

In Fulcher of Chartres' account of a departing crusader, he depicts a wife as overcome with emotion, falling 'senseless to the ground' as if her husband were already dead. Her husband, on the other hand, while 'secretly' suffering severely, leaves with no indication that he is going to swoon.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, in *Yvain*, the eponymous protagonist faints upon recollecting his first meeting with his wife Laudine, from whom he is now estranged.<sup>2</sup> Both sources were written in the twelfth century, but the former is a Chronicle whereas the latter is an Arthurian romance. The former is also an account of battle whereas the latter is an example of courtly love.

These two contrasting examples serve to demonstrate the variety of contexts available for swooning, and that men and women responded differently according to these contexts. There appear to be different emotionologies for men and women depending on the circumstances and the writer's intentions. Whereas Fulcher of Chartres portrays a courageous warrior who carries out his duty regardless of fear, *Yvain* presents a character who is 'capable of idealising love' and faints in line with this capacity. Mieszkowski would argue there is nothing 'unmanly' about this.<sup>3</sup> Both examples, therefore, suggest that swooning was not exclusive to men or women, but could be gendered according to context (for example its cause or how others responded to the swoon). This essay will discuss whether swooning was masculine or feminine, but also the extent to which it was regarded as positive or negative. For example, was a man swooning regarded as effeminate? Writing on anger, White argues that it is not the emotion itself which is intrinsically good or bad, but rather the context in which it appears.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, one can argue that swooning was not inherently gendered, nor intrinsically positive or negative. However, swooning *became* gendered according to socio-cultural context. These contexts could be romantic love, grief, or shame, all of which are considered below.

While the swoon had a cultural context beyond the body, one should analyse to what extent its causes were considered biologically ungendered. As Saunders notes, while the

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<sup>1</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, *Chronicle of the First Crusade*, trans. Martha Evelyn McGinty (Reprint, London, 1941), p.24.

<sup>2</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*, trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven, 1987), line 3497

<sup>3</sup>Gretchen Mieszkowski, 'Revisiting Troilus's Faint' in Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (eds.) *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's 'Troilus and Criseyde'*, (Cambridge, 2008), p.50.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen D. White 'The Politics of Anger' in Barbara Rosenwein (ed.) *Anger's Past: the Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca, London; 1998), p.148.

extreme emotion of literature such as medieval romances might seem distant from reality, 'swoons and sighs tap into medieval understandings' of 'being in the world in ways that are surprisingly realist'.<sup>5</sup> References in medieval texts to swooning and fainting characters indicate that their swoon is similar to that of a modern understanding: a loss of consciousness brought on by psychological and physiological factors.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, any cultural, literary understanding of swooning came from a realist understanding of swooning as a medical response, and thus the medical aspect of swooning must be analysed.

Some causes of fainting were understood as pertaining exclusively to the female body. Galen's ideas surrounding menstruation included a so-called suffocation of the uterus which could cause women to collapse.<sup>7</sup> This idea was taken up by Gilbertus Anglicus in his *Compendium Medicinae* of c.1240, in which he wrote that 'prolonged retention of menstrua affects women so gravely that they appear to be dead'.<sup>8</sup> The *Trotula* too mentions that 'sometimes they [women] suffer syncope' due to a suffocation of the womb.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, swooning could be gendered. Its cause was sometimes linked to the solely female experience of menstruation.

However, there were other medical causes of syncope which appear to be ungendered. In Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum* of the 1230s, he wrote that the 'defaute of the herte and febilnesse of spiritis cometh swownynge that hatte comenlich spasmacio'.<sup>10</sup> In addition to weakness of spirits, Galen had also noted that fainting could be due to excessive semen, which he believed existed in men and women and could be cured through intercourse. Thus, the causes of fainting were sometimes understood as being applicable to both men and women. The medical context is important to understand how swooning was considered to function for both men and women. We can see that women might be more prone to swooning in the case of a suffocation of the

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<sup>5</sup> Corinne Saunders, 'The Play of Breath: Chaucer's Narratives of Feeling', in Arthur Rose et al (eds.) *Reading Breath in Literature*, (Basingstoke, 2018), p.18

<sup>6</sup> Barry Windeatt, 'The Art of Swooning in Middle English', in Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (eds.) *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, (Woodbridge; Rochester, 2011), p.211.

