 1). All portents, including his two dreams and the crumbling fortresses in Sorelois, point towards his eventual loss of Lancelot. Yet he faces his imminent downfall most stoically, disappearing with grace into the background of endless adventures, until he is led to believe that Lancelot is dead, at which he finally dies of grief, despair, and a subsequent illness. Later, when Lancelot discovers Galehot’s tomb and learns that the latter is dead, he wishes to kill himself for the unbearable *dolor* and *damage* he feels for the “loss of the most valiant knight in the world, who died of love for the basest and most wicked knight there ever was” (*Lancelot-Grail* 3: 59).³⁾ Upon the intercession of the Lady of the Lake’s messenger, though, he has Galehot’s body carried to the Joieuse Garde—the castle he captured early in his career—where he buries him in an ancient tomb made of precious stones: “As he had laid [Galehot] down, he kissed him three times on the mouth in such agony that his heart leapt out of

2) “il est plus jaloux de lui que nuls chevaliers de jouene dame” (8: 482); “il avoit mis en l’amor Lancelot tot ce que hom i pooit metre, cuer et cors, et tote honor, que miels valt” (1: 3).

3) “perte del plus preudome del monde qui mors est por le plus vil chevalier et por le plus malvés qui onques fust” (2: 213).

his chest” (3: 69-70).⁴⁾

As far as Lancelot and Galehot are concerned, however, the most erotic moment comes posthumously at the end of *La Mort le roi Artu*, the final branch of the Lancelot-Grail Cycle. When Lancelot dies a hermit after the collapse of the Round Table and the demises of Arthur and Guinevere, his surviving companions bear his body upon his request to the Joieuse Garde. He is buried there in the tomb containing Galehot’s body:

That day there was a great deal of grief expressed in the castle, and that night they ordered that the rich and sumptuous tomb of [Galehot] be opened. The following day they placed the body of Lancelot in the tomb, which they then had inscribed as follows: Here lies the body of [Galehot], the Lord of the Distant Isles, and with him rests Lancelot of the Lake, who, with the exception of his son Galahad, was the best knight who ever entered the kingdom of Logres. (*Lancelot-Grail* 4: 159)⁵⁾

Thus the two friends are bound to lie side by side, liberated from “the touch of earthly years” and rolling round *in saecula saeculorum* “in earth’s diurnal course, / With rocks, and stones, and trees.” Considering his lifelong service to *son amie* Guinevere, it is sadly ironic that the body Lancelot is ultimately united with is not hers, but that of the long-deceased *ami* Galehot.

The subtle rivalry between Guinevere and Galehot is tuned carefully

4) “quant il ot couchié, si le baisato fois en la boche a si grant anguisse que par pou que li cuers ne li partoit el ventre” (2: 254).

5) “Celui jor fu li duelz trop granz el chastel; et la nuit firent ouvrir la tombe Galeholt qui tant estoit riche com nule plus. L’endemain firent metre enz le cors Lancelot; après firent metre desus letres qui disoient: Ci gist li cors Galeholt, le signor des Lointaignes Illes, et avec lui repose Lancelos del Lac qui fu li mieudres chevaliers qui onques entrast el roiaume de Locres, fors seulement Galaad son fill” (*Mort* 262-63).

throughout the first half of *Lancelot Proper*, which Kennedy aptly calls “*Lancelot without the Grail*.” A telling example is the confusion caused by the term *biaux dols amis*. In *Lancelot Proper*, as in other Old French courtly literature, the word *ami/e* is given an erotic value, which is unequivocally articulated in the famous scene of Lancelot’s first tryst with Guinevere, which culminates, as remembered by Dante’s Francesca, in the moment when “the longed-for smile / was kissed by so renowned a lover” (*Inferno* 5.133-34).⁶ The dialogue between the gracefully assertive Guinevere and the bashful Lancelot goes as follows:

[S]he said to him, “Tell me, where does this love come from that I am asking you about?”. . .

