'A Mayde, and Last of Youre Blood': Galahad's Asexuality and its Significance in *Le Morte Darthur*

MEGAN ARKENBERG

Reading the 'virginité and chastité' of Galahad in Malory's *Morte Darthur* as *asexuality*, a subjectivity defined by lack of sexual desire, reveals a logic at work in the text that rejects a futurity based on desire and heterosexual reproduction. (MA)

In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Galahad appears in Camelot on the feast of Pentecost garbed in a coat 'of rede sendell' and a mantel 'that was furred with ermyne.'[1] A new knight's red garment, Geoffroi de Charny explains in his *Book of Chivalry* (c.1350), signifies that he is 'pledged to shed [his] blood' in defense of Christ and to be prepared for 'the death which awaits [him, though he] knows not at what hour,' while white represents 'chastity and purity of the flesh.'[2] Galahad, however, does not entirely conform to de Charny's terms of knighthood. Both his life and death are unmarked by bloodshed—the latter event coming at the hour of his choosing—and his virginity, as I will argue throughout this paper, seems to result not from self-regulation or morally superior chastity but from an intrinsic lack of sexual desire.[3] By wearing red and white, Galahad does not appropriate these colors' symbolic value to indicate his own acts of bloodshed and state of chastity; instead, he foreshadows the significance these colors will acquire later in the Grail Quest, when they become connected to the Tree of Life that Eve carried out of Eden. The Tree, which 'becam rede' when Abel was murdered beneath it, was initially 'as whyght as ony snowe … in tokyn a maydyn planted hit' (2.990.31–32/17.5). Not bloodshed and chastity, but death and virginity—the sexless 'maydenhode' of Eve in Eden before the Fall—appear symbolically in Galahad's garments. Throughout 'The Tale of the Sankgreal,' death and virginity remain inexorably linked to each other and to Galahad.

Indeed, Galahad's virginity is conspicuous within Malory's text because it manifests itself not as the result of moral virtue but as a constitutive *absence* of sexual desire. This absence differentiates Galahad from all other Malorian virgins, including Perceval, whose virginity is threatened by sexual temptation from a 'fyende' disguised as a gentlewoman (2.920.4/14.10), and Elaine of

Astolat, who dies a 'clene mayden' only because Launcelot refuses to become her paramour (2.1091.7/18.19). Galahad's virginity is neither hetero- nor homosexuality held in check, nor is it an accident of circumstances. Instead, *virginity* names Galahad's lack of sexual desire as a significant part of his identity.[4] This essay reads Galahad as an asexual figure and his 'virginité and chastité' (2.946.27-28/16.3) as *asexuality*, a subjectivity defined by lack of sexual desire. Used in this sense—as a category of identity and as a form of being—asexuality has been articulated and gained visibility only within the last decade.[5] A thorough exploration of asexuality's implications for literary study has yet to emerge, despite what Megan Milks and Karli June Cerankowski identify as asexuality's 'clear connections with theories of gender and sexuality.'[6] My essay supplies a small portion of the 'concentrated study of asexuality' in the humanities that, according to Milks and Cerankowski, 'the current historical situation demands.' Specifically, it applies the concept of asexuality to literary study, contributing to the project of exploring the potential for an *asexual reading* to generate new understandings of canonical texts.[7]

Medieval readers and writers would, of course, have been unfamiliar with the term 'asexuality,' which responds to the conceptual framework of sexual identities that includes the terms 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality.' As David Halperin has shown, these terms have specific linguistic histories tied to the emergence of perceived ontological categories.[8] Carla Freccero succinctly captures the position taken by Halperin and other queer historicists on the use of contemporary identity labels for historical figures: 'the past was different from the present and ... presentist categories for past sexualities did not apply.'[9] In departing from this position and choosing to use the term 'asexual' to interpret a medieval character, I draw on recent work at the intersection of queer theory and medieval studies that has demonstrated the productiveness of anachronistic identification and *reading unhistorically* to satisfy the needs and desires of communities in the present. In their introduction to *Premodern Sexualities*, Freccero and Aranye Fradenburg question the injunction to resist 'the joy of finding counterparts in the past' and argue that 'we should not discount the oppositional potential even of grand narratives and continuist histories' which connect contemporary queer experiences to premodern ones.[10] Similarly, Carolyn Dinshaw defends 'a queer historical impulse' to make connections between present understandings of sexuality and 'lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then,' suggesting that this anachronistic impulse has an ethical dimension in that it 'extends the resources for self- and community building into even the distant past.'[11] I build upon these claims by arguing that reading asexuality anachronistically into historical texts can contribute to contemporary efforts at asexual community building. Such a goal links the study of asexuality to

queer studies, which Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner characterize as aspiring to create 'queer publics' and 'new contexts . . . radical in the aspiration to live another way now, here.'[12]

Just as history can suggest ways of being that do not conform to current frameworks of sexuality, the present offers ways of being that were unrecognized in the past. Thus, understanding the past in terms of the present can confer intelligibility on what previous analyses have found unintelligible. Galahad's virginity provides an example of a subjectivity that remains anomalous even when its historical context is taken into account. While it is clear that Galahad modeled the Christian virtue of chastity to medieval audiences, the complete absence of sexual desire remains unaccounted for in medieval discourses of virginity. Thomas Aquinas argued that in order for virginity to be considered virtuous, it must be chosen voluntarily.[13] However, Galahad's virginity goes unchallenged over the course of the text and is not presented as an active choice. As strident a champion of virginity as St. Jerome assumes that all humans, chaste virgins included, experience sexual desire and must overcome temptation through strength of will and dedication to God:

> It is hard for the human soul to avoid loving something, and our mind must of necessity give way to affection of one kind or another. The love of the flesh is overcome by the love of the spirit. Desire is quenched by desire.[14]

Jerome does not seem to consider the possibility of subjects like Galahad who do not experience a 'love of the flesh' that must be overcome. Karmen MacKendrick's analysis of the erotics of medieval asceticism shows that a religious subject's self-denial first necessitates that the subject experience desire in order to triumphantly resist its temptation. Tracing a genealogy of textual examples, MacKendrick observes that 'the ascetic in fact courts temptation.'[15] This dynamic of resistance does not appear in Malory's Galahad, whose virginity Donald Hoffman describes as 'untainted by even a repressed or sublimated desire.'[16] Reading Galahad as asexual emphasizes the way in which his particular subjectivity is non-normative even in the religious and historical context of *Le Morte Darthur*'s production.[17] This opposition to normativity points to another intersection between asexuality and queer studies; as Berlant and Warner explain, 'queer work wants to address the full range of power-ridden normativities of sex,' including the entrenched norms surrounding reproduction.[18] Indeed, it is within *Le Morte Darthur*'s approach to reproduction that Galahad's asexuality is most disruptively queer.