<sup>7</sup> Galen, *De Locis Affectis*, quoted in P. Brain, *Galen on Bloodletting* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Gilbertus Anglicus, *Compendium Medicinae*, quoted in C. H. Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England* (London, 1967), p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> M. H. Green, *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia, 2001). p.71.

<sup>10</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, trans. John Trevisa, ed. M. C. Seymour, (Oxford, 1975), vol. 1, Book 7, p. 378.

uterus, but that overall, causes of syncope be ungendered. Weiss notes the importance of this medical understanding of swooning. Medical texts considered the emotional disturbance to both men and women which could lead to the temporary departure of the vital breath ('spirits'). This loss of spirits is often mentioned in literature, for example Criseyde's swoon references 'hire woful spirit'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, while swooning had a wider cultural context than the body, one should be aware that writers may have had an awareness of medical ideas surrounding the swoon. As Weiss notes regarding Troilus' swoon, to take swoons out of their 'medieval medical and literary contexts is to risk simplifying Chaucer at best, and at worst, to wholly misinterpret him'.<sup>12</sup> In other words, medical ideas of swooning may well have influenced writers' understandings of swooning, and we should not negate this.

Fainting was a common trope in literature; in medieval romance literature there is no shortage of fainting lovers, for example Lancelot and Guinevere.<sup>13</sup> To offer a more detailed analysis on whether such swooning in literature was gendered (and whether it was received positively or negatively), we need to explore the fainting within *Troilus and Criseyde*, focusing on the perception of Troilus' swoon. In the epic poem, both Troilus and Criseyde faint at different points. Criseyde faints when she hears she might be exchanged for Antenor, a Trojan prisoner. Troilus faints moments before consummating the relationship.<sup>14</sup> Weiss argues that 'it is important to de-gender the medieval swoon'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, in this poem both the male and female protagonist faint. However, they swoon in different contexts. As Mieszkowski notes, Troilus as a lover is 'undebatably' passive.<sup>16</sup> One must question whether this passivity applies to his swoon, if this passivity is gendered, and whether his swoon is deemed to be negative.

Hansen would argue for the affirmative. She writes that Troilus' swoon 'feminizes' him, defining this feminisation as negative in that it renders him 'subservient, weakened, infantilised'.<sup>17</sup> To consider this further, it is noteworthy that Chaucer took inspiration

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<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, trans. Barry Windeatt, (Essex 1984). Book IV line 1152.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Weiss, 'Modern and Medieval Views on Swooning: the Literary and Medical Contexts of Fainting in Romance' in Michael Cichon and Rihannon Purdie (eds.) *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, (Cambridge, 2011) pp.133-134.

<sup>13</sup> Mieszkowski, 'Revisiting Troilus' Faint', p.55.

<sup>14</sup> Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book III line 1092. Book IV lines 1150-1155.

<sup>15</sup> Weiss, 'Modern and Medieval Views', p.122.

<sup>16</sup> Gretchen Mieszkowski, 'Revisiting Troilus's Faint', p.44.

<sup>17</sup> Elaine Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, (Oxford, 1992) p.20

from Boccaccio in his version of *Troilus and Criseyde*, but changed the position of Troilus' swoon within the text's structure. While in Boccaccio's version, it is Troilus who faints upon hearing that Criseyde may be taken prisoner, Chaucer places his swoon at the moment of consummation. One can assume there was a reason for this. Perhaps he was attempting to satirise courtly love. This is not far-fetched; in *Boeve de Haumtoun*, Boeve faints for fear lest his lover Josiane is dead, and he is recalled to his senses by his horse. The humorous implications behind this suggests that other writers also saw a comic element to fainting within courtly love.<sup>18</sup> To return to *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer could be intending to criticise courtly love, but could also be suggesting that Troilus' swoon is inappropriate. Indeed, the reactions of Pandarus and Criseyde exemplify this, as Pandarus comments, 'O thef, is this a mannes herte?'<sup>19</sup> Given this reaction, one can infer that swooning could be gendered in terms of how people responded to it; Troilus' swoon is perceived as feminine by other characters within the poem, and this could be negative given his masculine identity.

