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Author(s): GRETCHEN MIESZKOWSKI

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The Prose *Lancelot*'s Galehot, Malory's Lavain, and the Queering of Late Medieval Literature

GRETCHEN MIESZKOWSKI

This article adds two Arthurian characterizations to Queer Criticism's emerging analysis of homoeroticism in late medieval literature: Galehot, from the 13th-century Prose *Lancelot*, and Malory's Lavain, from the story of Elaine le Blanke, the Fair Maid of Astolat. Both are altogether anomalous figures for the virulently homophobic late Middle Ages: positively represented men who love other men; and Galehot is one of the great homoerotic portraits of medieval literature. (GM)

> Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.
>
> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1976 (105-06)

Michel Foucault's dramatic reconceptualization of sexuality as a social construct is the cornerstone of late-20th-century gender studies and in particular of queer theory, their most recent and prolific offshoot. Foucault's fundamental point is that sexuality does not exist apart from the meaning sexual behavior acquires in a given culture. No essence in human beings dictates the objects of their desires; no Freudian psyche constitutes itself outside of history. Instead, homosexual and heterosexual are culture-based concepts and have no transhistorical significance. Alan Bray extends Foucault's point in *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* when he argues that '... There is no linear history of homosexuality to be written at all, any more than there is of 'the family' or indeed of sexuality itself. These things take their meaning from the varying societies which give them form; if they change it is because these societies have changed' (104). Historians are quick to point out one of the most important of

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these changes for understanding sexuality in previous eras: it is not until late in the 19th century that sexual preference comes to define personhood. 'Nothing in Renaissance theology, philosophy, or jurisprudence suggests that individuals found their identity in this way,' Bruce R. Smith notes in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (12). 'I am a heterosexual' or 'I am a homosexual' would have been unintelligible in the Renaissance, for instance, because people thought of sexuality as an undifferentiated force that took many various forms, some of them culpable: incest, bestiality, and sodomy, for example. As Smith explains, 'The structures of knowledge that impinged on what we would now call 'homosexuality' did not ask a man who had sexual relations with another man to think of himself as fundamentally different from his peers. Just the opposite was true. Prevailing ideas asked him to castigate himself for falling into the general depravity to which *all* mankind is subject' (11).[1]

The objective of queer studies is to bring homoeroticism to light in the half-hidden forms it often takes, and to understand it both historically and literarily as a construct of the society in which it occurs. As a critical approach, queer theory is barely ten years old, and yet it has yielded an impressive number of provocative and often compelling readings of texts from the 16th through the early 20th century, readings which form a significant part of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as 'the extraordinary recent efflorescence of gay and lesbian studies' *(Epistemology* 16). This remarkable 'queering' of English and American literature includes the tracing of subtly intimated homoeroticism in works from Henry James's 'Beast in the Jungle' and Melville's *Billy Budd* to Milton's *Paradise Regained* (Sedgwick, *Epistemology*; Bredbeck). Some of the most extensive and fruitful of these studies have concerned English Renaissance literature. They have produced rich new interpretations of works that would be expected to support interesting readings from a gendered perspective, such as Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (Bredbeck, Sedgwick, *Between*; Smith), Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (Bray, 'Homosex. and Signs'; Bredbeck, Smith), and mythological poems about Jupiter and Ganymede (Rambuss, Smith). More surprising, canonical works with no obvious connection to homoerotic issues have turned out to be nearly equally fertile subjects: Sidney's *Arcadia*, for instance (Bredbeck, Smith), several episodes of *The Faerie Queene* (Stephens, Smith), and an unexpectedly comprehensive group of Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies, and problem plays (Bredbeck, Goldberg, 'Romeo'; Smith, Traub). Even the gender of the recipient of Marlowe's famous lyric, 'Come live with me, and be my love,' has been successfully called into question by two of these writers (Bredbeck 149-50, Smith 92-93).

In contrast to this outpouring of Renaissance scholarship and commentary, the queering of late medieval literature is just beginning. Newsletters and

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conference sessions are being organized around this topic, and a few articles have been published discussing patently relevant subjects: Chaucer's Pardoner (Burger, Kruger), and the passages denouncing sodomy in the Old French *Enéas* (Burgwinkle, Gaunt), for example. But the flood of books and articles to match current Renaissance criticism has yet to appear.

The ultimate purpose of this article is to suggest that once medieval literature is considered from this new perspective, the techniques of queer theory will yield as impressive results for the later Middle Ages as they have for the English Renaissance. Sodomy was equally condemned officially during these periods, with the result that much of this literature is only halfway out of the closet. Its first meanings are often heterosexual, and determined readers can close their eyes to its second levels of homoerotic meaning. The readings of queer theorists are needed to open up new approaches to late medieval literature, just as they have for English Renaissance literature.

This article's more immediate aim, however, is to introduce two late-medieval Arthurian works into current discussions of homoeroticism in medieval literature. One of these texts offers only a brief glimpse of same-sex love: Malory's 15th-century portrayal of Lavain in the story of Elaine le Blanke, the Fair Maid of Astolat (Malory 3: 1061-98). The second, however, is impressive and substantial: the portrayal of Galehot in the Prose *Lancelot*, a 13th-century Old French romance written by an anonymous author (*Lancelot do Lac* 1: 60, 263-612).[2] This long, sensitive, appreciative, honoring portrait is as complex and extensive a representation of a man's love for another man as any that has been found to date in English Renaissance literature.

Galehot is a major figure in the Prose *Lancelot*, which tells the story of his relationship with the man he loves from Galehot's first encounter with him until Galehot's death, which concludes the work. The Prose *Lancelot* is not a minor text written for an in-group of cognoscentes. It is one of the major books of its era, and it had a very wide and diverse audience. It was 'immensely popular' for more than three hundred years, according to its most recent editor, Elspeth Kennedy, and its influence was 'enormous.' Despite the fact that much of it concerns a powerful and impressively imagined homoerotic love story, it was referred to frequently, borrowed from widely, read throughout Western Europe, and translated into Dutch and German (*Lancelot do Lac* 'Intro.' 2: 1-10; 1: VI).

Unlike the other works considered up to this point by queer commentators on medieval literature, both the Prose *Lancelot* and Malory's account of Lavain give positive presentations of homoerotic feelings and the men who experience them. Galehot is one of the most important heroes in the Prose *Lancelot*, and neither it nor Malory's account of Lavain ever suggests that the feelings of

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these men for other men are shameful or even inappropriate. The appealing portrayal of a man who loves another man bucks some of the strongest historical currents of the late Middle Ages. Galehot and Lavain, attractively presented characters yearning for homoerotic relationships, are anomalous figures in late medieval literature. Two recent major histories of homosexuality corroborate the basic configuration of attitudes toward homoeroticism first put forward by John Boswell in his pathbreaking work, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century.* Boswell argues that a major shift in attitude toward homosexuality occurred between the High Middle Ages and the late Middle Ages. The late 11th and the 12th centuries, he says, were relatively tolerant of homosexuality, but from the late 12th century on, Western Europe became virulently homophobic.

Boswell presents substantial and varied evidence in support of his unexpected claim for the openness and tolerance of the High Middle Ages. For instance, he discusses a number of important people who seem to have lived an openly gay lifestyle (218, 221-4); he cites St. Anselm of England writing in 1102 as if ordinary laypeople did not realize that sodomy was a sin (215); and he points out that between 1050 and 1150 'theological arguments against gay sex came to a standstill' (226). Boswell's most important evidence, however, is 'the astounding amount of gay literature which issued from the pens of clerics during this period' (218), and he describes and translates a number of these predominantly Latin pieces. Some of these poems are straightforwardly homoerotic, and many are addressed to boys. Some lament a lover's absence or a potential lover's standoffishness; others discuss worries about the first appearance of facial hair, or whether boys or girls are more attractive (243-66). One very popular poem, which is found in manuscripts throughout Europe and was often memorized, recounts a debate between Helen as a young girl and Ganymede, the beautiful boy who was carried off by Jove to be his cupbearer and who became a standard way of referring to homoerotically attractive boys (255-56). Ganymede and Helen debate the virtues of males and females as sexual partners in stanzas like the following:

> Ganymede: "When Jupiter divides himself in the middle of the bed,
> And turns first to Juno, then to me,
> He hurries past the woman and spends his time playing love games with me.
> When he turns back to her, he either quarrels or snores."
> Helen: "Your Venus is sterile and fruitless,
> And highly injurious to womankind.
> When a male mounts a male in so reprobate a fashion,
> A monstrous Venus imitates a woman." (Boswell 387)