In *Le Morte Darthur*, the link between normative sexuality and reproduction is dramatized by the shifting colors of the Tree of Life. As Perceval's sister explains to the Grail Knights during the interval aboard the ship of Solomon, the wood of this tree changed color according to the changing circumstances of the first human family. When God commands Adam to 'know hys wyff flyshly, as nature requyred,' the previously white Tree 'felle to grene os ony

grasse' (2.990.33–35/17.5). The green of sexuality, symbolically placed between the white of virginity and blood red of death, unites virginity *with* death in opposition to reproduction. Medieval virgins provoked anxiety by failing to bring forth new generations and thus marking the deaths of their family lines; this anxiety emerges in an incident in Malory's French source, the *Queste del Saint Graal,* when Galahad and Perceval come upon the graves of virgins who were sacrificed to cure a gentlewoman of leprosy. 'Many a great family,' the text laments, had been 'blotted out through the maidens' deaths.'[19] By foregrounding the young women's status as 'maidens,' the text leaves interestingly ambiguous whether it is their deaths or their virginity (and consequential lack of descendants) that are to blame for eliminating the future of these lineages. Jerome's celebration of virginity similarly engages with anxieties about its potential to end family lines, or even, 'if the desire for virginity were general,' the entire human race.[20] Interestingly, despite valorizing virginity as a permanent state in the figures of Galahad and Perceval, Malory's account of the Grail Quest never overtly attempts to defend virginity from its associations with unproductiveness and death. Instead, it embraces these associations.

Through his asexuality, Galahad disrupts the temporal narrative that sees sexual reproduction as the guarantor of futurity. Recent queer scholarship reveals the opposition between queerness and reproductive futurism, and this work helps us understand how Galahad's asexuality functions within *Le Morte Darthur*. For example, Lee Edelman frames reproductive futurism as the heteronormative social order's 'pervasive invocation of the Child' generated through heterosexual reproduction 'as the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value.'[21] He argues that queerness figures 'the place of the social order's death drive,' the position that opposes not merely the fact of reproduction but reproduction's entire ideological basis, which is the moral value of the future itself.[22] Reproductive futurism provides narratives for normative sexual desires in which these desires, fulfilled in a socially-sanctioned way, produce measurable effects on the world and reward the desiring subject with a form of continuity with the future. In *Le Morte Darthur,* forms of futurity are varied, encompassing famous deeds, mystical revelations, and the worship of future generations, in addition to long-standing bloodlines and noble descendants.[23] Yet, as I will argue, these diverse forms of futurity in the *Morte* are consistently generated by sexual desire.

As an asexual subject, Galahad does not participate in this narrative of desire, producing neither the perpetuation of his lineage through reproduction nor conventionally knightly deeds. Instead, he emerges in the Grail Quest as a force against productivity and against futurity, a force that pushes for the termination of worldly objects. Dinshaw argues that 'queerness . . . has a temporal dimension,' and indeed, Galahad's asexuality makes him occupy a

separate temporality than that of the other characters in *Le Morte Darthur*, where sexual desire opens subjects to future potentials and possibilities.[24] My reading of Malory's text extends Aranye Fradenburg's claim that desire is 'the void inside that is pushing us on into the future by asking to be filled' by showing that sexual desire is at the root of subjects' access to futurity in Malory's world. Therefore, it is appropriate that the asexual Galahad seems wholly unconcerned with the future.[25] While it is true that for a medieval Christian audience, Galahad's holiness destines him for eternal life in heaven—a prospect that receives limited attention within Malory's text—Galahad's failure to contribute to the future of the Arthurian world makes him a powerful force of negativity. Yet his attribution as 'the beste knight of the worlde' (2.856.14–15/13.2) reveals Malory's privileging of this very negativity. Like the Siege Perilous, the 'voyde' that prevents the Round Table from being 'fulfilled' (2.791.6,/11.1), Galahad, void of desire, disrupts the fantasy of desire's productivity or potential continuity with the future. Instead, Galahad reveals *Le Morte Darthur*'s positive valuation of termination, death, and being in absence of futurity.

'ADREAD TO BE KNOWN'

Recent scholars of *Le Morte Darthur* have fixated on—almost fetishized—Galahad's unintelligibly. For instance, Kenneth J. Tiller argues that 'Galahad represents the allegorical text itself,' and 'Galahad is, in effect, unsignifiable, unknowable, concealed, and finally, undefinable,' while Kathleen Coyne Kelly claims that '[Galahad] resists any final or complete reading.'[26] I suggest that this unintelligibility results from Galahad's disruption of the normative narratives of desires that structure action and identity in Malory's text. Within *Le Morte Darthur* (and the medieval romance genre in general), a subject confronts many possible avenues of desire, which I label anachronistically as heterosexual, homosocial, and homoerotic. In figures such as Perceval, sexual desire may be present but ascetically sublimated. [27] Each of these forms of desire confers recognizable knightly identity. As Donald Hoffman argues, 'Malory seems to agree with Freud that man is constituted by his sexuality, although Malory would probably be more comfortable with the Augustinian formulation that man is defined by what he loves.'[28] Peggy McCracken similarly suggests that sexual desire confers identity while 'the subject that does not desire' occupies an 'anomalous and ambiguously defined position' in medieval romance, where it is clear 'not only that certain kinds of desire are normative … but that *desire itself is normative*' (my emphasis).[29] I would add that one of the romance genre's most powerful strategies for normalizing sexual desire lies in its linking of desire to productivity, specifically the production of future knightly conduct, or what Malory might characterize as 'mervaylous dedys' (2.526.8/9.31). Galahad's asexuality removes him from possible paths to

normative identity and places his performance of knighthood in opposition to the actions of knights like Gawain, who seems perpetually in search of future 'mervayles adventures' (1.103.24/3.5, 2.942.1–2/16.1).

For some modern readers, Galahad's anomalous identity and disinterest in futurity render him 'curiously static,' 'bland,' and even 'so perfect that he bores readers.'[30] Within the *Morte Darthur* itself, however, Galahad and his disruptive rejection of the future are in fact privileged and celebrated. On its own, the assertion that Galahad does not experience sexual desire is not a new one.[31] However, before exploring in-depth the ways in which Galahad's asexuality disrupts conventional narratives of desire and reproduction, I would like to address the range of erotic desires in the *Morte Darthur* that Galahad does not possess, thereby establishing his asexuality. Throughout this discussion, I hope to demonstrate the potential of the subject without desire to disrupt expectations of productivity and to show how this subject is supported, rather than elided or presented as unviable, by Malory's text.