However, one must return to the idea that there was a tradition of fainting lovers in medieval romance. Mieszkowski argues that, given this context, Troilus' swoon is 'not comic nor inappropriate'. Instead, it establishes him as capable of the idealising feelings of love, as in other romances such as *Florimont*.<sup>20</sup> Mieszkowski even suggests a masculine element to Troilus' swoon, as he demonstrates that he is supreme in love as well as war. This is also argued by Crocker and Pugh, who label Troilus' swoon as a 'masochistic' masculinity which affirms a superiority to female agency, as his suffering is 'identified as a defining experience for the culturally privileged male'.<sup>21</sup> Mieszkowski furthers this idea of masculine suffering through examination of the medical context of his swoon, referring to Criseyde's worry that 'his herte deyde'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, medieval authors spoke of the danger of death from a fainting attack which led to *sincofis magna, vel mors ipsum*.<sup>23</sup> This dangerous element to death valorises his heroism through suffering. While Crocker and Pugh acknowledge that women could also experience this suffering, they suggest it is

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<sup>18</sup> *Der Anglonormannische Boeve de Haumtone*, ed. A. Stimming (Halle, 1899), lines 1686–90, quoted in Weiss, 'Modern and Medieval Views', p.124.

<sup>19</sup> Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book III line. 1098.

<sup>20</sup> Mieszkowski, 'Revisiting Troilus' Faint', p.55.

<sup>21</sup> Holly A. Crocker and Tison Pugh, "Masochism, Masculinity and the Pleasures of Troilus" in Pugh and Marzec, (eds.) *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's 'Troilus and Criseyde'*, (Cambridge, 2008), pp.82–96.

<sup>22</sup> Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book III, line 1171.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Liggins, 'The Lovers' Swoons in Troilus and Criseyde,' *Parergon* 3.3 (1985), p.96.

predominantly imagined as a 'privileged formation of masculine identity', and thus the swoon of Troilus indicates his masculinity.<sup>24</sup>

Whether one wishes to perceive Troilus' swoon as positive or negative, masculine or effeminate, it is still gendered. After Troilus' swoon, Pandarus still refers to him as 'so noble a creature', implying that his swoon has not affected his status as a man of virtue.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, immediate responses to the swoon suggest it was improper. Therefore, the example of *Troilus and Criseyde* demonstrates that men did swoon, but there was ambivalence surrounding its appropriateness in any given context.

In addition to the romantic context, there are representations of homosocial swooning within male relationships. Rachel Moss examines Boeve and Terri in *Boeve de Haumtoun* (c1324), in which Terri 'fel ther doun and swough [swooned]' upon hearing that Boeve was dead.<sup>26</sup> Upon seeing this emotional response, Bevis reveals himself. In this context, the swoon demonstrates the worthiness of Terri as a noble companion; he is someone virtuous who can be trusted.<sup>27</sup> Swooning here implies the formation of a male friendship. Likewise, in *Sir Degaré*, Degaré comes across a knight and the two fight over territory. Once both are led to exhaustion, Degaré draws his broken sword and is suddenly recognised by his father. Upon this recognition, Degarre 'fel iswone tho,/And his fader, sikerlo,/ Also he gan swony'.<sup>28</sup> In both examples, swooning appears to be a shock reaction, but also demonstrates the creation and affirmation of male bonds. As Moss notes, 'it can be a way of marking and strengthening an existing relationship or allowing an entry-point into forming a meaningful relationship between two men'.<sup>29</sup>

While these examples suggest the physical, potentially uncontrollable nature of the swoon, one should not ignore the wider social context. As Warner argues, swooning was a genuine emotional reaction, but there it also contained a ritualised element.<sup>30</sup> In noble

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<sup>24</sup> Crocker and Pugh, 'Masochism, Masculinity and the Pleasures of Troilus' pp.92-93.