“My lady, you yourself made it happen, by making me *your friend* [*vostre ami*], if your words did not lie to me.”

“*My friend* [*Mon ami*]?” she asked, “How was that?”

“My lady,” he said, “I came before you, when I took my leave of the king, fully armed but for my head and my hands, and I commended you to God and said that I was your knight in whatever place I might be. And you said that you wanted me to be *your knight and your friend* [*vostres chevaliers et vos amis*]. Then I said, ‘Farewell, my lady,’ and you said, ‘Farewell, *dear friend* [*biaux dols amis*].’ Since then those words could never leave my heart; those were the words that made me a worthy knight, if I am one.” (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 145; my Italics)⁷

6) “il disiato riso / esser basciato da contanto amante.”

7) «Dites moi, fait ele, dont cele amor vient que je vous demant.». . . —Dame, fait il, vous le feistes faire, qui de moi feistes vostre ami, se vostre bouce ne me meti. —Mon ami? fait ele. Et comment? —Dame, fait il, je m’en ving devant vous, quant je prins congié de mon seignor le roi tous armés fors de mon chief et de mes mains, si vous comandai a Dieu et dis que j’estoie vostre chevaliers en quelconques lieu que je fuisse; et vous me desistes que vestres chevaliers et vos amis voliés vous que je fuisse; et puis dis «a Dieu, dame» et vous desistes «a Dieu,iaux dols amis»,

Lancelot is talking about the incident that happened on the day he was knighted. Young squire as he was then, he was well informed enough to interpret *biax dols amis* as an erotically charged term, which it *was*, not only in the context of the courtly romance at large but also in the context where the queen actually used it, for by that time she had already begun to feel for him, suspecting he was helplessly in love with her (*Lancelot* 7: 274-75, 285). Even if it was *not*, his interpretation is eventually justified by Guinevere's subsequent use of the term. With a first kiss following this dialogue, Lancelot attains Guinevere's *amor vraie* (*Lancelot* 8: 115), and *biax dols amis* becomes her favorite term of endearment for him.⁸⁾ It is exactly by this term, and by it only, which Lancelot was thrilled to hear from Guinevere, that Galehot prefers to designate him—of course, with no less affection.⁹⁾ Thus as Lancelot is Guinevere's *biax dols amis*, so is he to Galehot. As Guinevere “was so overwhelmed by him and by his love that she did not see how she could ever do without him” (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 228), Galehot “had so given him his heart that he could have no joy without him” (2: 241).¹⁰⁾

This theme of one friend versus another, or of one love versus another, permeates the entire first half of *Lancelot Proper*. For Lancelot, “la riens el monde que il plus aime” is, of course, Guinevere (*Lancelot* 8: 463), and no one else—not even Galehot, for whom he has utmost respect and affection—can replace her. *Lancelot* without the Grail hence might be read as the eponymous

ne onques puis del cuer ne me pot issir; et ce fu li most qui me fera preudome, se jel sui ja (*Lancelot* 8: 111).

8) E.g. see *Lancelot* 8: 116, 456; 7: 155; 1: 144, 151, 173.

9) E.g. see *Lancelot* 8: 81, 84, 91, 97; 1: 9, 12, 33, 35, 73, 75, 126.

10) “ele est si sosprise de lui et de amor, que ele ne voit mie comment ele s'en puisse consievrer” (*Lancelot* 8: 445); “il li avoit si doné son cuer, la ou il ne pooit avoir joie sans lui” (1: 3).

hero's quest for love and identity, in which his *amie* Guinevere eventually prevails over his *ami* Galehot, or heteronormativity over homoeroticism. Only with Galehot's death does Lancelot's vacillation between the two "friends" come to an end. Puzzlingly, however, at the very moment when Lancelot's love and sexual identity are fixed and resolved once and for all—*par aventure*, if not by his own choice—begins his long, slow downslide, in which he is destined to lose not only his love but also his name as the best knight in the world, as well, superseded by his son Galahad. What is even more puzzling is that it is not Guinevere but Galehot who is set up to await him at the far end of the journey, so the reader is left to suspect Lancelot might have known who it was going to be, after all.