Knightly conduct in medieval romance is largely produced and shaped by desire for women, such as the beautiful and vulnerable maidens who inspire valiant deeds. Sir Gareth of Orkney provides an illustrative example; at the request of Lynet, a 'fayre damesell,' he undertakes 'strange adventures' to rescue (and ultimately marry) her sister, Lyones (1.296.15–16/7.2). Scholars of medieval romance have commented on the productive role of female characters. Geraldine Heng argues that *Le Morte Darthur* contains a 'feminine subtext' in which women provide 'the enabling conditions for activity,' while McCracken emphasizes that this generative relationship between women and knights is continuous, describing it as a 'cycle in which chivalric prowess is rewarded with sexual love that, in turn, inspires chivalric prowess.'[32] These commentaries reinforce the idea that action in the *Morte Darthur* is structured through what I have been calling narratives of desire: sexual desire between a knight and a lady produces the whole range of knightly undertakings. Indeed, the prominent portion of the Pentecostal Oath dedicated to a knight's obligations to the feminine serves to underscore women's role as the producers of chivalric conduct. As Dorsey Armstrong has argued, the Oath constructs feminine vulnerability and subjugation as the grounds for chivalric activity.[33] Arthur charges his knights 'allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes socour: [and] strengthe hem in hir ryghtes' (1.120.20–22/3.15). In this passage, succoring women and defending women's rights are the only positive duties included amid the oath's prohibitions against murder, treason, and wrongful quarrel. In the microcosmic vision of the chivalric world expressed by the Pentecostal Oath, service to women undergirds the only possible actions offered to knights, rendering desire for women necessary to knightly activity.

Considering the prominent female presence in this oath, it should not surprise us that the vow, sworn every year 'at the hyghe feste of Pentecoste' (1.120.27/3.15) goes unmentioned in Malory's account of the Pentecost on which Galahad appears in Arthur's court. Here, Galahad's presence moves Arthur's knights to replace their vow to defend women with a vow to 'laboure in the queste of the Sankgreall' (2.866.7–8/13.7). Furthermore, the hermit Nacien makes it clear that these two vows are mutually exclusive, forbidding the knights 'sworne in the queste' to 'lede lady nother jantilwomen' with them (2.868.15–869.1/13.8). This prohibition against female companionship reflects an attempt by more worldly knights to appropriate a performance of knighthood that comes naturally to Galahad, a performance that disrupts the conventional narratives of chivalry by excluding both women and sexual desire. In fact, Galahad's mode of knighthood rejects the productivity inherent in the cycles McCracken and Heng describe, in which great achievements fuel sexual desire, which in turns inspires future achievements. Galahad's most impressive knightly endeavor, the achievement of the Grail, is emphatically terminal and nonproductive. Shortly after his ultimate vision of the Grail, Galahad dies and the vessel is born 'up into hevyn,' having conferred no tangible benefits—and abundant tangible destruction—upon the fellowship of knights who labored in quest of it (2.1035.19/17.22).

Galahad also avoids the homosocial, potentially homoerotic encounters with other men that constitute so much of the *Morte Darthur*'s vision of knighthood. Malory, somewhat unusually, assigns male fellowship a productive role similar to that of knights' sexual desire for women.[34] Knights seeking 'adventure' might journey in pairs, as Uwain and Bagdemagus do when they travel together before the adventure of Galahad's shield (2.877.19/8.9), and Gawain and Ector accompany each other to the 'auncyant chapel' where they both receive visions (2.941.27/16.1). In the background of the Grail Quest, the great love between King Evelake and Josephé, the son of Joseph of Arimathea, provides the foundation for future events by contributing to the conversion of pagan Britain 'to the Crystyn feythe' (2.880.29–30/13.10). It is perhaps with the just-recounted story of Evelake and Josephé in mind that Bagdemagus' squire, a king's son hoping for great achievements of his own, begs for permission to accompany Josephé's descendent Galahad on his adventures. Galahad, however, must refuse his request—not because Bagdemagus' squire is unworthy of the saintly virgin knight's companionship, but because Galahad has no desire whatsoever for companions. 'If I wolde have ony felyshyp,' Galahad offers reassuringly, 'I wolde nat refuse you' (2.881.27/13.11).

'The Tale of the Sankgreal' abundantly reiterates that Galahad will *not* have any fellowship. While Donald Hoffman argues that Galahad's quest for the Grail is part of a strategy to '[avoid] women altogether,' it is worth noting that

Galahad hardly appears eager for the companionship of men.[35] At one point, he actively flees the company of Perceval and Lancelot, 'adrad to be knowyn' (2.893.11–12/13.17). The verb 'knouen' can indicate both 'to recognize' and 'to be familiar with.'[36] I suggest that Galahad fears to be recognized by the other knights because he wishes to avoid the intimacy and the familiarity that this recognition would engender. While other critics have observed Galahad's tendency to avoid homosocial intimacy, so far as I am aware, none have yet connected it to a rejection of erotic desire.[37] I feel justified in doing so because the male companionship offered to Galahad often carries a prominent erotic charge. Gawain, for instance, places himself in a subject position similar to that of the four queens who desire Lancelot for his 'worthynesse' when he expresses the desire to accompany Galahad 'for all mervaylous adventures sir Galahad enchevith' (1.257.25/6.3, 2.890.23–24/13.16). It is also important to acknowledge the erotic charge of the gaze of which Galahad is so often the object.[38] Lancelot's first encounter with Galahad emphasizes the boy's beauty and the knight's searching gaze: '[Lancelot] behylde thys yonge squyer and saw hym seemly and demure as a dove, with all maner of good fetures' (2.854.19–20/13.1). Elsewhere, the visuality of Evelake's desire to 'se [Galahad] opynly' accompanies a physical desire to 'kysse hym' (2.908.28/14.3).