<sup>25</sup> Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book V, line 384.

<sup>26</sup> Bevis of Hampton, in *Four Romances of England*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, 1999) lines 1309-1314.

<sup>27</sup> Rachel Moss, "And much more I am sorryat for my good knyghts": Fainting, Homosociality and Elite Male Culture in Middle English Romance', *Historical Reflections*, 42:1, (Spring, 2016), p.106.

<sup>28</sup> Sir Degaré, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, 1995), lines 1058-1065.

<sup>29</sup> Moss, 'And much more I am', p.106.

<sup>30</sup> A.Warner "'Doel" In Situ: The Contextual and Corporeal Landscape of Grief in *La Chanson de Roland*'. In A.Marculescu and CL.Métivier, (eds.) *Affective and Emotional Economies in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, (Cham, 2018), p.216.

male relationships, swooning could demonstrate a political affinity, perhaps part of the 'ennobling love' as proposed by Jaeger, in which men fostered spiritual love as a way of behaving. In this context, swooning was gendered in its function to demonstrate male alliance. One must acknowledge Jaeger's note that such ennobling love was primarily a way of behaving, only secondarily a way of feeling.<sup>31</sup> With this in mind, we can read homosocial swooning as a literary device used to demonstrate the emotional expectations of noble men. Swooning was part of what Rosenwein would call an emotional community, in which these noble men should demonstrate their loyalty to one another.<sup>32</sup> This is further exemplified in *The Song of Roland*, in which Roland faints upon seeing his peers dead, 'and Oliver too whom he loved so much'.<sup>33</sup> In these instances of literature, swooning becomes masculinised as men are expected to demonstrate their bonds. Swooning could therefore become a gendered behaviour in its representation of masculine love.

Also in the *Song of Roland*, Charlemagne faints and tears his beard upon Roland's death. In line with Jaeger's idea of ennobling love, his swoon honours the significance of Roland to the army as well as demonstrating the political ideology of the feudal code.<sup>34</sup> Along with Charlemagne's swoon, 'twenty thousand of them [baron knights] swoon and fall to the ground'.<sup>35</sup> This epic lament is evidently a literary device to demonstrate a political and military alliance. According to Lansing, male lamentation measured the honour of the individual character, but also underscored political networks of association. When Charlemagne grieves for Roland, therefore, 'it is the grief of a lord for a loyal vassal, or the grief of a lord who is threatened by powerful nobles for a beloved youth who was a loyal member of his entourage.'<sup>36</sup> Here then, one might see swooning as gendered in that it is a performance which demonstrates a masculine support for a loyal warrior. However, there do seem to be limits to the display of emotion. While Karras notes that public emotion was admired, that it was 'manly to have deeply held feelings, and important to

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<sup>31</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*, (Philadelphia, 1999), p.6.

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, (New York, 2006)

<sup>33</sup> 'The Song of Roland' in Ana del Campo (ed.), *ME3431 Course Reader* (St Andrews, 2022), p.186.

<sup>34</sup> Angela Moots, 'Perceptions of Syncope in Medieval French Literature of the High Middle Ages: the Function and Cultural History of Fainting' (PhD Thesis, University of Kansas, 2015), p.53.

<sup>35</sup> 'The Song of Roland' p.188.

<sup>36</sup> Carol Lansing, *Passion and Order: Restraint of Grief in the Medieval Italian Communes*, (Ithaca, 2008), pp.79-80.

display them', contemporary records suggest this was not always the case.<sup>37</sup> Following Charlemagne's swoon, Geoffrey of Anjou chastises him, saying 'Fair sir king, grieve not so much!'<sup>38</sup> This suggests that there ought to be a restraint on grieving and its accompanying somatic gestures. One must question why this was the case, and whether Geoffrey of Anjou's chide had a religious dimension, was linked with Charlemagne's social status, or was a comment on his masculinity.