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In addition to many poems like these, written from the perspective of a gay culture, Boswell cites satirical attacks against gays as evidence of their prevalence and importance during this period. One such poem, for instance, names four major French cities as centers of gay prostitution (261). As Boswell writes, 'The common use of frankly gay sexual themes and language by clerics of high standing, who also wrote conventional religious verse, is evidence of a remarkable social trend, one suggestive of a more profound change than the introduction of a new literary style'(250). David Greenberg, in *The Construction of Homosexuality*, the second of these recent histories of homosexuality, supports Boswell's claim for a gay subculture with evidence of a different sort:

> The extent of this subculture, and its freedom from repression can be gauged from the comment of Henry, abbé of Clairvaux, to Pope Alexander III, that 'ancient Sodom is reborn from its ashes,' and from Jacques de Vitry's description of Paris in 1230 as filled with sodomites. (267)

From the late 12th century on, however, attitudes toward homosexuals changed drastically. As James A. Brundage, author of the third recent history, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, reports, the Third Lateran Council (1179) prohibited 'acts against nature' and ruled that guilty clerics 'must either forfeit clerical status or be confined indefinitely in a monastery,' while guilty laymen 'were to be excommunicated and entirely excluded from society' (Brundage 313). By 1215-19, monastic orders were instructed to imprison sodomites, and the Council of Angers labeled pederasts 'monsters' (Greenberg 288). It became ordinary practice to add sodomy to accusations against people charged with political offenses during this period (Brundage 473), as if sodomy's always rather vague meaning were losing whatever precision it had, leaving it an undifferentiated firebrand to hurl at an enemy. The most decisive indication of the extreme change in attitude that had occurred, however, is the secular legislation that was passed throughout the 13th century. All over Europe laws against sodomy specified savage penalties of dismemberment and horrific death – from burning in Bologna, to castration followed by hanging by the legs until dead in Portugal (Brundage 472-73, 533-35, 548). As Boswell sums up the new attitude toward homosexual behavior: 'During the 200 years from 1150 to 1350, homosexual behavior appears to have changed, in the eyes of the public, from the personal preference of a prosperous minority, satirized and celebrated in popular verse, to a dangerous, antisocial, and severely sinful aberration' (295).

This changed atmosphere could not be expected to support overtly positive literary treatments of homoerotic love, and most references to homosexuality in 13th- and 14th-century literature are as homophobic as the legal and

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theological discourse of the period. The fabliaux, which revel in heterosexual episodes, hardly mention homosexuality. According to Charles Muscatine, male homosexuality is only at issue in six of the approximately 150 fabliaux that have survived, and even then it appears 'mainly as an insult or as a comic result of misunderstanding' (125). Popular revulsion against sodomy is the mainspring for the joke in *Du sot chevalier* [Concerning the Stupid Knight], for instance, where a group of travelers, one tall ['lonc' in Old French] and one short, take shelter from a storm at the home of a slow-witted knight whose mother-in-law has just finished showing him how to consummate his marriage. The travelers overhear the knight repeating his mother-in-law's lesson: 'je me volrai anuit conbatre, / le plus lonc foutre et le cort batre' ['Tonight I want to attack: fuck the long one (the vulva) and beat the short one (the anus)']. The tall ['lonc'] traveler understands that he is to be sodomized and reacts in horror – 'mels voudroie estre en croiz tonduz' ['I'd rather be hung on a cross'], he says (Harrison 334, 330). In Guillaume de Lorris' portion of the highly influential *Roman de la Rose*, very subtle homoerotic imagery characterizes homosexuality as a danger to the integrity of the self (discussed by Harley 333-34), while later, in Jean de Meun's continuation, Genius denounces homosexuality with no subtlety at all (Guillaume 19629-700). The great 13th-century Icelandic work *Njal's Saga* is full of imaginatively vicious insults, but the most vicious of them all is homosexual. One man accuses another of being 'the mistress of the Svinafell Troll, who uses you as a woman every ninth night,' and the blood feud is on (*Njal's Saga* 256). No positive comments about gay love have been found in romance literature, even from the relatively tolerant 12th century. Instead, when two 12th-century romances mention same-sex relationships, they use accusations of homosexuality as slander against innocent heroes. In *Lanval*, one of Marie de France's lais, a queen denounces a young man who refuses to love her by saying he must desire men, and in the Old French *Enéas*, a mother tries to stop her daughter's proposed marriage by bringing the same accusation against the bridegroom (Herman 79-83).[3] One 13th-century romance follows the same pattern. A queen falls in love with a young woman disguised as a man and when the young woman refuses her advances, the queen accuses her of being a sodomite (*Silence* lines 3817; 3929-48). In popular conception as well as in popular literature, the same-sex act of love had indeed become 'thilke abhomynable synne, of which that no man unnethe oghte speke ne write,' as Chaucer's Parson, at the close of the 14th century, formulates the already traditional circumlocution for sodomy (Chaucer x 909).

The legal and moral, as well as the most noticeable literary discourse of the late Middle Ages, then, was outspokenly homophobic. It was no different in

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this respect from the officially proclaimed attitudes of the English Renaissance. In the Renaissance, just as in the late Middle Ages, church and state both condemned same-sex relationships and threatened those involved in them with death by various horrific means. As Alan Bray describes Renaissance attitudes in *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*:

> Hostility to homosexuality, unlike many other legacies of the late Middle Ages, showed no signs of atrophy: it had all the robust vitality of a living idea, and it had long been built into its dominant intellectual traditions. This rejection was total and unbending; there was no civilisation in the world at that time with as violent an antipathy to homosexuality as that of western Europe. (79)

And yet, as queer criticism has shown, despite this threatening legal and theological climate, numerous English Renaissance works explore homoerotic themes and issues. They hide their homoerotically attractive characters behind heterosexually acceptable forms, but they create them nonetheless.

Similarly, the blatantly homophobic incidents and observations in late medieval literature are only its most conspicuous means of representing homoeroticism. Another kind of medieval text, like its Renaissance counterpart, presents same-sex love in ways that do not call attention to themselves and do not insist upon being heard, but that will nevertheless be recognized by readers who know how to listen. The authors of these texts lacked the luxury of speaking openly that had made possible the outpouring of explicitly gay literature that John Boswell discovered from 12th-century Europe. Instead, these later writers eluded official condemnation of sodomy by partially concealing their representations of homoerotic desire. The Prose *Lancelot*'s Galehot and Malory's Lavain are characterizations of this sort.

Galehot and Lavain do not descend directly from Boswell's 12th-century gay poetry. None of the literature that Boswell uncovered from the High Middle Ages is at all like these two characterizations. The majority of Boswell's brief lyrics and satires are in Latin, many of them seem to have been written by clerics for clerics, and they often praise same-sex relationships openly, as if they are intended for gay readers. The portraits of Galehot and Lavain, conversely, were created in the vernacular for a general audience, and the enormously popular Prose *Lancelot* reached that audience very effectively. As I shall show, both the Prose *Lancelot* and Malory's account of Lavain in fact depict homoerotic relationships; nevertheless, these texts are not explicitly homoerotic, and it would be possible for readers who are offended by their kind of love to understand their relationships simply as 'friendship' or 'comradeship.' As Bruce R. Smith observes in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* : 'The four kinds of discourse about homosexuality – moral, legal, medical, and poetic–

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in fact address different subjects entirely. Moral, legal, and medical discourse are concerned with sexual acts; only poetic discourse can address homosexual desire' (17). These stories both concern desire, not acts, which would have made it possible for them to 'pass' even with a homophobic late-medieval audience. The gay poems Boswell cites are out of the closet; these texts are only halfway out, and they keep in reserve the option of pretending that the closet door is in fact actually still shut.

Galehot's role in the Prose *Lancelot* is virtually entirely as a lover. He begins as a conqueror, but his love, ironically, overthrows him. He is extravagantly, desperately, devastatingly in love, so much in love that he acts out the two most extreme claims of the stricken lover: he gives up both his world and his life for love. At his first encounter with his beloved, he succumbs so totally to his feelings for him that every important aspect of his own personal and professional life is irrevocably changed. He literally throws all he is and has become at his beloved's feet. In every respect except the sex of his beloved, Galehot is a lover worthy of the tradition of *fin' amor*.[4] And the man he loves is Lancelot.

Galehot expresses his love of Lancelot by renouncing on his account the most important conquest of his own professional life. At this point in the story, Galehot is at the height of his power. He has conquered more territory than any other leader his age (1: 264), thirty kings already hold their lands from him, and he is about to take King Arthur's kingdom by force unless Arthur agrees to pay homage to him. A year earlier Galehot granted Arthur a year's truce because Galehot's troops outnumbered Arthur's so decisively. And then, on the second day of the second year of fighting, Galehot encounters Lancelot, and Galehot is transformed. By the conclusion of the episode he has not only given up his goal of conquering King Arthur, he himself has sworn homage to the king. Like a traditional courtly lover, Galehot falls in love at first sight of Lancelot, and Galehot the conqueror is overcome by Galehot the lover. In the most direct and dramatic way – far more directly and dramatically than if Lancelot had single-handedly defeated Galehot on the battlefield – Lancelot's excellence saves Arthur's sovereignty, and the price Galehot pays for loving Lancelot is his own great honor.