Physical exchanges between men in the *Morte Darthur* are rarely so affectionate, however, and the most pronounced opportunity for homoerotic encounters comes through battle. While Malory seems reluctant to detail heterosexual encounters, he rarely skimps on the details of split skulls and dripping or spurting blood that accompany battle between men. Malory writes of Lancelot and Guenevere, 'whether they were abed other at other maner of disportis, me lyste nat thereof make no mencion' (3.1165.11–13/20.3), and more generally, he resorts to 'clippen' as the appropriate verb, which the *MED* defines as 'to embrace' but also 'as euphemism: to have sexual intercourse with.'[39] My point here is not the euphemism but the brevity. Malory appears to take more pleasure in imagining the bodily details of battles than those of overtly sexual encounters. As a result, the knights in Malory's combat scenes take on an intensely physical, embodied presence. Zeikowitz argues convincingly that medieval male readers could experience homoerotic identification with the knights whose 'handsomeness, physical strength, endurance, and prowess' they were asked to envision.[40] Kelly pushes the eroticism of combat scenes even further by turning injury into a symbolic sexual act, claiming that what a knight 'won't do in bed, he will do in combat; i.e., either be penetrated, or better, penetrate.'[41] While this variety of symbolic reading may appear stretched, I would point out that *Le Morte Darthur* itself intertwines images of sexuality and wounding, as when Perceval 'rooffe hymselff thorow the thygh' to punish the near-loss of his virginity (2.919.14/14.10), or when the text on the sheath of Galahad's sword

promises that its bearer 'shall never be shamed of hys body nother wounded to the dethe' (2.986.17–18/17.3).

Galahad, of course, is never wounded. His body and his virginity seem equally unassailable, equally resistant to eroticization. Even as the triumphant aggressor, he receives less detailed analysis than Arthur or Lancelot when they occupy the same position. That is, when Galahad is fighting, we never see the ground 'all besparcled with bloode' or the smiting of a 'necke in sunder' as we do in Lancelot's gory encounter with Tarquin (1.267.16–17, 23/6.8–9). The lack of physical imagery in Galahad's battles mitigates some of the erotic charge that generally accompanies combat scenes in *Le Morte Darthur*. I find it significant, also, that the asexual Galahad rarely instigates battle. Unlike Bagdemagus, whose first interaction with the white knight is to '[dress] hys speare ayenst hym and brake hit upon [him],' Galahad approaches this same knight peacefully, while maintaining a physical and emotional distance: 'and everych salewed other curteysly' (2.878.8/13.9, 2.879.16/13.10). Later, when Galahad encounters Lancelot and Perceval in a waste forest, Lancelot dresses 'hys speare and brake hit upon sir Galahad,' exhibiting what we might characterize as a sexualized desire to penetrate the other man (2.892.34–35/13.17). In this instance, Galahad returns violence when it is offered, but after quickly overcoming both Lancelot and Perceval, he spurs his horse and rides 'a grete pace [fr]oward them,' avoiding, once more, the erotic potential of male companionship (2.893.13/13.17).

When we consider the productivity attached to this erotic potential and the parallel role of sexual desire for women in producing knightly conduct, we see that Galahad's avoidance of erotic desire also represents a rejection of futurity. Other knights' desires, as Fradenburg puts it, '[push them] on into the future,' at various times sending Gareth in quest of Lyones, Lancelot in pursuit of Guenevere, and Gawain perpetually in search of worship and new undertakings. Galahad's performance of knighthood, however, excludes the potential for tangible or sexual rewards, the 'worship' of future generations, or the possibility of future adventures. During the Grail Quest, Gawain experiences a vision that dramatizes the distinction between Galahad and the other knights of the Round Table. Failing to comprehend the nature of the quest, the other knights, driven by futurity, are 'bullis' seeking 'bettir pasture' (2.942.10–11/16.1). These knights approach the Grail as they have approached all other quests, guided by a fantasy of measurable outcomes and future benefits. But the Grail Quest, like Galahad, remains unintelligible on these terms. As Kenneth Tiller notes in a similar context, it is not 'a completely literal journey to lift a completely tangible covering off of a real cup.'[42] Just as the knights are ignorant of the process of achieving the Grail, their focus on futurity means that they cannot grasp the nature of the Grail's attainment; the quest ends not with miraculous revelations for the knights to carry back to

Arthur's court, but with Galahad's death in Sarras. 'The Tale of the Sankgreal' equates achievement with termination. So far as it presents the Grail as an object of desire, it celebrates the absence of futurity.

In other words, while Galahad effectively turns the conventions of intelligible knightly conduct inside-out, Malory's text continues to uphold him as an exemplary knight—in fact, 'the beste knight of the worlde' (2.856.14–15/13.2). This praise does not eliminate unintelligibility; when Mordrains hails Galahad as 'a clene virgyne above all knyghtes,' he suggests that while Galahad's virginity elevates him *over* other knights, at the same time it also prevents him from being *like* other knights, from being comprehensible on the same terms. Yet this unintelligibility further privileges Galahad by confirming him as an object of desire. As Tiller argues, 'the concealed Galahad becomes as much an object of the quest as the "preciously covered" Grail.'[43] Malory encourages this perception when he has Arthur praise Galahad for his ability to 'meve many good knyghtes to the queste of the Sankgreall' (2.862.17–18/13.4). Like any object of desire, Arthur's words suggest, Galahad inspires knightly conduct. This particular conduct has disastrous consequences, as Arthur prophetically laments: 'I am sure at this quest of the Sankgreall shall all ye of the Rounde Table departe, and never shall I se you agayne hole togydirs' (2.864.5–7/13.6). Yet the act of prophecy itself, and the intense mourning that it generates among the knights and ladies of Camelot, dignifies this approaching dissolution. In a similar way, Lancelot uses an acknowledgment of death's inevitability to make death in pursuit of the Grail appear desirable: 'For hit shall be unto us a grete honoure, and much more than we dyed in other placis, for of dethe we be syker' (2.867.10–12/13.8). The Grail Quest, which takes Galahad as much as the Grail as its object, promises termination, but it is for precisely this termination and absence of futurity that Galahad engenders desire.

'LAST OF MY LINEAGE'

What, then, makes Galahad 'the moste nobbelyste knight of the worlde' (2.796.2–3/11.3)? At least in part, Galahad's superiority is rooted in his overwhelmingly noble genealogy.[44] On his mother's side, he is of 'kynges linage and of the kynrede of Joseph of Aramathy' (2.859.12–13/13.3); on his father's side, he descends from 'seven kynges,' the Grail kings of Britain and France (2.928.22/15.3), and is of the 'nyneth degree frome oure Lord Jesu Cryst' (2.865.11/13.8) and 'laset knight of [King Solomon's] kynred' (2.994.13/17.7). Galahad's impressive lineage links him to great figures from Christian and British history stretching far back in time.[45] Yet his asexuality ensures that, as Plutarch has Iphicrates say of Harmonius, his nobility ends in him. Malory suggests a connection between Galahad's bloodline and his virginity in the instances where these elements are mentioned together.