Indeed, Geoffrey of Anjou had religious reasoning for limiting expressions of grief. Given that Christians were meant to place hope in God for the eternal salvation of the soul, it was perceived as inappropriate to grieve excessively over the body.<sup>39</sup> This is evidenced by letters of the Avignon papacy which urged widows against weeping and instead to put their faith in God.<sup>40</sup> However, one should not ignore the potential gendered element of his reprimand towards Charlemagne. Indeed, outside of literature men were criticised for displaying excessive grief, such as Louis IX of France who displayed emotion when his mother died.<sup>41</sup> There could well be a link to status in this reprimand too, that noble men or men of authority should remain composed. This is further evidenced by King Orfeo, whose restraint in grief was based in part on his kingly image.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, in the case of Troilus, the potential negative connotations of his swoon could also be associated with social standing, with Cox suggesting that his faint is an action 'hardly the behaviour of a hero'.<sup>43</sup> Thus, swooning could be gendered based on the responses it received, but this response could have multiple reasons, whether to do with religion or social rank.

To further consider the implications of social rank and gender within swooning, one must analyse female swooning. In *Yvain*, Lunette remarks to Laudine that a woman of her rank should not swoon with such regularity.<sup>44</sup> This again links to an emotional community, but a community of status rather than gender. While this example does not pertain to grief, it

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<sup>37</sup> Ruth Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2003), 65.

<sup>38</sup> *The Song of Roland*, trans. Jessie Crosland (Cambridge, Ontario; 1999), p. 75.

<sup>39</sup> Katherine Harvey, 'Episcopal Emotions: Tears in the Life of the Medieval Bishop', *Historical Research*, 87:238, (2014) p.605

<sup>40</sup> W. J. Courtenay and K. Shoemaker, 'The tears of Nicholas: Simony and Perjury by a Parisian Master of Theology in the 14th century', *Speculum*, lxxxiii (2000), p.624.

<sup>41</sup> Jean de Joinville, *Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. M. Shaw (1963), p. 315.

<sup>42</sup> Rebekah M. Fowler, 'Mourning, Melancholia and Masculinity in Medieval Literature', (PhD Thesis, Southern Illinois University, 2011), p.93

<sup>43</sup> Catherine Cox, *Gender and Language in Chaucer* (Gainesville, 1997), p.45.

<sup>44</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*, trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven, 1987), lines 1590-1612.

demonstrates that social status was closely tied in with the appropriateness or inappropriateness of swooning. Swooning could therefore be gendered, but it had a further social context.

Nonetheless, within expressing grief, there do appear to be more extreme versions of swooning for women. Women faint dead where men do not. Aude, for example, upon hearing of Roland's death, notes 'May it not please God...that I remain alive after Roland'. Following this, 'she dies straightway.'<sup>45</sup> In *The Book of the Duchess*, Alcyone swoons upon hearing that her husband has drowned. She is 'cold as stone' waking only to die within three days.<sup>46</sup> Such female "death swoons" did not just pertain to the individual but could be done *en masse*. In parallel to the Franks fainting, in *Roman de Thèbes*, four thousand women faint dead upon hearing that only King Adraste, Capanée and a messenger are the only surviving Greeks.<sup>47</sup> Female swooning in medieval literature could be fatal. Whereas the male swoons display bonds of affection and alliance among male warriors, women swoon in grief to reflect upon the hero and express devotion. This problematises Crocker and Pugh's argument that suffering from swooning was a 'masculine...sacrifice'; the suffering which swooning entailed could also be a female experience. This feminine suffering was caused by a devotion so strong that it could be deadly.<sup>48</sup> This is not to suggest that female swooning lacked a political element; Alice's swoon in Raoul de Cambrai stems in part from her loss of an heir.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, female swooning appears to be less as part of an alliance and more linked to devotion or family loyalty. Thus, swooning was gendered in its meaning as well as its extremity.