Galehot's deep confusion of purposes is dramatized by having him very nearly switch sides during the battle to fight against his own knights. As before, Galehot's forces outnumber Arthur's decisively, but Lancelot is fighting for King Arthur, although his identity is unknown to both sides, and his exploits are so phenomenal that thousands of Galehot's men flee from him. Galehot is amazed at his troops' tales of this Black Knight's miraculous feats, and he

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organizes those who fled into a company and leads them back into battle himself. When Galehot first sees Lancelot, Lancelot is the epitome of the heroic warrior. His last horse has been killed beneath him, and he is fighting on foot. Surrounded by mounted enemies, he strikes right and left without pause, hacking helmets and shields to pieces and piercing coats of mail. His sword was never seen when it wasn't dealing a blow: '... il faisoit mervoilles a veüe' (1: 318) [he accomplished marvels].

Emotion is expressed by action far more than by words in the Prose *Lancelot*, and Galehot's actions show how completely his feelings for Lancelot have turned his conception of himself and his priorities upside down and inside out. From this moment on Galehot loses the straightforward purposefulness that had led him to attack King Arthur. He is full of awe at this superlatively powerful young knight who can actually reverse the tide of a battle himself, and he is profoundly drawn to him. By all rights Lancelot should be Galehot's principal enemy, but as Galehot marvels at Lancelot's feats, he thinks to himself that he would not kill such a worthy man to conquer all the lands of the earth. Consciously or unconsciously, Galehot has abandoned his own military goals at his first sight of Lancelot. He is not only unwilling to kill his enemy, he wants to protect him, and Galehot forces his way through his own troops to reach Lancelot's side with the ironic intention of aiding his opponent's most formidable warrior. Lancelot is still on foot, slashing down everyone within reach; Galehot calls to him with offers of protection and finally even of personal service. His men will be forbidden to harm the Black Knight so long as he is unmounted, Galehot promises, and he will supply him with fresh horses throughout the day. Indeed, he himself will be his enemy's squire. Galehot dismounts at once and gives his own horse to the Black Knight. Another charge follows, once again led by Galehot, and when Lancelot's horse is killed beneath him, Galehot again gives him his. This is a bizarre way to conduct a battle.

Galehot's next response to Lancelot dramatizes even more extravagantly Lancelot's complete conquest of Galehot's feelings. Like the lover who throws himself at his lady's feet, swearing to do anything at all she asks of him if only she will grant him some trivial sign of favor – a sleeve or a ribbon, Galehot promises to do anything at all Lancelot asks, if only Lancelot will sleep in Galehot's tent that night. At the close of the battle, Galehot spurs his horse to overtake Lancelot, who is trying to slip away unnoticed among the crowd of knights leaving the field. Galehot's pursuit of Lancelot makes excellent military sense. Here is the only knight who can match Galehot in combat and King Arthur's one conceivable means of winning this encounter. If Galehot can lure the Black Knight to his side, there will be no contest. This is exactly the meaning

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King Arthur and his court assume as they watch Galehot lead the Black Knight to his camp with his arm around his shoulders. Gawain, badly wounded from earlier fighting, faints at the sight, King Arthur weeps openly, and Queen Guinevere is so angry she cannot speak a word. But they have misunderstood Galehot altogether. His motives are entirely personal. His feelings for Lancelot are so strong that, from this point on, the Black Knight will direct his life.

Galehot still does not know either the Black Knight's name or his status, and yet he puts himself unconditionally in his power. As they leave the battlefield, Galehot tells Lancelot that he is the best knight in the world and the knight he most wishes to honor. He then invites him to spend the night in his tent. Lancelot is furious that an enemy of King Arthur's should offer him hospitality, and he rejects the invitation scornfully. Galehot continues:

> "Ha! sire, ... ge feroie plus por vos que vos ne quidiez, et si ne l'ai mie hore a comancier. Et ancor vos pri ge, por Deu, que vos herbergiez anuit a moi par covant que ferai a devise quant que vos m'oseroiz requiere." (1: 321)
>
> ["Ah, sir, ... I would do more for you than you believe, and I have already begun. Again I ask you, before God, to spend the night in my tent with the promise that I will do whatever you ask me to do, according to your wishes."]

Lancelot cannot imagine that Galehot will keep such an extravagant promise, and Galehot responds by repeating it twice. Lancelot next demands witnesses. Galehot must take an oath to keep his promise in front of the two men he trusts most. Those two in turn must swear that if Galehot breaks his oath, they will renounce their allegiance to him, consider him their mortal enemy, and fight for Lancelot as their lord. Galehot's witnesses are both great kings and when they hear what Galehot is promising, one of them objects to its enormity, but Galehot commands him to swear, '... car ansi me plaist, et ge sai mout bien que ge faz' (1: 323) ['for this is what I want, and I know what I am doing'].

The Prose *Lancelot* suggests the homoerotic dimension to Galehot's love for Lancelot with considerable delicacy. Galehot's unconditional promise to do anything at all that Lancelot asks if Lancelot will spend the night in his tent is the irrational, frantic gesture of a lover who is desperate for continued contact with the person he loves. In medieval romance important people often share bedrooms, and later in the story Lancelot and Galehot routinely sleep in the same room and even share a bed when they have special reasons to talk together in the night. But when Galehot shows Lancelot the sumptuous tent prepared for him – three smaller beds around a very large one, which is as richly adorned

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as a bed can be – he assures Lancelot that his men-at-arms will occupy the smaller beds and that he himself will sleep elsewhere. As soon as Lancelot is asleep, however, Galehot returns to lie awake all night in one of the three beds, plotting to keep Lancelot with him and listening to Lancelot moan in his sleep. This is a curiously intimate scene, and it is made significantly more intimate because Galehot feels the need to hide his desire to spend the night beside Lancelot. He steals away before dawn like an unacknowledged lover. The next day, in the presence of the two kings who witnessed Galehot's oath, Lancelot explains what he is requiring of Galehot. He is to give up not only his conquest of King Arthur but even his independence as a ruler; the price of this one night has turned out to be Galehot's professional self-definition.

Lancelot has planned a grand gesture of melodramatic reversal, like a scene from an adolescent's daydream. Lancelot, Galehot, and Galehot's men are to fight until King Arthur is overpowered beyond any hope of rescue, at which point Galehot is to stop the battle, beg Arthur's mercy, and put himself unreservedly in the king's power. When Galehot hears Lancelot's plan, he is overcome by emotion and says nothing. The kings, misunderstanding, prompt him:

> "Sire, a que pensez vos? Ci androit n'a pensers mestiers. Vos avez tant correü que il est neianz do retorner." (1: 325)
>
> ["Sir, what are you thinking about? Thinking is of no use here. You have gone so far that there is no question of turning back."]

But Galehot rejects indignantly the notion that he could be regretting his promise, and his extravagance underscores the urgency of his emotions. If the whole world were his, he protests, he would give it to the Black Knight; nothing he did for him could be shameful. On the contrary, he was struck silent by the nobility of Lancelot's idea, 'que onques mais home ne dist si riche' (1: 325) ['that no man ever said anything so noble before'].

The importance of Galehot's renunciation of victory is caught in the responses to the final battle by King Arthur and his retinue. The king recognizes the utter hopelessness of his military situation as his men flee from the attack of Galehot's knights who are led and surpassed in every excellence by the mysterious Black Knight who now wears Galehot's armor. And as the king watches Galehot ride straight for his standard, he 'par un po ne crevoit de duel de ses genz que il veoit desconfites' (1: 327) [almost burst with grief over his defeated troops]. All hope is lost, and four knights hurry the queen away from the field to protection and then try to carry off Gawain on his stretcher, and he loses consciousness so many times that everyone who sees him believes he is dying.