For instance, Pelles foregrounds his own genealogy by introducing himself to Lancelot as 'cousin nyghe unto Joseph of Aramathy,' shortly before he schemes to bring about the conception of his grandson, 'a pusyll [virgin], which shulde be called sir Galahad' (2.794.5–6/11.2). At another moment, when Solomon hears a heavenly voice announce that 'there shall com a man which shall be a mayde, and laste of youre bloode,' it seems apparent that these two statuses—maidenhood and the end of a hereditary line—are equivalent (2.991.32-33/17.5). While never explicitly stated in the text, the idea that, in Martin Shichtman's words, virginity 'sounds the death knell for the future of genealogy,' surfaces in the numerous moments in which Malory displays Galahad's virginity and lineage together.[46]

While the equal valuation of virginity and genealogy initially appears contradictory, *Le Morte Darthur*'s embrace of termination makes the 'laste of [one's] bloode' a privileged status in itself. The specific circumstances of Galahad's conception challenge the privileging of normative reproduction, and at the same time, Galahad challenges reproduction's ideological basis—the value of futurity itself—by presenting death and termination as objects of desire. Other scholars have attempted to resolve the tension between virginity and lineage in 'The Tale of the Sankgreal' without questioning whether Malory places a positive valence on futurity. As a result, their interpretations find an inherent contradiction in the tale's ethics. Karen Cherewatuk, for example, claims that the tale's advocacy of chastity is greatly weakened by the double standard in which 'the *Sankgreal* also promotes fathering sons as natural and even redemptive.' According to this reading, the sexual sin of Lancelot and Elaine that results in Galahad's conception 'functions as the *felix culpa* of the Grail legend.'[47] Jennifer Looper examines the depiction of the original *felix culpa* in Malory's French source and concludes that

> Sexual contact is nevertheless depicted as necessary for reproduction of the species ... This 'fall' [from virginity] seems necessary and may even be glorified when the white tree [of life] turns green and begins to flower when Eve loses her virginity.[48]

I find it significant that the flowering which Looper interprets as glorifying procreative sexuality disappears from Malory's reworking of the 'Story of the Three Spindles.' Here, the Tree merely changes color from white to 'grene os ony grasse, and all that com oute of hit' (2.991.1/17.5). This absence of floral imagery is in fact symptomatic of a larger reversal of floral and arboreal symbolism within *Le Morte Darthur*, a reversal that is itself emblematic of the text's rejection of futurity. In Malory's text, flowers represent non-procreative virgins, while more worldly characters become equated with rotted or barren trees. Thus, Galahad is 'the floure of the lyly in whom virginité is signified' and 'the rose which ys the floure of all good vertu' (2.1025.13–15/17.18), and in Bors' vision, 'the two whyght floures signifieth two maydyns' which, when

their virginity is preserved, bring forth 'may floures and fruyte grete plenté' (2.968.12–13/16.13, 2.958.19–20/16.8).[49] Meanwhile, Lancelot is 'an olde rotyn tree' like the fig tree in Jerusalem 'that had levys and no fruyte' (2.898.19–20, 31–32/13.20), Gawain is 'so olde a tre' that he possesses 'neythir leeff, nor grasse, nor fruyte' (2.949.6–7/16.5), and Lionel is a 'worme-etyn and fyeble tree' (2.958.15/16.8). Both Lancelot and Gawain are fathers, yet in the ethos of the Grail Quest, children do not count as fruit.[50] Malory's work presents heterosexual reproduction, especially in connection with Galahad, as an overly complicated, unlucky affair with no lasting results. Reproduction becomes a source of shame, and even the noblest family tree desires not perpetuation but rather the arrival of its final scion, Galahad, who figures its termination.

Galahad's conception, easily one of the most complex accounts of procreation in Malory's work, demonstrates how fathering sons is neither natural nor redemptive. At her father's urging, Elaine uses sorcery to disguise herself as Guenevere, and Lancelot, believing that he has been given the opportunity to consummate his adulterous passion for the queen, goes to bed with Elaine. What I find especially striking about this encounter, and similar sexual encounters in the *Morte Darthur*, is how thoroughly contrived it is—how thoroughly, that is, the sexual activity that leads to conception is not presented as natural. Galahad's conception, like Arthur's at the beginning of the text, relies on adulterous desire, deception, and enchantment on the part of the parents. Furthermore, Pelles and Merlin orchestrate these encounters for the production of the prophesied children, foregrounding heterosexual desire's capacity to be externally generated and controlled.

Reproduction in *Le Morte Darthur* thus acquires unsavory correlations with scheming, sorcery, perverse desires, and above all, deception, dramatically lessening its ability to 'glorify' sexuality by association. The morning after, Lancelot reacts to the circumstances of Galahad's conception with utter despair, professing himself 'shamed' and raising his sword against the woman who has deceived him (2.795.26/11.3). He later describes this incident as 'ayenste my wylle' (2.804.9/11.7) and 'magry myne hede' (2.825.27/12.5), phrases that elsewhere indicate rape.[51] Elaine herself approaches conception as a cause for unease rather than celebration, going so far as to call her own willingness into question when she laments to Lancelot, 'I have gyvyn the[e] the grettyst riches and the fayryst floure that ever I had, and that is my maydynhode that I shall never have agayne' (2.796.21–23/11.3). Both parents, and to an extent Galahad himself, find themselves linked to this shameful incident for the rest of their lives. Galahad's conception incites the tension between Guenevere and Lancelot that briefly drives Lancelot mad, while Elaine's name becomes consistently linked to her deceit of Lancelot: 'kynge Pelles doughter, which made [Lancelot] to lye by her by enchauntemente' (2.862.3–4/13.4). Even Galahad, when reminded who fathered him, feels 'a

lityll ashamed' (2.870.1/13.8). Elsewhere in the Grail Quest, Malory finds it difficult to mention Sir Bors without reference to the 'fleysshly lustes' that result in Bors' begetting of Helian the White (2.956.3/16.6). Galahad functions similarly for Lancelot, foregrounding his father's sexual transgression, and this shame appears at least slightly reciprocal: his father's sexuality is also a source of shame for Galahad.