2. Courtly Love as Erotic Asceticism

To properly locate the implications of this homoeroticism in *Lancelot Proper*, a reexamination of normative heterosexual relationship is indispensable, for the text is apparently one of the most powerful and memorable endorsements of courtly love ever rendered in fictional narrative.

The structure of *Lancelot Proper*, elaborate and complex as it may be, is typically romantic in two ways. First, the entire work is framed by the exile-and-return motif characterizing many medieval romances: it begins with the dispossession of the infant Lancelot and his two first cousins and ends with them re-conquering their patrimonies from their nemesis King Claudas. The world in which Lancelot and his cousins are orphaned and disinherited is governed by feudal—and thus essentially homosocial—values such as dynastic obligation, princely virtues, and vassalic loyalty. The world itself is distinctively

homosocial, too: women are virtually invisible there, and, when they *are*, they are found to be either isolated in a convent (Lancelot's mother and her sister) or incarcerated by their husbands (Pharian's wife). It is only with the emergence of the Lady of the Lake and her magical lake community that homosocial agenda begins to submerge, at least from the surface. The Fair Unknown motif, another popular theme of the romance, is also present in *Lancelot Proper*: Lancelot arrives at King Arthur's court as a handsome nobody and has to win a name—and love, too—befitting his exceptional physical beauty by his own effort. Compared with Claudas' Gaul, which is justly named la Terre Deserte, Arthur's Kingdom of Logres is noticeably heterosocial in atmosphere. Lancelot enters Camelot escorted by the Lady of the Lake—his patron and surrogate mother—and her splendid retinue. Upon his arrival, he instantly falls in love with Queen Guinevere, “la dame des dames et la fontaine de biauté” (*Lancelot* 7: 274), and one of the two adventures he subsequently undertakes as *le novel chevalier* is defending the Lady of Nohaut and her land from the invasion of the king of Northumberland.

Both these motifs, however, are eventually undermined and left uncompleted. When the long-delayed revenge is finally fulfilled at the end of *Lancelot Proper*, Lancelot yields his claim for Gaul to his half-brother Hector and his cousin Lionel, denouncing landed comfort as detrimental to the pursuit of chivalry. Unlike typical heroes of the exile-and-return romance, he and Bors, another cousin of his, prefer to remain a “povres hom et bons chevaliers” than to be a “riches rois recreanz” (6: 170). Lancelot's story departs from the typical Fair Unknown plotline, as well: his quest does not result in the foundation of a new dynasty away from home through a marriage to a rich, beautiful heiress; he, instead, loves Guinevere, who is his sovereign's wife and thus neither available for a legal union or able to re-enfranchise him. What Lancelot has to

learn amid the plethora of adventures and marvels, therefore, is to suppress and overcome territorial ambition and dynastic motivation, which characterize both types of romance heroes described above.

Such unmarried, seemingly anti-feudal lifestyle is odd because most adventures are either erotic or feudal or both by nature. Love and property are everywhere to take up for a *preudome* noble and valiant enough, and often handily combined in a single person. Thus the Lady of Nohaut, upon the king of Northumberland's withdrawal, "offered [Lancelot] herself and her land [li et sa terre], as he might wish" (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 73), and the Lady of Malehaut, another *femme sole* with a power to enfranchise, "greatly desired to find out who [Lancelot] was and where he had placed his heart, and would have liked it to be in hers" (2: 125).¹¹⁾ Again, it is in the same context that the Lady of Roestoc lamented her failure to detain Gawain, confessing that he was "the person she had most loved in all the world" (2: 169).¹²⁾ So is it that the Lord of the Estroite Marche offered Hector both his land and only daughter after the latter successfully championed his cause against Marganor (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 193; *Lancelot* 8: 306–307). He is looking for the "chevaliers de si grant riqueche ou de si grant proeche" who can protect his patrimony and perpetuate his lineage:

I have been in such anguish all my life; now I'm very old, and nothing else in all the world gives me such sorrow as the fact that there will be no one after me to maintain this castle as well as I have maintained it, for my only child is a beautiful and sensible daughter, who could already have three

11) "moult se poroffri, li et sa terre, a son voloi" (*Lancelot* 7: 304); "si volsist moult volentiers savoir qui il estoit et en quel lieu il avoit mis son cuer et bien volsist que che fust en li" (8: 35).

12) "la riens en cest mont que ele avoit plus aimee" (*Lancelot* 8: 209).

children, given her age, but I don't want to marry her off until *a knight of great worth or great power* comes along, upon whom she would be well bestowed and who could honorably maintain this castle after me. (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 186; my Italics)¹³⁾

The Lord of the Estroite Marche is thus beleaguered by a problem common to heirless chatelains and unattached chatelaines abounding in Arthurian landscape. The world of adventures Lancelot and his likes roam about, therefore, is basically the same as the one inhabited by the Fair Unknowns, or rather male Cinderellas: what unfolds before the eyes of a young knight-errant is a terrain of unlimited opportunities, where *li et sa terre* await his magic kiss, dormant in the keep of a forlorn castle, besieged by the irksome and noxious briers of suitors, pretenders, and usurpers.

A hallmark of a better knight, however, is an ability to remain aloof from propertied women, or property personified as women. Lancelot's entire career is, in fact, a never-ending series of heroic efforts to ward off all other women—most of whom are coupled with properties—to stay loyal to one and only Guinevere. The same is true for Hector, who, as Kennedy observes, “takes Lancelot's place in the main narrative as a young knight and lover in the process of establishing his reputation” during his half-brother's absence (232). Even Gawain, who is not committed to any single woman and obviously less rigorous in sexual discipline than Lancelot and Hector, manages to evade the

13) “En tel angoisse ai esté des que je ving en terre tant que sui mais tous viex ne je n'ai el monde si grant duel comme j'ae de ce qu'il n'ert après moi qui cest castel maintiegne si bien comme je l'ai maintenu, car je n'ai de tous enfans que une fille moult bele et moult sage qui peust ja avoir .III. enfans par eage ne je ne la voeil marier dusqu'a tant que uns chevaliers de si grant riqueche ou de si grant proeche viegne ou ele fust bien emploie et qui après moi maintenist chest chastel a honor” (*Lancelot* 8: 279).

Lady of Roestoc's desperate courtship. This ideal of knighthood, of which Lancelot is the epitome, sustains *Lancelot Proper*, and, in successively loosened forms, the later Arthurian prose cycles—especially their central, more secular branches such as the Prose *Tristan* and *Palamedes*. A bizarre example of this impoverishing practice of knighthood is le Chevalier a la Cote Mautailleie in the Prose *Tristan*. While Malory's La Cote Male Tayle is happily invested with a bride and a castle (Malory 476), his French namesake is not so lucky, at least to the eyes of a worldly-wise reader. The Chevalier neither marries la Demoisele Mesdisant nor secures any landed franchise. His adventure ends abruptly with an ascetic overtone symptomatic of the Old French courtly romance. Lancelot is offered the Chastel Nestor but once again satisfied to be a "povres hom et bons chevaliers": "'Lords,' said he, 'know well that in this country there is no land that I want to keep for myself. I am a knight-errant; for no adventure in the world will I stay here or elsewhere'" (*Roman de Tristan* 3: 88; my translation).¹⁴ Instead, he encourages the inhabitants of the castle to choose their lord among his four companions, one of whom is le Chevalier a la Cote Mautailleie. They elect a knight better proven than the youthful Chevalier, as Lancelot heads back towards King Arthur's court. The severely wounded Chevalier a la Cote Mautailleie, however, is left behind, nursing his battered body, still landless and wifeless *à la mode Française*, after his share of adventure is completed.