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Lancelot, too, is grieving, but for a very different reason. As Galehot spurs toward the king's standard, only Lancelot realizes that Galehot is about to give up everything he has apparently gained. A few minutes earlier Lancelot told Galehot, 'Ge voi[l] mervoilles' ['I want a miracle'], and Galehot assured him, 'En non Deu, ... ce ne me grieve rien quant il vos plaist' (1: 326) ['In God's name, ... that does not grieve me at all since it pleases you']. But as Galehot gallops to produce that miracle, Lancelot thinks about the sacrifice this man is making on his account and marvels 'que nus si bons amis ne si veritable compaignon n'ot onques mais' (1: 327) [that no one ever had such a good friend or such a true companion]. And he pities Galehot so much that he sighs from the depths of his heart and weeps behind his helmet as he says to himself, 'Biau sire Dex, qui porra ce deservir?' (1: 327) ['Good Lord, who could deserve this?]. Galehot is so totally dominated by his love for Lancelot that Lancelot himself is grieved by it. To the amazement of King Arthur, his court, and his troops, Galehot kneels before the king and puts his power in the king's service. When Galehot is next with Lancelot he speaks slightingly of all he has just discarded: '... car petit vos en ai fait ...' (328) ['for little have I done for you']. But later he buries his recognition of the meaning of his actions in a promise of future service to Lancelot: 'Demandez qanque vos voudroiz et vos plaira, car ge ne vos escondirai ja mais. Plus vos ai ge anmé que terriene anor.' (1: 329) ['Ask what you wish and whatever pleases you, for I shall never refuse you. I have loved you more than earthly honor']. This is a simple statement of fact. It is 'earthly honor' that Galehot has given up for love of Lancelot.

Narratively, the Prose *Lancelot* expresses Galehot's love by chronicling the sacrifices he makes for Lancelot. Several episodes dramatize the self-destructive desperation of Galehot's loving. The most impressive of these is one of the most mysterious and poetic moments in the romance, and it develops Galehot's loss symbolically. The incident occurs, portentously, as Galehot takes Lancelot for the first time to la Terre des Loigntaines Isles, the Faraway Islands, which is the land Galehot inherited from his ancestors rather than one of his many conquered kingdoms. As the two men enter the Faraway Islands, they come upon a marvelously beautiful castle in an exquisite landscape. Set high on a rock with a deep river flowing beside it, the castle is flanked by a beautiful meadow and a tall forest, and the air around it is full of birds. Lancelot, struck by the castle's beauty, exclaims: '... Com fu fermee de grant cuer' (1: 574) ['With what a high heart it was built']. It is Galehot's most important and most treasured castle, and he recollects how high his spirits were when he ordered its construction. He built it to be the stage for his coronation, just before their first meeting, he tells Lancelot. He had already conquered thirty kings and was

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overlord of all their lands, but he was still uncrowned himself. He was waiting to conquer King Arthur and add the kingdom of Logres to his territories, after which he planned an extraordinary coronation that would be remembered for generations. All his thirty-one conquered kings would be present, crowned to do him honor. On each of the turrets of this splendid castle would be a silver pillar the size of a man, supporting a great candle; and on the tower in the middle of the castle would be a pillar of gold larger than any of the rest, topped by an even larger candle. All night long the candles would burn so brilliantly that the coronation would be ablaze with Galehot's glory.

This is Galehot's conception of himself at the moment of his meeting with Lancelot: 'li plus viguerex hom del siegle et li plus redotez' (1: 574) ['the strongest man of the century and the most dreaded'], and the heroic conqueror of kingdoms who can summon kings to decorate his turrets with their crowns and celebrate his triumphs and renown in light and majesty. As Galehot tells Lancelot the history of the castle's construction, the man he was and his dreams for himself become the tragic backdrop for the man he has become. By this point in his relationship to Lancelot, he has so surrendered his separate identity and singleness of purpose that he loses consciousness and falls off his horse at the thought of being separated from his comrade-in-arms, and he has given up interest in his own position so completely that he will never be crowned himself.

Finally, as Galehot and Lancelot ride toward Galehot's glorious castle, now virtually an emblem of his lost self, the scene mysteriously incarnates the metamorphosis Galehot has suffered. Before their eyes, with no known cause, one of the walls of the castle falls to the ground, and at that very same moment every castle in Galehot's land crumbles. Nevertheless, even faced with so unmistakable a supernatural enactment of his personal tragedy, Galehot puts Lancelot's well being first. He shrugs off his ruined castle and urges his people to celebrate Lancelot's visit with festivities and be joyful in honor of it.

Often in the Prose *Lancelot* events are more meaningful than the significance formally attributed to them, and in this case the official meaning offered by the story seems to be a deliberate attempt to conceal the homoerotic meaning. Arthur's wisemen explain that Galehot's falling castles foundered because of his presumption. He had waged war against the most worthy man on earth, and God was mortifying his pride (1: 582).[5] Although King Arthur's great worthiness is mentioned from time to time in the Prose *Lancelot*, there is little evidence of it. The king's judgment is very poor on several occasions, and his role in battles is inconsequential. He is a background figure rather than a major actor in this romance (Kennedy 'Le roi Arthur' 46-62). But if King Arthur's great worthiness is not evident, Galehot's sinful pride is even less so. From the

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moment that he first encounters Lancelot, Galehot's sin of the spirit is too little consciousness of his own worth. The story of Galehot is not the story of a man intoxicated with power but one of a man who loves so much that only his love matters to him, just as this episode dramatizes. When Galehot is informed that not a single castle in his land remains whole, he greets what should be devastating news with: 'M'aï[t] Dex, ... de ce ne me chaut, car nuns cuers ne se doit esmaier de chose qui puist estre restoree si legierement' (1: 577) ['Lord help me, ... this does not matter to me, for no heart should be dismayed by something that can be redressed so easily']. How many literary lovers, swept along by the first surges of passion, have vowed to give up the world for love? Galehot literally enacts that traditionally empty claim: as his falling towers symbolize so brilliantly, he gives up the conqueror's world of power, fame, and possessions for love – and considers it well lost.

Galehot's love story is a tragedy. He loves Lancelot with an exclusive, absolute, lover's love that shoulders aside all worldly considerations in deference to that love. But while Lancelot comes to love Galehot as his comrade-in-arms, the only love in the story that matches Galehot's for Lancelot is Lancelot's for Guinevere. Lancelot loves Guinevere just as exclusively, absolutely, and desperately as Galehot loves Lancelot. Consequently, Lancelot can never begin to return Galehot's love equally. No matter how much Galehot sacrifices on Lancelot's account, Galehot can never win the kind of love he needs.

The ordinary love-triangle in a Lancelot story is King Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot, but in the Prose *Lancelot*, the homoerotic/heterosexual love triangle of Galehot, Lancelot, and Guinevere is far more complexly realized and profoundly dramatized.[6] Galehot loves Lancelot so intensely and uncompromisingly that he literally cannot live without him. But Lancelot loves Guinevere equally intensely and uncompromisingly. Galehot will die of love without Lancelot, but Lancelot will die of love without Guinevere. If Galehot helps Lancelot win Guinevere, then he will lose him to her; if he does not help him win Guinevere, he will lose him to death. The triangle yields the tragic contradiction of Galehot's life; he must give up Lancelot because he loves Lancelot.

A love-triangle of this sort is very unusual in medieval romance. Traditionally, comrades-in-arms help each other find love and are overjoyed when their comrades love successfully. Their mutual relationship and their comrade's love for a woman ordinarily complement rather than conflict with each other, and no love-triangle evolves. Claris and Laris, two unexceptional knights of romance, for example, express their comradeship by each smoothing the way for the other one to love, and they are ultimately delighted by each other's successful

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loving (Alton lines 3970-79, 8099-167, etc.). Galehot, on the contrary, thinks of Guinevere as his rival, as if Lancelot's love for her diminishes his love for him. Nevertheless, conflicted as Galehot is, Lancelot's suffering is so great that it drives Galehot to arrange a meeting for Lancelot with Guinevere. Lancelot is so heroically miserable that the two kings who keep watch over him at night report that he soaks his blanket with his tears and moans in such anguish that they cannot sleep. He will not explain his grief to Galehot or anyone else, and when Galehot offers to avenge him if he has been wronged, Lancelot weeps even more bitterly than before and begins to faint. Galehot is terrified that he will die, and he kisses and embraces him. When they hear Mass together, Galehot reaffirms his love and swears by the Eucharist to devote all his power to lifting Lancelot's spirits. Nevertheless Lancelot still gives Galehot no hint of what is wrong and no charge to carry out for him beyond listening to what is said about him at King Arthur's court and continuing to conceal his whereabouts.

At this point in the story Lancelot has not admitted his identity to anyone, even Galehot. He is simply a nameless knight in black armor who achieves astonishing feats in battle and then disappears. The queen, however, suspects who he is and that he is in love with her. She also suspects that Galehot knows where the Black Knight is hiding, and so she asks Galehot to arrange a meeting for her with him. In the process of arranging this meeting, Galehot discovers that Guinevere is the cause of Lancelot's debilitating despair, and during the meeting Lancelot admits to loving Guinevere, which establishes once and for all the emotional configuration of the Lancelot, Galehot, Guinevere love-triangle. Galehot's going between saves Lancelot from the slow death of his self-destructive grieving, but it leaves Galehot a distant second in his affections.