Le Morte Darthur's most persistent challenge to heteronormative reproduction, however, lies in its challenge to the value of (re)productivity itself, a challenge that appears prominently in the text's celebration of Galahad's termination of his genealogical line. His ancestors, gifted with prophetic foreknowledge of his role as the last of their lineage, nevertheless yearn for his arrival—in effect, presenting absence of futurity as an object of desire. Solomon dwells on the 'laste of [his] blood' almost obsessively: 'but ever [Solomon] mervayled and studyed who that sholde be, and what hys name myght be' (2.992.4–5/17.8). Josephé explicitly identifies Galahad as the end of his line and suggests Galahad's desirability when entrusting his blood-stained shield to Evelake, saying 'never shall no man beare this shylde ... unto the tyme that Galahad, the good knight, beare hit. And last of my lynayge have hit about his necke, that shall do mervaylous dedys' (2.881.9–13/13.11). The anomalous punctuation of these sentences not only mimics the labored breathing of a man 'in hys dedly bedde,' but also works to braid the concepts 'good knyght' and 'laste of my lynayge' around the physical action of bearing a shield which, in its red and white coloring, symbolizes the juncture of virginity and death. This chain of associations reinforces the remarkable idea that the virgin who represents the death of a lineage should be eagerly awaited, should in fact be an object of desire for his 'mervaylous dedys.' Shichtman suggests that 'The Tale of the Sankgreal' presents Galahad as an object of desire for 'his family heritage,' which is extraordinary enough to make his reproduction advantageous.[52] On the contrary, the figures to whom this reproduction might appear most important—Galahad's ancestors themselves—have no fantasies about the asexual knight's capacity to reproduce. In desiring Galahad, they knowingly desire the termination of the hereditary line that in fact constitutes their entire existence within the *Morte Darthur*. Malory's incessant quoting of the prophecies surrounding Galahad, encompassing both his virginity and his worthiness as a knight, serves to confirm the desirability of Galahad, and thus the privileging of termination itself.

'THAT THAT HATH BEEN MY DESIRE'

Malory presents Galahad as an object of desire that it is death to obtain. The equation of desire for Galahad with desire for death becomes concretized in the death of Earl Hernox, who has long 'abyddyn' Galahad's coming with the expressed wish to die 'in so good a mannys armys' (2.998.17–19/17.9). Similarly,

Mordrains has 'abyddyn longe' for Galahad, intending to die 'between [his] armys' (2.1025.10–12/17.18). The verb 'abiden' means not merely 'to await' but 'to hope for, to look forward to.'[53] Companied with the enthusiastic physicality of these dying men's wish to embrace Galahad, it suggests that Galahad's arrival is to be celebrated, and celebrated precisely because of its terminating potential. Additionally, this equation of Galahad and termination foreshadows Galahad's own desire for death. Like all good knights, Galahad demonstrates a casual disregard for his own safety when his opponents warn him that his life is in danger (2.887.20–21/13.15, 2.1000.33–34/17.10). But his embrace of termination runs deeper than that of any other knight. His final experience of the Grail emphasizes both its lethal nature and its desirability:

> And than he began to tremble ryght harde whan the dedly fleysh began to beholde the spirituall thynges. Then he hylde up his hondis towarde hevyn and seyde, 'Lorde, I thanke The, for now I se that that hath be my desire many a day. Now, my Blyssed Lorde, I wold nat lyve in this wrecched worlde no lenger, if hit myght please The, Lorde.' (2.1034.21–27/17.22)

This experience must be understood in terms of its implications for the absence of futurity, rather than as an expression of asceticism. In wishing to die, Galahad does not merely reject 'this wrecched worlde' in the same way that Lancelot forsakes 'the vanytees of the worlde' to live in a monastery at the end of the *Morte Darthur* (3.1253.14/21.9). His desire to live no longer is not presented as desire for spiritual life in heaven, but simply for an end to bodily life on earth. In this passage, all of Galahad's being seems contained within the 'dedly fleysh' that trembles, offering no mention of the soul that might be better suited to behold 'spirituall thynges.' Malory leaves ambiguous what, precisely, has been Galahad's desire—the Grail itself, or the experience of mortality and the sense of being 'dedly fleysh' that the Grail conveys upon its viewer.

Interestingly, some medieval writers equated a lack of sexual desire with death, as Giovanni del Virgilio does in his fourteenth-century interpretation of Ovid's Orpheus:

> Orpheus renounced Hell, that is, temptation, and reconciling himself to God began to spurn women, giving his soul instead to God, and began to love men, that is, to act in a manly way, on which account he was dead to the delights of the world; for such men are dead to the world.[54]

This allegorical interpretation reimagines Orpheus' change in sexual object choice as an ascetic renunciation of sexual desire, and goes on to suggest that subjects who lack sexual desire, like Galahad, already exist in a kind of living death: 'such men are dead to the world.' Yet this mode of continuous 'death,' in which one is ceaselessly reconciling and giving and acting, seems to me to be quite the opposite of what Galahad desires, which is a final and

terminal death. Fradenburg also emphasizes the 'repetitive form' of medieval *contemptus mundi,* linking it to the death drive, in which the repetition of unpleasant experiences illustrates 'the creature's urge to return to a state of inanimacy.'[55] Galahad rejects even the form of continuation offered in the repetitive nature of the death drive. His quest for the Grail, unlike Lancelot's, is not a repetitive series of rejections of worldly pleasures, but a relentless push towards his own termination, which marks the true achievement of the Grail and ending of the Quest.

Galahad, wholly unconcerned with coming events, works throughout the text to promote termination—of himself, of his family line, and of 'all thy felyship of the Rounde Table' (2.864.2–3/13.5). The Grail Quest, which Galahad instigates, leads directly to the dissolution of Arthur's court and the death of Arthur and his knights. William Caxton's preface to the *Morte Darthur* reinforces this association in a curious grammatical construction that makes the Quest and Arthur's death two parts of the same 'history,' the 'ystorye of the Saynt Greal and of the deth and ending of the sayd Arthur,' which begins with Galahad's arrival at Camelot (1.cxliv.3–4).[56] Galahad's achievements, destructive in and of themselves, also reject productivity by offering no guidance to current or future generations. As Armstrong observes, his ultimate experience of the Grail is 'linguistically incomprehensible.'[57] Neither Malory nor Galahad puts it into words, leaving the messenger Bors incapable of relating it alongside the other 'hyghe aventures of the Sankgreall' which he carries back to Camelot (2.1036.16–17/17.23). The closest Galahad comes to acknowledging the future is in his final words to Lancelot, which bid him 'remembir of this worlde unstable' (2.1035.11–12/17.22). This cryptic caution, in which 'unstable' means 'not lasting, impermanent; transitory, fleeting; not persistent or enduring,' suggests anything but futurity.[58]

Galahad's embrace of termination points to a larger pattern within Malory's text that celebrates the absence of futurity. Even Malory's title, *Le Morte Darthur*, privileges termination by emphasizing the fact that 'the hole book of kyng Arthur' is in fact the book 'of *the Deth of Arthur*' (3.1260.16, 19/21.13, original emphasis).[59] Despite Arthur's epitaph, '*Rex quondam Rexque futurus*,' Malory, interestingly, seems dismissive of Arthur's potential return and the future of Camelot: 'Yet I woll nat say that hit shall be so, but rather I wolde sey: here in thys worlde he chauged hys lyff' (3.1242.25–27/21.7). He goes on to trace the deaths of Guinevere and Lancelot, even following Bors, Ector, Blamour and Beloberis into the Holy Land, where 'they deyed upon a Good Fryday for Goddes sake,' almost as though he is determined to leave no character alive at the end (3.1260.15/21.13). Cory Rushton notes that this tendency has particular implications for the relationships between parents and their offspring, writing that 'Malory undercuts all possibility of inheritance or linear descent' by creating a narrative in which sons consistently die before

their fathers.[60] Galahad is not merely an example of this impulse, but the text's most fully-imagined embodiment of the ideology behind it: a rejection of the fantasy of a future created through sexual desire.