Compared with the Chevalier's seemingly purposeless life, Lancelot's appears to be far more unified and meaningful. It is for the love of Guinevere that he renounces everything valuable in this world and next. His life is no less

14) "'Seignor,' fait il, 'or sachiez bien qu'en cest païs n'a nule terre que je por moi vousisse retenir. Je sui chevaliers erranz; por nule aventure del monde je ne remendroie ne ci ne aillors.'"

arduous and painful, though. He abandons his patrimony and duty to revenge, passes over the hopes of conjugal stability, and denies the comfort of a “riches rois recreanz.” He is even deprived of a celestial privilege to achieve the Grail on account of his love, let alone a chance to be *le meilleur chevalier du monde*. He can accept no woman’s offer of “friendship” since he has only one lady in his mind, but, unfortunately, he is isolated from her, too, not only because he has to quest as a knight-errant away from the court where she resides, but also because she and her body permanently belong elsewhere. Though he is a jousting *par excellence*, life on the road is not always easy and pleasant to him, either, for he pines away most of the time in a remote dungeon, captured in turn by all kinds of villains and sorceresses—including Morgan le Fay, who is resourceful enough to trap him twice. The Lady of the Lake’s shield that Lancelot takes up during his first spell of madness, in this sense, becomes an effective symbol of his dilemma. While he is wearing it around his neck on a sling, he is perfectly sane but it torments him; as soon as he takes it off, however, he gets insane again (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 231; *Lancelot* 8: 455-57). Love is like carrying such magic shield for Lancelot: the weight of it is too tormenting to bear, but he cannot be himself without it. Few other medieval romances are more erotic than those of Lancelot, which is true. But what other stories of erotic love could be more ascetic than his? In sacrificing all else in self-imposed penance and poverty for the sake of one love that means everything, erotic love pursued by Lancelot approaches the gist of religious monasticism, paradoxical as it may sound. It is exactly in this context that the oxymoron of “erotic asceticism” becomes a term apropos to define the form of heterosexual relationship prized in the Old French courtly romance.

Guinevere’s barren body further elucidates the problematic nature of courtly love as erotic asceticism. Barrenness of adulterous relationship in courtly

literature, as Georges Duby points out, might have been caused by the concern that “bastardy was too serious a matter to be treated lightly in literature,” or that “people were too afraid of it to use it as a subject for a tale” (*Knight* 222). More important to our purpose, however, is the awareness that Guinevere’s barrenness places her once again vis-à-vis with Galehot, another barren body in love with Lancelot. This, in turn, reminds us of the barrenness of Lancelot’s life. The object of his lifelong quest proves to be hardly differentiated from the subject by whom he has been objectified as “la rien que je plus aim” (*Lancelot* 8: 93) and from whom he has longed to escape unconsciously—at least by the feudal standard of the medieval romance, in which femininity is equated with double fertility in procreation and enfranchisement. Guinevere’s twofold sterility, then, threatens her feminine identity, as well as her value as an object of feudalized masculine desire. The boundary between heteronormativity and homoeroticism is again being blurred; so is the one between masculinity and femininity.

3. A Reality Check

This valorization of barren sexuality espoused by a categorical denouncement of all other socio-cultural currencies might be an ideological discourse addressed to the group of landless bachelors whom Georges Duby identifies as the youths, or *juvenes*. According to Duby, the *ordo* of youths included both unmarried eldest sons and the younger sons who were, necessitated by primogeniture, “condemned to a prolonged ‘youth’” (“Youth” 118) and thus led a life of vagabondage prone to violence and promiscuity—including sodomy, of course (115n). They were the primary audience of the twelfth-century chanson and romance, so goes his argument, which were intended