Toward the end of the Prose *Lancelot*, Guinevere's claims to Lancelot are pitted openly against Galehot's and the rivalry between Lancelot's two loves is played out in open court. Even publicly, Galehot is willing to announce outright his desperate need for Lancelot. The occasion is King Arthur's invitation to Lancelot to become part of the Round Table, and Galehot pleads his case with Lancelot beforehand. We have come to the place where I will lose you, he tells Lancelot.

> "Ge sai por voir, fait Galehoz, que li rois vos proiera de
> remanoir de sa maisniee. Et que ferai ge qui tot ai mis an vos
> et cuer et cors?" (1: 568)
>
> ["I know for a fact," Galehot says, "that the king is going
> to beg you to stay here as one of his special companions. And
> what shall I do who have given myself completely to you, heart
> and body?"]

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Lancelot replies with full recognition of Galehot's love that at the same time puts Guinevere and her love on a separate plane:

> "Certes, sire, fait Lanceloz, ge vos doi plus amer que toz les homes do monde, et si fais gié. Ne ja de la maisniee lo roi Artu ne remanrai se force ne m'i fait remanoir. Mais comment veerai ge rien que ma dame me commande?" (1: 568)
>
> ["Certainly, my lord," Lancelot says, "I owe it to you to love you more than all the men in the world, and I do. I shall never remain as one of King Arthur's special companions unless I am forced to remain. But how shall I refuse anything my lady commands me to do?"]

Lancelot has just virtually single-handedly rescued the king and his major knights from the prison of a sorceress who had seduced the king, so King Arthur is even more acutely aware than usual of Lancelot's enormous importance to him. Although he does not seem to realize that Guinevere and Lancelot are lovers, he recognizes her special power over him and puts it to use. He explains to Guinevere that he plans to ask Lancelot to join the Round Table, and he spells out the role he wants her to play: 'Et s'il ne voloit por moi remanoir, si l'an cheïssiez tantost as piez' (1: 570) ['And if he does not want to stay on my account, then fall at his feet at once']. Guinevere reminds the king of Galehot's prior claim as Lancelot's knight and comrade, and she persuades Arthur to ask Galehot's permission before he speaks to Lancelot. Galehot does not refuse the king's request, but he begs him to remember his loyal service and confronts him with the magnitude of his own need:

> "Ha! sire, fait Galehoz, ge sui venuz en vostre besoigne atot mon pooir, car c'est qancque ge puis. Ne ja ne m'aïst Dex, se ge savoie vivre sanz lui. Et comment me toudriez vos ma vie?" (1: 570)
>
> ["Oh, my lord," Galehot replies, "I came with all my power when you needed me, for it was all I could do. God help me, I do not know how I can live without him. And how can you take away my life?"]

But when the moment of decision arrives, Arthur does not even acknowledge Galehot's plea. He simply calls upon Guinevere to ask Lancelot to stay, and at the sight of the queen on her knees Lancelot rushes forward, promising his allegiance. Lancelot loves Galehot and owes Galehot his love, but when that love conflicts with his love for the queen, he does not hesitate to choose her. At

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first, in a half-hearted way, Galehot agrees to the solution Arthur next offers him: both he and Lancelot are to be part of Arthur's court as fellow lords rather than as knights; however, Galehot cannot accept the inexorability of Guinevere's power over Lancelot. No matter how great his own need of Lancelot may be, Lancelot will always leave him for the queen, and Galehot broods over his situation, harking back to the time when he could have conquered Arthur and musing about all he gave up on Lancelot's account, only to lose so much of Lancelot's love to Guinevere. The Prose *Lancelot* rationalizes the conflict between Lancelot's love of Guinevere and his comradeship with Galehot by identifying Galehot's professional responsibilities as the source of the tension: as the ruler of many realms, Galehot cannot simply choose to spend his life at Lancelot's side in King Arthur's court. Galehot's desperation, on the other hand, suggests that he is enduring far more than a practical problem of responsibilities conflicting with his pleasure. Galehot suffers from a lover's need for an absolute and totally committed relationship, but Lancelot cannot give it to him. Lancelot promises to do anything in his power for Galehot, but it is not in his power to go against the wishes of the queen.

By this point in the story, other characters seem on the verge of recognizing the homoerotic dimension to Galehot's love of Lancelot. When Gawain is afraid that King Arthur will lose Lancelot to Galehot, for instance, he chooses a sexual comparison to characterize the problem:

> '... Galehoz l'an menra ja au plus tost que il porra, car il an
> est plus jalous que n'est uns chevaliers de belle dame jone,
> qant il l'a.' (I: 568)
>
> ['...Galehot will take him away as fast as he can because
> he is more jealous of him than a knight is of a beautiful young
> woman when he possesses her.']

Galehot's love of Lancelot is the central feature in the Prose *Lancelot*'s portrayal of him. It directs his life from the moment that he first encounters Lancelot, and it determines his death. Galehot acts out a second traditional extravagant claim of the literary lover. Not only does he give up his world for love, he dies of love. No ordinary causes of death – fevers or chills or old battle wounds that fester – divert attention from the meaning of his dying. He dies because a young woman, for unexplained reasons, comes to him in the Faraway Islands with a false report that Lancelot has been killed. She claims to have seen his headless corpse, and Galehot's grief is so devastating – 'si grant duel que nus hom ne porroit greignor avoir' (I: 612) [such great grief that no one could suffer greater] – that within three days he is dead. Galehot dies of love as he lived for love.

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Moreover, Galehot accepts in advance that his love for Lancelot will kill him. He has a prophetic dream in which two lions fight long and ferociously. One of the two wears a crown. The uncrowned lion [Galehot] nearly defeats the crowned lion [Arthur], but just as he is on the verge of winning their fight, a leopard [Lancelot] intervenes to make peace between them by leading the uncrowned lion to kneel before the crowned one. When Galehot first awakens from his dream, he discloses this much of it to Lancelot and claims not to understand it, but he relates the real ending to Arthur's wisemen, and his omissions show that he understood more than he acknowledged. In the final scene, the uncrowned lion lay dead, killed by the leopard. The wisemen tell Galehot that Lancelot is destined to kill him, and Galehot pressures them urgently for more information. How could Lancelot, who would never harm him, be destined to kill him? Their explanation is suitably vague: Galehot will die of grief over a future occurrence. But while they tell Galehot that he will die in three years and that he cannot escape his death, he is nevertheless greatly calmed and sufficiently in command of himself to comfort Lancelot who is distraught at the prediction that he will cost Galehot his life. Once again Galehot's response is a lover's response. Although he is only a few years older than when he first appeared in the story at the height of his powers, what appalls him is not losing his life; it is being killed by Lancelot. The crucial blow is against his love, not his being. When Arthur's magician makes clear that Lancelot will not turn against Galehot, that it is Galehot's love of Lancelot that will cause his death, Galehot is comforted (1: 582). Loving Lancelot has been the meaning of Galehot's life. Once he is assured that it will also be the meaning of his death, he accepts that death with a quiet spirit.

The final episode in the Prose *Lancelot* is an account of Lancelot's response to Galehot's death, and it acknowledges one last time the recurrent competition between Galehot's and Guinevere's claims upon Lancelot's affection which provides so much of the energy of this section of the romance. Lancelot grieved enormously when he first learned that Galehot was dead, the storyteller says. His laments were so full of pain that everyone who heard him pitied him greatly. Galehot had always been the man Lancelot loved most, and he would never have recovered from his grief if it had not been for the queen, who eased his pain and comforted him until all his misery and anguish were forgotten in the company of the woman he loved best of all the world (1: 612-13). This is what Galehot and Guinevere have always meant to Lancelot: he loves the one very much but the other far more. Lancelot is never pictured as a callous man who takes advantage of Galehot's devotion. Throughout the romance, he grieves for Galehot's lost possibilities and marvels at his own power over him. But

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when Lancelot must choose between Guinevere and Galehot, he always chooses Guinevere.

Galehot wins Lancelot's happiness for him by bringing him together with Guinevere, but the price Galehot pays for Lancelot's happiness is his own capacity for life and joy. When Guinevere offers Galehot a reward for arranging that first meeting, Galehot asks her to give him Lancelot as his companion, and she formally pledges to do so: 'sauf ce que j'ai aü avant' (1: 349) ['except that I have him before you']. This is the fatal qualification that breaks Galehot's heart. His final meaning is as a sacrificial figure. His love is sacrificed to the love of Lancelot and Guinevere and becomes one of the means of establishing the extraordinarily high value of that love. Loving Lancelot wrenches Galehot's life from its course. In as radical an about-face as love can inspire, he turns against all his early ambitions and dreams to squander his own immense potential by subordinating himself entirely to this other man's purposes. The classic contradictions of tragedy trap Galehot, and by the close of his story, Galehot has literally acted out the two most extravagant gestures of romantic love: he gives up his whole world for love, and he dies for love.