While Galahad arguably embodies a negative force in Malory's narrative, it is vital to note that his position, although non-normative, is not one of abjection. Rather, Malory celebrates his asexual Galahad for his ability to bring 'many straunge adventures and peryllous' to their termination (2.1013.7/17.13). The phrase 'bring [an adventure] to an ende' appears over a dozen times in *Le Morte Darthur*, with over half the occurrences appearing in 'The Tale of the Sankgreal.' The emphasis of the Quest that defines Galahad has shifted, from bringing worship to the fellowship of the Round Table to dissolving that fellowship and pursuing termination itself. Galahad, as an asexual knight who disrupts the conventional narratives of desire and reproduction, figures the absence of futurity within *Le Morte Darthur*, and Bors speaks more accurately than he knows when he says 'he shall have much erthly worship that may bring [the Grail Quest] to an ende' (2.955.9–10/16.6).

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

Megan Arkenberg is a graduate student in the English department at the University of California, Davis.

NOTES

1 Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 3rd edn., 3 vols., ed. Eugène Vinaver, rev. P.J.C. Field. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 2.860.3–4. For all further quotations from this edition, page and line numbers, followed by book and chapter from William Caxton's 1485 printing, will be given parenthetically.

2 Geoffroi de Charny, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, trans. Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 91–2.

3 A heavenly voice promises Galahad that 'whan thou askyst the deth of thy body thou shalt have hit' (2.1032.13–14/17.21). On Galahad and bloodshed, Kathleen Coyne Kelly writes, 'Of all the knights of the Round Table, only Galahad escapes the relentless wash of blood that characterizes so much of Malory's text'; See Kelly, 'Malory's Body Chivalric,' *Arthuriana* 6.4 (1996): 63 [52–71].

4 Galahad's virginity is so significant a part of his identity, in fact, that it occasionally stands in metonymically for the rest of him. For example, Pelles knows that Lancelot shall beget 'a pusyll' on his daughter Elaine (2.794.5/11.2). The choice to refer to the yet unborn-and-unbegotten Galahad by this term, which the *MED* defines as 'A virgin, young woman; also, a chaste young man,' implies that Galahad's virginity will be a permanent state, while additionally suggesting some uneasiness about how else (besides his virginity) Galahad might be named and identified. See Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 548 n. 283; *Middle English Dictionary*, ed.

Hans Kurath et al (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954–present), s.v. 'pucelle.'

5 Asexuality has been developed as an identity largely through social activism by the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) and through the sociological work of Anthony Boagert, Kristin Scherrer, and others. See Anthony Boagert, *Understanding Asexuality* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012); Kristin Scherrer, 'Coming to an Asexual Identity,' *Sexualities* 11.5 (2008): 621–41. A bibliography of academic work relating to asexuality is available at http://www.asexualexplorations.net/home/extantresearch.html.

6 Megan Milks and Karli June Cerankowski, 'New Orientations: Asexuality and Its Implications for Theory and Practice,' *Feminist Studies* 36.3 (2010): 650 [650–644].

7 Milks and Cerankowski, 'New Orientations,' 655.

8 It is interesting to note that the emergence of the term 'asexuality' pre-dates 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality' by about fifteen years, implying that the distinction between sexuality and its absence plays a more fundamental role in our conception of sexual orientation that the distinction between hetero- and homosexuality. See David Halperin, 'One Hundred Years of Homosexuality' in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 15–40; *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2012), s.v. 'asexuality.'

9 Carla Freccero, 'Queer Times,' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.3 (2007): 487 [485–494].

10 Carla Freccero and Louise Fradenburg, eds., *Premodern Sexualities*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. viii, xvii.

11 Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 1.

12 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'What Does Queer Theory Tell Us About X?' *PMLA* 110.2 (1995): 344, 347, 348 [343–349].

13 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 152, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4 (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2013), pp. 1801–02.

14 Jerome, 'Letter XXII to Eustochium,' in *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, ed. Paul Halsall (Fordham University Internet Sourcebooks: 2011).

15 Karmen MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 77.

16 Donald L. Hoffman, 'The Ogre and the Virgin: Varieties of Sexual Experience in Malory's Morte Darthur,' *Arthurian Interpretations* 1.1 (1986): 24 [19–25].

17 Hoffman underscores Galahad's sexual non-normativity with the suggestion that Galahad's virginity 'may be the ultimate perversion.' See Hoffman, 'The Ogre and the Virgin,' 19.

18 Berlant and Warner, 'What Does Queer Theory Tell Us About X?' 345–46.

19 *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, trans. Pauline M. Matarasso (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 253.

20 Jerome, 'Letter XXII to Eustochium.'

21 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 3–4.

22 Edelman, *No Future*, p. 4.

23 The concept of narratives of desire also fits MacKendrick's analysis of other forms of normative sexuality. MacKendrick writes, 'in its construction of the erotic as the handmaiden of the procreative, contemporary Christianity lines up startlingly well with both Freudian biologism and capitalist culture … Each presumes a measurable outcome and denies the delights of desire.' Interestingly, MacKendrick sees asceticism as disruptive of these narratives in its denial of productivity: 'the ascetic denial of efficiency approaches the self-sacrificial—the ultimately unproductive.' I do not see Galahad as ascetic or self-denying. However, Malory clearly connects self-sacrificial characters, such as Percival's sister, to unproductivity; notably, the woman for whom Percival's sister sacrifices her life dies within a matter of hours. This reinforces the idea that Malory's text rejects the value of futurity, although a detailed exploration of this subject is outside the scope of this article. See MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures*, pp. 66, 114.

24 Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 4.

25 L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer*, Medieval Cultures, vol. 31. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 5.

26 Kenneth J. Tiller, '"So precyously covered": Malory's Hermeneutic Quest of the *Sankgreal*,' *Arthuriana* 13.3 (2003): 85, 87 [83–97]; Kathleen Coyne Kelly, 'Menaced Masculinity and Imperiled Virginity in the Morte Darthur,' in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1999), p. 113 [pp. 97–114].