to beautify their nomadic lifestyle and discipline their excessive virility. Duby suggests, however, that their status began to change near the end of the twelfth century, when more younger sons were allowed to marry thanks to the increased revenues of aristocratic families (*Knight* 274-78). How well-versed Duby was in the courtly romances of the following century is uncertain, but it *is* certain that in no place else is the presence of the “youths” felt more strongly than in the thirteenth-century prose cycles. The earlier episodes of *Lancelot Proper* are, in fact, inscribed with concerns about poor *bachelers*, a term that indicates the aristocratic males who are “not only young and unmarried but, more particularly, landless” (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 118n) and, therefore, corresponds exactly to Duby’s description of *juvenes*. Thus “li legier bachelier et li povre homme” populate the tournaments (*Lancelot* 7: 424), and “moult li povre homme” are eager to break lances on both sides during Galehot’s war against Arthur,¹⁵⁾ while Arthur is advised by a wise man to take care of any “poor landless knight [le povre bachelor] whom Poverty has in bondage and who has not forgotten knightly prowess” (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 122).¹⁶⁾ What is most interesting, however, is the fact that Lancelot fashions himself as “uns povres bachelers” (*Lancelot* 8: 8) and is recognized, in turn, as a “povre hom” (8: 117) who “had not a penny’s worth of land” (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 230).¹⁷⁾

Lancelot thus emerges as a paragon of young bachelors, and what his example does ideologically is obvious. No other social group is, of course,

15) Samuel N. Rosenber’s translation goes respectively as follows: “lively young knights and landless men” (*Lancelot-Grail* 2: 105); “the landless knight” (2: 129). Considering social contexts, these might be accurate, if not literal, renderings of the terms.

16) “le povre bachelor que poverté avra en son lien et qui proece de cors n’avra mie oublié” (*Lancelot* 8: 19).

17) “li n’a denree de terre” (*Lancelot* 8: 453).

farther away from the “profane” asceticism he practices than the *juvenes*, but no other is in a direr need of disciplinary measures than them, either. The romances of Lancelot, arguably the purest brand of courtly narratives known to the French Middle Ages, of which *Lancelot Proper* is an exemplar, glorify the state of bachelorhood in which an exclusion from feudal customs and resources is prized and perpetuated in anticipation of an erotic conquest. The conquest itself is heavily prescribed, too, as it is imagined on the remote, sterile female body in the network of disenfranchising asceticism. What is “subverted and mystified,” therefore, is not female desire alone; male desire is also subverted and mystified. As “the female subject vanishes,” so does the male subject (Krueger 65).¹⁸ Then, it is not entirely an unimaginable scenario that Lancelot is indeed a nobody, “uns povres bachelers” without any splendid ancestry to boast: it should be noted that the watery element of the lake where he is educated and where his identity is shaped is an illusion created by the Lady of the Lake’s enchantment (*Lancelot* 7: 44). Without this illusion, in which is programmed his future as “Lancelos del Lac, li fiex au rois Ban de Benoÿc,” life would have been much more painful and much less rewarding to him, and also to any bachelors who would like to pattern their careers after him.

What greets a “young” knight-errant after the dreaded moment of disenchantment, however, is nothing but hard reality—the deep, throbbing wounds of a Chevalier a la Cote Mautailleie *sans guerdon*, or the fifty-five-year-old body of a Lancelot laboring to out-joust the seventy-six-year-old Gawain in a combat of life and honor, still wifeless and landless (*Mort* 204), or the “friendly” kiss and embrace of a Galehot, who is

18) Krueger is commenting on Chétien de Troyes’s *Le chevalier de la charette*. Her observation, however, can be applied with little reservation to *Lancelot Proper*, which is an encyclopedic expansion of Chétien’s romance.

in his turn ready to sacrifice anything for the sake of a friend and lover in his wildest fantasy. After all, what else can be more erotic in the life of a fictional knight-errant than a friendly but fierce struggle of sweat and sinew against a worthy foe, in which one body is unavoidably intertwined with another? Then, it might be a poignantly realistic ending, I would argue, for Lancelot to be reunited body to body with Galehot after all those years.