Three elements in particular of the Prose *Lancelot* obscure Galehot's homoerotic love of Lancelot for 20th-century readers. First, Galehot is presented as an exceedingly manly man while homosexuals are traditionally portrayed as effeminate in 20th-century popular culture. Second, Galehot enters into and consummates a heterosexual relationship during the course of the romance. Third, Lancelot is one of the legendary lovers of Western literature, but from time to time he talks quite extravagantly about how much he loves Galehot, and he sounds very much like Galehot when he does so. None of these aspects of Galehot's characterization and story, however, would have led medieval readers to have misunderstood his passionate love for Lancelot. Conceptions of homosexuality and the relations of men with men have changed in seven centuries.

First, Galehot's manliness. There is no trace of effeminacy in the Prose *Lancelot's* portrayal of Galehot. On the contrary, Galehot is a warrior and a hero, the son of a giantess, and he is introduced as a paragon. He is half-a-foot taller than any other man known to King Arthur's court; he is more noble, more generous, and more loved by his people; and he has conquered more territory than any other leader his age (1: 264). Galehot's manliness, however, would not have interfered with 13th-century readers' recognition of him as a man passionately in love with another man. What evidence there is of late medieval ideas about homosexuality suggests that it is anachronistic to expect to find a man who loves a man in the late Middle Ages portrayed as effeminate.

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David Greenberg, in *The Construction of Homosexuality*, writes that effeminacy 'was not an important element of the medieval conception of sodomy, or a common feature of urban male homosexuality in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. Artistic representations of men accused of sodomy in these periods do not show cross-dressing or effeminacy, and written accounts rarely mention these themes' (333). The more ordinary medieval image of a man who loved men may well have been the warrior-lover modeled on such prominent figures as Richard the Lionhearted, who was the lover of the king of France (Greenberg 259, Boswell 231). Galehot would fit this image very well. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire,* conceptions of men's desire for men undergo radical changes from period to period: 'The virility of male desire seemed as self-evident to the ancient Spartans, and perhaps to Whitman, as its effeminacy seems in contemporary popular culture' (27).

The second obstacle to recognizing Galehot's homoerotic love of Lancelot for 20th-century readers is Galehot's engagement to the Lady of Malohaut. If Galehot is homoerotically in love with Lancelot, then why would the Prose *Lancelot* complicate the representation of Galehot's sexuality by involving him in a heterosexual relationship? Like Galehot's manliness, this issue would have mattered much less for pre-eighteenth-century readers, who did not think of identities as defined by homosexuality and heterosexuality and did not consider homosexuals and heterosexuals different in nature. Before the late 18th century people were not expected to be attracted exclusively to the same sex or to the opposite sex. When men are accused of sexual offenses in Renaissance satire and drama, for instance, the illustrations of their wrongdoing can be both homosexual and heterosexual (Bredbeck 78-79). Ulysses' charges against Achilles in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, for example, shift 'almost instantaneously from a homoerotic condemnation of love for Patroclus to a heteroerotic indictment of passion for Polyxenes' (Bredbeck 79). And Chaucer's lascivious Summoner, hot and lecherous as a sparrow, provides a medieval illustration of such polymorphous sexuality if 'Ful prively a fynch eek koude he pulle' is taken to refer to heterosexual activity and the pun on the 'stif burdoun' he bore to the Pardoner's little love song is accepted as implying that he is homosexually involved with the Pardoner (652, 673).

In fact, however, it is the use the Prose *Lancelot* makes of the Lady of Malohaut episode much more than special pre-modern conceptions of sexuality that prevents Galehot's engagement from interfering with the portrayal of his love of Lancelot. Loving Lancelot as he does, Galehot has very little emotion left for loving a woman. It is at Guinevere's request that he consents to become the

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lover of her confidante, the Lady of Malohaut, and he gives no indication that he is even acquainted with the Lady before that point. When Guinevere asks Galehot if he is willing to love as she directs since she loved as he directed, Galehot tells her that she may do with him as she wishes, 'et de mon cors et de mon cuer' (I: 353) ['both with my body and with my heart']. Guinevere praises her confidante briefly, but the real virtue of the arrangement is that when Galehot and Lancelot are traveling in foreign lands, the queen explains, they will be able to lament together, while she and her confidante will comfort each other and share their joys (I: 352-55). In every important sense, this is the equivalent of an arranged marriage – arranged to suit the important people in the man's life rather than the man himself. Galehot agrees to love the Lady of Malohaut to complement Lancelot's loving of Guinevere, subordinating himself, as always, to Lancelot's needs. And while Galehot and the Lady of Malohaut consummate their relationship the same night that Lancelot and Guinevere consummate theirs, and Galehot is engaged to marry the Lady of Malohaut at the time of his death, his feelings for her are rarely mentioned, and when the two of them are portrayed as a couple, they are always a kind of faint, passionless echo of Lancelot and Guinevere. Lancelot is Galehot's one real love.

The most serious obstacle for 20th-century readers to understanding Lancelot and Galehot's relationship is Lancelot's feelings about Galehot and the similarity of their expressions of mutual devotion. If Lancelot's declarations of love do not have erotic meaning, then why should Galehot's? Could passionate language be so ordinary between the idealized knights of romance that it has no sexual implications for either man? The first point to make about Lancelot's declarations of love of Galehot is that, from their initial traumatic meeting on, they stand in the old and honorable relationship to each other of comrades-in-arms, and the language of comradeship and the language of love are the same. Lancelot and Galehot are lineal spiritual descendants of Roland and Oliver and Amis and Amiloun. That is why, when King Arthur threatens their relationship by asking Lancelot to join the Round Table, Lancelot tells Galehot that he owes it to him to love him more than all the men in the world (I: 568); and that is the relationship that Guinevere is recognizing when she warns King Arthur that he must ask Galehot's permission before inviting Lancelot to join the Round Table (I: 570). Lancelot loves Galehot, then, as part of their officially acknowledged mutual obligations in a society that accepts emotional relationships between men.

On the other hand, there is no question that Lancelot loves Galehot far more than would be required for simple fulfillment of his duties to him as his comrade-in-arms. The most dramatic illustration of Lancelot's love occurs in a

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later rewriting of his grief over Galehot's death. The Prose *Lancelot* exists in two versions: an earlier work referred to as the non-cyclic version, which is the work discussed in this article, and a later cyclic version which adds a quest for the holy grail and prepares for the excellence of Galahad, Lancelot's virgin son who will see the grail, by treating Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery as a sin.[7] The cyclic version leaves most of Galehot's story unchanged, but it expands its ending greatly (*Lancelot: Roman* vol. 8). For instance, Galehot has two prophetic dreams in the cyclic version, instead of just one, and they include lavish, complex imagery of a symbolic serpent and a body with two hearts, one of which leaves the body and becomes a leopard. Similarly, when Galehot tells Lancelot his plans for his coronation in the cyclic version, he specifies that 150 conquered kings were to have honored him there instead of the 30 in the non-cyclic version, and he points out to Lancelot the 150 matching castle turrets which would have been topped by man-sized silver candlesticks decorated with the kings' jeweled crowns. The cyclic version tends to be more spectacular and extravagant than the non-cyclic. It rationalizes events more and introduces more magical solutions to problems. It is also heavily, sometimes ponderously, moralized.

Lancelot's response to Galehot's death is one of the episodes most thoroughly reconceived by the cyclic version, and this time Lancelot's grief equals Galehot's. Just as Galehot died of a broken heart when he believed Lancelot was dead, Lancelot tries to commit suicide when he discovers Galehot's tomb. He is rescued by a servant of his magical protectress, the Lady of the Lake, who foresaw that he would die unless she intervened, and she helps him redirect his anguish into heroic exploits in Galehot's memory. Five knights guard Galehot's tomb, and Lancelot fights all five at once to carry off the body and bury it again in what will be his own tomb. It is the richest tomb on earth, and it is made entirely of jewels. Lancelot and Galehot, then, are to be united as a couple in death, and before Lancelot closes the tomb they will share, he embraces his comrade and kisses him three times. This is an exceedingly romantic story. Lancelot's extravagant response to Galehot's death is presented as one of this major hero's admirable exploits, watched over by his attendant magical Lady, and his love of his friend clearly indicates his own great soul.