27 The complex interplay between asceticism and erotic desire has been detailed in recent studies of medieval sexuality. See MacKendrick, 'Asceticism: Seducing the Divine,' in *Counterpleasures*, pp. 65–86; Robert Mills, 'Invincible Virgins,' in *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), pp. 106–144. Foucault also explores asceticism's effects on subject formation. See Michel Foucault, '3 March 1982: First Hour' and '17 March 1982: First Hour,' *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981–82*, ed. Frederick Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005).

28 Hoffman, 'The Ogre and the Virgin,' 25.

29 Peggy McCracken, 'Chaste Subjects: Gender, Heroism, and Desire in the Grail Quest,' in *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 139 [pp. 123–142].

30 Kelly, 'Menaced Masculinity,' in *Menacing Virgins,* p. 113; Dorsey Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), p. 162; Karen Cherewatuk, 'Born-Again Virgins

and Holy Bastards: Bors and Elyne and Lancelot and Galahad,' *Arthuriana* 11.2 (2001): 56 [52–64].

31 Hoffman writes that Galahad's virginity is 'untainted by even a repressed or sublimated desire'; Armstrong claims that he 'lacks both desire and desirability'; McCracken claims that '[God] will not allow him to be tempted.' See Hoffman, 'The Ogre and the Virgin,' 24; Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, p. 168; McCracken, 'Chaste Subjects,' in *Queering the Middle* Ages, p. 127.

32 Geraldine Heng, 'Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory,' in *Arthurian Women: A Casebook,* ed. Thelma Fenster (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 97, 102 [pp. 97–113]; McCracken, 'Chaste Subjects,' in *Queering the Middle Ages,* p. 125.

33 Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community,* p. 36.

34 Elizabeth Archibald explains the uniqueness of Malory's vision of fellowship. 'Fellowship,' she writes, 'may be a chivalric virtue, but it seems to be singularly lacking in *Sir Gawain*, and in Middle English romance generally.' In Malory's world, on the other hand, other knights 'may be encountered by the current protagonist at any time. Two or more knights may travel together for a while, and may even have some joint adventure'; See Elizabeth Archibald, 'Malory's Ideal of Fellowship,' *The Review of English Studies*, New Series 43.171 (1992): 315–16 [311–328].

35 Hoffman, 'Perceval's Sister: Malory's 'Rejected' Masculinities,' *Arthuriana* 6.4 (1996): 77 [72–84].

36 *MED*, s.v. 'knouen,' def. 6, 3a.

37 For instance, Armstrong notes that Galahad 'refrains from establishing any strong homosocial bonds,' and Kelly writes that he 'never enters into the homosociality that so often drives Malory's *Morte Darthur.*' See Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, p. 162; Kelly, 'Menaced Masculinity,' in *Menacing Virgins*, p. 113.

38 Richard Zeikowitz offers an evocative analysis of scopophilia and the eroticism of the male gaze in medieval literature in *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 72–77.

39 *MED*, s.v. 'clippen, v.(1),' def. 1.

40 Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, p. 72. For a more recent reading of the ways in which violence can be an expression of love, see Leo Bersani, 'The Power of Evil and the Power of Love,' in Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 57–87.

41 Kelly, 'Malory's Body Chivalric,' 60. Kenneth Hodges has recently offered a contrasting reading that does not emphasize the sexual undertones of wounds in the *Morte Darthur*. See Kenneth Hodges, 'Wounded Masculinity: Injury and Gender in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*,' *Studies in Philology* 106.1 (2009): 14–31.

42 Tiller, '"So preciously covered,"' 85.

43 Tiller, '"So preciously covered,"' 86.

44 Martin Shichtman similarly notes that 'the predictors of Galahad's success reside within his somewhat ambiguous genealogical history.' See Martin Shichtman, 'Percival's Sister: Gender, Virginity, and Blood,' *Arthuriana* 9.2 (1999): 13 [11–20].

45 The age of Galahad's lineage, in fact, makes the small number of names in this genealogy biologically unfeasible. If the Grail Quest does in fact take place 'foure hondred wyntir and four and fyffty acomplyvysshed aftir the Passion of Our Lorde Jesu Cryst' (2.855.12–13/13.2), it is unlikely for Lancelot to be only nine generations removed from the time of Joseph of Arimathea. The crafter of this genealogy in Malory's source was, of course, more concerned with symbolism than biological accuracy. See Thomas Hill, 'The Genealogy of Galahad and the New Age of the World in the Old French Prose *Queste del Saint Graal*,' *Philological Quarterly* 73.3 (1994): 288–89 [287–297].

46 Shichtman, 'Percival's Sister,' 12.

47 Cherewatuk, 'Born-Again Virgins,' 53.

48 Jennifer E. Looper, 'Gender, Genealogy, and the 'Story of the Three Spindles' in the *Queste del Saint Graal*,' *Arthuriana* 8.2 (1998): 57 [49–66].

49 The image of virginal flowers bringing forth 'fruit great plenty' may owe something to St. Jerome, who wrote that virginity 'shall produce fruit a hundredfold.' See Jerome, 'Letter XXII to Eustochium.'

50 We see the more conventional association of offspring with fruit in John Trevisa's Middle English translation of Bartholomaeus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*: 'A maide is bareine & withouten fruyt.' Quoted in *MED*, s.v. 'baraine, adj,' def. 1. The text survives in eight extant manuscripts, as well as in a scholarly edition: *On the Properties of Things, John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum, a Critical Text*, eds. M.C. Seymour et al., vols. 1 and 2 (1975); vol. 3 (1988).

51 For example, in describing the rape of the daughter of the Earl Hernox, Malory writes 'they lay by her, magré [h]er hede' (2.997.32/17.8).

52 Shichtman, 'Percival's Sister,' 14.

53 *MED*, s.v. 'abiden, v,' def. 8.

54 Qtd. in J.B. Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 123.

55 Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, pp. 16–17.

56 Thomas Hill similarly argues that in the French *Queste del Saint Graal*, 'The advent of Galahad thus presages the end of the Arthurian world'; see Hill, 'The Genealogy of Galahad,' 290.

57 Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, p. 160.

58 *MED*, s.v. 'unstable, adj,' def. 1b.

59 Lumiansky explores the debate over the relative roles of Malory and Caxton in determining this title. See R.M. Lumiansky, 'Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, 1947–1987: Author, Title, Text,' *Speculum* 62.4 (1987): 878–97.

60 Cory Rushton, 'Absent Fathers, Unexpected Sons: Paternity in Malory's *Morte Darthur*,' *Studies in Philology* 101.2 (2004): 151 [136–152].