When the medieval West invented a way to eroticize its cultural front in the late eleventh century, compared to which “the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature”—so goes C. S. Lewis’ unforgettable dictum (4)—what was eroticized in consequence was not only heterosexual desire thitherto disregarded in literature, but also the homosocial bond between male warriors, which had been at the very heart of Germanic ideology and imagination from the pre-literary past to the age of *Beowulf* and of *La Chanson de Roland*. When Wealhtheow and Aude were eroticized, so were Wiglaf and Olivier. Even in the eroticized versions of heroic narratives, however, it is the homosocial—now homoerotic—relationship between man and man that is accepted without question and stays intact up to the very last moment. Wealhtheows and Audes, for all the rhetorical camouflage, remain curiously objectified and marginalized in this process of transformation. The same is true for an imaginary warrior-knight excluded by destiny from homosocial gift-giving culture, lacking Hyelacs and Charlemagnes—both are father-figures, anyway—to enfranchise him. He does not have many options available, one of which is a typically poetic and romantic one we are already well acquainted with: he “must again and again send his weary heart out over the woven waves,” caught in a dream of “embracing and kissing his liege [lady] and laying his hands and his heads on [her] knee,” even though she is not able to “protect” him as his non-existent male patron would be.¹⁹⁾

주제어: 란슬롯, 귀네비어, 켈러헛, 중세 로맨스, 궁정식 사랑, 에로티시즘, 동성애, 금욕주의, 가부장제, 봉건제

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19) “sendan sceal swiþe geneahhe / ofer waplama gebind werigne sefa” (*Wanderer* 557); “he his mondryhten / clyppe on cysse ond on cneo lecge /hond ond heafod” (41-43a). E. Talbot Donaldson’s translations are quoted from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; emendations are, of course, mine.

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Between Guinevere and Galehot: Homo/eroticism in the Lancelot-Grail Cycle

Abstract

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A homoerotic reading of the thirteenth-century Prose *Lancelot*, arguably the best and most sophisticated of all medieval romances ever written, lays bare a hitherto-disregarded ideological stance of courtly love. Through the first half of the Prose *Lancelot*, which is known as “Lancelot without the Grail,” Lancelot’s love for Guinevere is counterbalanced by Galehot’s equally passionate infatuation with Lancelot. While exploiting the well-established romantic rivalry between love and friendship to the fullest extent, this juxtaposition of seemingly incompatible erotic orientations, at the same time, points towards ideological proximity between the quasi-religious cult of erotic love and the celebration of male-male bonding in chivalric society. Although both love and friendship appear to be sensationally erotic and disturbingly antisocial in the Prose *Lancelot*, they eventually prove to be conducive to the patriarchal and feudal status quo since they urge the involved to sacrifice all worldly desires and ambitions for the sake of purely psychological reward, thus endorsing a curious lifestyle that might be dubbed as “erotic asceticism.” This eroticized ideal of asceticism objectifies and marginalizes not only the object of erotic desire (i.e. the lady) but also its seeming subject (i.e. the knight-lover), who, in turn, becomes the object of his friend’s erotic desire. What is “subverted and mystified,” therefore, is not female desire alone; male desire is also subverted and mystified. As “the female subject vanishes,” so does the male subject of romantic adventure, which Georges Duby has identified with the *juvenes*, the

group of landless bachelor knights in feudal society who were “condemned to a prolonged ‘youth’” by the law of primogeniture. It is arguable, therefore, that a “well-wrought urn” of courtly romance creates a safely contained world of fantasy for both aristocratic women and “young” bachelors, who are institutionally excluded from patriarchal and feudal resources and privileges.

Key Words

Lancelot, Guinevere, Galehot, medieval romance, courtly love, eroticism, homoeroticism, asceticism, patriarchy, feudalism