The usual 20th-century response to Lancelot's love of Galehot is to object that since one of the greatest lovers of medieval literature is presented as loving another man so passionately, then passionate expressions of love between men must not have homoerotic meaning in early 13th-century romances; Lancelot and Galehot both are simply using the language of male friendship of this time. Behind this argument lies the modern assumption that homoeroticism and male bonding are opposites, and this idea in turn is based on the widely

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accepted notion that homosexuals and heterosexuals are also opposites – fundamentally different kinds of people. However, neither of these conceptions was current in the late Middle Ages. According to Bruce Smith, in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, it was only late in the 18th century that male bonding and male homosexuality began to be seen as opposed to each other rather than as 'different aspects of the same psychological and social phenomenon' (270), and it is notoriously difficult to distinguish between passionate friendship and homoerotic passion in Renaissance literature.[8] Sedgwick explores these issues in *Between Men* where she argues that the 'homosocial' needs to be drawn 'back into the orbit of "desire," of the potentially erotic,' which will make it possible to 'hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted' (1-2).[9] Lancelot and Galehot are points on that continuum, which was understood as unbroken in the Middle Ages, and which includes men who care deeply about each other as well as men who love each other. Medieval readers, then, would have been able to accept much more easily than 20th-century readers that while Lancelot and Galehot love differently, they both love.

In fact, of course, it is the difference between the loves of Lancelot and Galehot, not the similarity, that interests the Prose *Lancelot*, and incident after incident in Galehot's story develops the fundamental contrast between these men and their loving. From Galehot's first sight of Lancelot, Lancelot is for Galehot 'la riens que ge plus ain' ['the person I love best']; Galehot, however, can never be the person Lancelot loves best. Galehot wants to spend his life with Lancelot, and what he asks for throughout their story – sometimes assertively, sometimes plaintively, and finally without hope – is that he and Lancelot be companions and be together. Here is the first and one of the least self-effacing of these declarations and appeals:

> 'Et sachiez que vos porriez bien compaignie avoir de plus riche home que ge ne sui; mais vos ne l'avroiz ja mais a home qui tant vos aint. Et puis que ge feroie plus por vostre compaignie avoir que toz li monz, bien la devroie donc avoir sor toz les autres.' (324)
>
> ['And know that you may well have the comradeship of a more powerful man than I am, but never of a man who loves you more. And since I would do more to have your fellowship than anyone in the world, I should have it in preference to everyone else.']

Throughout their unequal relationship, Galehot yearns for a commitment that Lancelot can never give him. Galehot defines himself by his love for Lancelot

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and recreates his life to serve it, sacrificing everything that had formerly mattered to him in hopes of winning Lancelot. In contrast, no incident in the non-cyclic Prose *Lancelot* ever portrays Lancelot sacrificing anything for Galehot. Guinevere, not Galehot, is at the center of Lancelot's emotional being. Galehot's typical declarations of love beg Lancelot to love him and spend his life with him; Lancelot's typical declarations, on the other hand, are excuses for not loving enough: 'I love you, but I can never deny the queen anything.' Like Galehot, Lancelot remakes his life for love, but he remakes it for Guinevere's love. Galehot is always second in Lancelot's life – an important second, but only second. Lancelot loves his comrade-in-arms; Galehot is in love with his, and that is his tragedy.

Galehot is one of the most deeply imagined characters in the Prose *Lancelot.* Indeed, Jean Frappier sees in Galehot a new kind of character in French literature. He quotes appreciatively Ferdinand Lot's assessment of Galehot as 'une sorte de Hamlet médiéval' [a kind of medieval Hamlet], and he admires in particular the 'dimension intérieure inégalée avant lui chez les héros de l'épopée et du roman' [inward dimension unequaled before him among the heroes of epic and romance]. The characterization of Galehot, Frappier says, represents the beginning of the modern novel (Frappier 553). Few of the Renaissance works analyzed by Bruce R. Smith, Gregory W. Bredbeck, and Jonathan Goldberg and the other authors of the essays in *Queering the Renaissance* contain portrayals of men who love other men that are as richly and sensitively developed as Galehot's. This is a rare and impressive instance of fully developed late medieval homoerotic characterization.

Nevertheless, readers are extremely reluctant to acknowledge the homoeroticism of even as clearly homoerotic a text as this one. Jean Frappier, despite his great admiration for this characterization, insisted that Galehot's relationship with Lancelot was friendship, and pointed out in a note that all suspicions of anything else should be laid to rest by the fact that Galehot was the lover of the Lady of Malohaut (545 note 15). Frappier was writing in the '60's, which surely constrained his responses, but even many late-20th-century readers are unwilling to see homoeroticism in this text. Of the six recent commentators on Galehot's relationship to Lancelot, four either deny that Galehot's feelings are homoerotic, or do not comment at all on the fact that this is a same-sex relationship, or broach the possibility of homoeroticism coyly in a questioning aside: 'A cet amour de la part de Galehaut pour le jeune héros se mêle-t-il une nuance d'homophilia?' (Sweetser 28, 1989) ['Could there be a trace of homosexuality mixed into this love of Galehot's for the young hero?']. Only two of the six commentators discuss Galehot's relationship to Lancelot

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straightforwardly as same-sex love: Jean Markale (77-82, 1985), and Christiane Marchello-Nizia (974-77, 1981) who, while describing Galehot's feelings in the course of a discussion of power relationships in the Lancelot and Tristan stories, asks: 'Mais s'il ne s'agit-il pas là d'amour, qu'appelle-t-on amour?' (976) ['But if this isn't love, then what could love be?'] Elspeth Kennedy, editor of the Prose *Lancelot*, mentions the Guinevere-Lancelot-Galehot triangle and its usefulness in distracting attention from the queen's adultery, but otherwise she does not discuss Galehot's love of Lancelot in her book-length study of the work (*Lancelot and the Grail* 74, 1986). Finally, and most surprising of all, two commentators, Jacques Roubaud (1982) and Reginald Hyatte (1991), analyze independently the nature of Galehot's love for Lancelot in full-length articles. Hyatte details the many ways in which it resembles the knight's feelings for his lady in *fin' amor* and Roubaud discusses the correspondences between Galehot's loving and traditional medieval accounts of lovesickness. Despite the ease with which Hyatte establishes his case that Galehot's love for Lancelot is like Tristan's for Iseut and Lancelot's for Guinevere, Hyatte denies that Galehot's love is homoerotic, claiming that 'As an extreme variation on literary *fine amor*, Galehout and Lancelot's nonsexual relationship lacks the essence of its erotic model,' and that 'the narrator plays down the sexual potential of Galehout's love for Lancelot ...' (505). Later Hyatte moderates his position a little to admit that 'there is more than a hint of homosexual attraction' in this 'ambiguous' relationship which 'is homosexual and heterosexual at one and the same time' (506). Roubaud, on the other hand, never mentions at all that he is writing about a man loving a man. Despite the fact that all the other examples that Roubaud gives of lovesickness are heterosexual, he ignores the issue of Galehot and homoeroticism.

Unlike Galehot, who is portrayed at such length in the Prose *Lancelot*, Lavain is barely suggested as a character in the second of these works, Malory's 15th-century story of Elaine le Blanke, the Fair Maid of Astolat (Malory 3: 1061-98). In fact, Lavain is developed so slightly that his feelings might easily be overlooked. Nevertheless, Lavain, like Galehot, is a homoerotic lover in love with Lancelot. The Lavain incident occurs during Malory's retelling of one of the most romantic of the Lancelot tales, the story of the beautiful Elaine who dies of love for Lancelot. After Elaine's death, as she requests on her death bed, her gold-wrapped corpse is placed on a barge decorated in black silk which floats down the Thames to the king's palace. Her dead hand clutches a letter declaring her love for Sir Lancelot and asking him to bury her and pray for her soul since her love for him killed her.

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Sir Lavain is Elaine's brother, and he is a supporting character in these events. As the episode begins, Lancelot is fighting in disguise in a tournament in opposition to the knights of the Round Table, and Lavain is part of Lancelot's disguise. Lancelot carries Lavain's older brother's shield, and throughout the tournament Lavain fights beside Lancelot with a matching shield. Lavain then saves Lancelot's life by helping him reach a hermit who can cure him when Lancelot is very seriously wounded.

Elaine had fallen in love at first sight of Lancelot, and she tends him throughout his long recovery, with Lavain's assistance. But once Lancelot is well again and about to leave, Elaine confronts him with her feelings for him. In the presence of her father and brother, she begs Lancelot to save her from certain death by marrying her, and when Lancelot refuses on the grounds that he never intends to marry, Elaine asks him to become her lover. 'Jesu deffende me!' Sir Lancelot replies. 'For than I rewarded youre fadir and youre brothir full evyll for their grete goodnesse' (3: 1089), and he instead acknowledges Elaine's nursing during his illness by promising her a dowry of a thousand pounds a year when she marries. Elaine repeats her claim that her life is finished unless Lancelot will marry her or at least become her lover, and she shrieks, falls to the floor in a faint, and dies shortly afterward.

The passion and death of Elaine are romantic love in its most extreme form, and this is the immediate context for a group of speeches which reveal Lavain's love of Lancelot. In them Lavain declares that his feelings for Lancelot are identical to his sister's. As Elaine's waiting women carry her into her chamber, Lancelot once again prepares to leave, and he asks Lavain what he intends to do. In its own way, Lavain's answer is as desperate as Elaine's declarations of love. He replies: 'Sir, what sholde I do ... but folow you, but if ye dryve me frome you or commaunde me to go frome you' (3: 1090). Elaine's plight distracts the reader from Lavain's because their father comes forward at this point to tell Lancelot that he truly believes his daughter is dying of love. Lancelot repeats his offer of a dowry and appeals to Lavain to confirm that Lancelot never made love to Elaine or encouraged her affections. Lavain defends Lancelot:' "Fadir," seyde sir Lavayne, "I dare make good she ys a clene maydyn as for my lorde sir Launcelot ...."' Lavain then continues, drawing out the analogy between his sister's passion and his own commitment at first sight to Lancelot: '"but she doth as I do, for sythen I saw first my lorde sir Launcelot I cowde never departe frome hym, nother nought I woll, and I may folow hym"' (3: 1091). Lavain understands his sister's situation because it matches his own, and he uses his own feelings to explain her to their father. Like Elaine, he has fallen in love at first sight of Lancelot, cannot tolerate the thought of separation from him, and

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will follow him wherever he leads, and Malory reintroduces Lavain in lists of Lancelot's knights in later episodes.

Even if Lavain's response to Lancelot stood alone, it is so absolute and uncompromising that it would suggest homoerotic content. But it does not stand alone by any means. It is deliberately designed and identified as the homoerotic echo of Elaine's heterosexual feelings for Lancelot, and it acquires its meaning as a mirror image of her heterosexual passion. To claim that Lavain's feelings about Lancelot are simply a friend's feelings, one would have to make the same claim for Elaine's, for '"She doth as I do,"' as Lavain declares. Malory has provided a glimpse of a man who has fallen in love with another man.

The Prose *Lancelot*'s Galehot may well be Malory's source for this tiny portrayal of homoerotic love in Lavain. The link between the two figures is slender but credible. Although Malory never told the Galehot story, the Prose *Lancelot* was one of his major sources (Vinaver Intro. VII). The story of Elaine, however, came from another 13th-century prose work, *La mort le roi Artu*, which does not develop Lavain at all and never mentions Galehot in connection with this incident. Malory, on the other hand, includes 'syr Galahalte the Haute Prynce' six separate times in lists of knights in this episode (3: 1065, 1069, 1070, 1073, 1076, 1088). He unquestionably had Galehot in mind when he created this incident, and his development of Lavain's feelings into a mirror image of Elaine's suggests that he had understood Galehot's real role in the Prose *Lancelot*.

These portrayals of Lavain and Galehot are particularly remarkable in light of the official attitudes of the late Middle Ages toward homosexuality: condemned by theology and the law and treated with scorn or derision by literature. These are not conflicted, problematic, disturbing portraits like Chaucer's portrait of the Pardoner, whose sexuality is so questionably represented. Instead, these are positive characterizations of two very attractive people. Moreover, these are both stories that honor homoerotic emotions. Although Galehot's story ends tragically, it is full of richly expressed love.

Literature is the obvious source for insight into as secret and sinful a subject as homoeroticism in the late Middle Ages. Unlike legal documents, the church's pronouncements, conduct books, and a society's many other artifacts, literature takes the reader imaginatively into lived experience or its symbolic equivalent and intimates complex feelings and relationships, whether or not they are socially, politically, legally, or morally acceptable. With its powerful tools of saying and not saying, of implication, innuendo, and allusion, symbol and interplay of action, literature can bring to life experiences which it then never needs to admit to having dealt with; it can speak to responses and emotions that must remain concealed but are nonetheless vitally real and full of urgency

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and power. Sodomy was an unspeakable sin from the 12th through the 15th centuries, but no reader of idealized representations of relationships like Lavain's and Galehot's would have been forced to think about sodomy.

My first point, then, is that two instances of positively portrayed homoerotic attraction do in fact exist in late medieval literature, and they were created during the most virulently officially homophobic period in all of Western history. My second point is that surely these instances are not unique. Indeed, they are probably not even very unusual. There must be many more brief portrayals of homoerotic emotion like Lavain's, or even a number of full-scale portraits of a man in love with a man like the Prose *Lancelot*'s Galehot. Undoubtedly the homophobic political, social, and intellectual climate of the late Middle Ages made it unacceptable for writers to produce poems that praise homoerotic love openly, like the 12th-century Latin clerical poems John Boswell quotes, but Boswell is wrong when he says that this new official intolerance stilled European gays for centuries to come (266). It forced writers who wanted to portray same-sex relationships to speak inexplicitly and inoffensively in a far subtler language; it muted their voices; but it did not silence them. And when the flood of books and articles considering late medieval literature from the perspective of queer theory does appear – as it surely will – in all likelihood it will change current understanding of the literary uses of homoeroticism in medieval texts as significantly as queer theory and criticism have changed conceptions of English Renaissance texts, and we will learn to hear those muted voices once again.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON - CLEAR LAKE

Gretchen Mieszkowski is a Professor of Literature and Director of Humanities at the University of Houston – Clear Lake, and past president of the South Central Women's Studies Association. She is the author of *The Reputation of Criseyde: 1155-1500*, as well as several Chaucerian journal articles, and she is currently finishing a book on medieval literary go-betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus.

NOTES

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1 Not all medievalists working in gender criticism would agree with these claims. Simon Gaunt, for instance, cautions that 'numerous homophobic passages in

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vernacular literature suggest that some medieval writers at least had an essentialist, not a performative view of homosexuality ...' (21-22).

2 Citations throughout are to *Lancelot do Lac*. Translations are my own. Two translations exist of the Prose *Lancelot*, but both are significantly abridged. The first is of the long, cyclic version: *Sir Lancelot of the Lake: A French Prose Romance of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Lucy Allen Paton (London: George Routledge, 1929). The second translates the non-cyclic version, which is the version discussed in this paper: *Lancelot of the Lake*, trans. Corin Corley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989). Both translations omit parts of the Galehot story.

3 See also Gaunt's very interesting discussion of the purpose of the *Enéas*'s denunciation of homosexuality (23-7).

4 Jacques Roubaud, in 'Galehaut et l'Éros mélancolique,' discusses the many ways in which Galehot's feelings for Lancelot match medieval accounts of melancholic lovesickness, and Reginald Hyatte, in 'Recoding Ideal Male Friendship as *Fine Amor* in the *Prose Lancelot*,' following the suggestion of Jean Markale (80), develops in great detail the point that the friendship between Galehot and Lancelot is far more like the relationship between lover and lady in *fin' amor* than it is like Ciceronian and Aristotelian ideal friendship. Roubaud does not mention at any point in his discussion that Galehot's love is homoerotic, and Hyatte describes it as 'nonsexual' (505). Two other commentators, however, Jean Markale (78-82) and Christiane Marchello-Nizia (974-81), both discuss Galehot's attraction to Lancelot at length and consider it homosexual.

5 Jean Frappier accepts this judgment of Galehot. He criticizes his excessive desire for worldly glory overthrown by excessive love for Lancelot (542-43).

6 Elspeth Kennedy, describing the competition between Guinevere and Galehot for Lancelot as 'one of the main themes' of the Prose *Lancelot*, suggests that this love triangle is deliberately developed to draw attention away from the triangle of adulterous love. 'The author has avoided as far as possible the triangle of royal husband, wife, and lover which might have threatened the integrity of the Round Table and the peace of the kingdom ...' (Kennedy 74).

7 Elspeth Kennedy notes the absence of any criticism of illicit love in the non-cyclic version and compares it in that respect with the cyclic where the lovers' sin is an important theme. As she says, throughout the non-cyclic version, the love of Lancelot and Guinevere is presented 'as a source of inspiration and an ennobling force....' Kennedy argues convincingly that the long, cyclic version was expanded from the short, non-cyclic version rather than the short version abridged from the longer version (*Lancelot do Lac* 2: 39-40).

8 Alan Bray discusses these distinctions in 'Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England.'

9 Kosofsky's idea becomes much clearer when she points out that 'the diacritical opposition between the "homosocial" and the "homosexual" seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men. At this particular historical moment, an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women:

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the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women's friendship, "networking," and the active struggles of feminism' (*Between Men* 2). Alan Bray's discussion of male friendships in Renaissance England is also very useful for understanding these distinctions, or lack of distinctions ('Homosexuality and the Signs' 40-61).

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