In addition to sorrowful swooning in *chansons de geste* and other epic poems, the Middle Ages saw representations of swooning related to *The Passion of Christ*. From the late thirteenth century grew an idea that the Virgin Mary had fainted at the cross during the crucifixion of Christ. This is depicted in art such as Giotto's c.1315 fresco in the Lower Church of Assisi. This imagery could often include implications of childbirth labour. For

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<sup>45</sup> *The Song of Roland*, trans. Jessie Crosland, p.73.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Book of the Duchess*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, (3rd ed. Boston, 1987), ll. 1309–10. Corinne Saunders, 'From Romance to Vision: The Life of breath in Medieval Literary Texts' in David Fuller Corinne Saunders; Jane MacNaughton (eds.) *The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine Classical to Contemporary* (Cham, 2021), p.95.

<sup>47</sup> *Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Raynaud de Lage, Guy., 2 vols. (Paris, 1968), quoted in in Moots, 'Perceptions of Syncope', p.310.

<sup>48</sup> Crocker and Pugh, 'Masochism, Masculinity and the Pleasures of Troilus' p.96.

<sup>49</sup> *Raoul of Cambrai*, trans. Jessie Crosland. pp.65-66.



example, Bonaventura wrote that while she suffered no pain in giving Birth to Christ, 'now, under the Cross she gives birth in pain'.<sup>50</sup> Although he states that this pain is an agony of compassion, it is still a childbirth labour. Her swoon, then, is a maternal experience. This experience of *compassio* was gendered; it was not uncommon for women to demonstrate their piety in an affective manner, such as through swooning. For example, Angela of Foligno began to swoon in front of images of the Passion as well as becoming feverish and ill.<sup>51</sup> Margery Kempe, furthermore, was reported to have sobbed and swooned during Mass, reliving the trauma of Christ's Passion and reopening the wounds of his bleeding body.<sup>52</sup> It was said she could not see a crucifix without fainting. Bynum suggests that this such affective piety was enacted because women did not have the clerical office as an authorisation for speaking, and thus *had* to stress the experience of Christ through the body.<sup>53</sup> This demonstrates a *compassio* in which women demonstrated their grief and devotion through swooning. Thus, in a religious context of grief, swooning was clearly gendered, as it was seen that women were more able to use their bodies in affective piety.

The final element of swooning and gender which ought to be discussed is that of shame. Returning to *The Song of Roland*, Roland's swoon demonstrates the masculinised nature of sorrow. Indeed, the same can be said for Adraste in *Roman de Thebes*, who faints upon seeing women come to bury the bodies of their men. However, in addition to the sorrowful element of this swoon, there is one of shame. It was seen better to die fighting rather than be the only survivor amongst the army. This is evidenced in chronicles as well as literature, such as in Geoffrey le Baker's *Chronicle*, in which Prince Edward tells his soldiers to 'show greatness in action', and if they die, to 'die a good death.'<sup>54</sup> Thus, the fact that Adraste is one of only three surviving men implies a loss of pride which brings on his swoon.

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<sup>50</sup> Saint Bonaventura, *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*, in Emma Theres Healy, *Women According to Saint Bonaventure*, (New York, 1956), pp.239-41.

<sup>51</sup> Elena Carrera, 'The Spiritual Role of the Emotions in Mechthild of Magdeburg, Angela of Foligno and Teresa of Avila' in Lisa Renée Perferri, *The Representation of Women's Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, (Gainesville, 2005) p.75

<sup>52</sup> Laura Kalas-Williams, *Margery Kempe's Spiritual Medicine: Suffering, Transformation and the Life Course* P.47

<sup>53</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, (New York, 1989) p.171

<sup>54</sup> 'The Song of Roland', p.126

Women could also faint for shame, though the reasoning behind this shame differed. For example, in Chaucer's *The Legend of Lucrece*, Lucrece faces shame at being raped by Tarquin, and swoons 'for fear of slander and dread of death'. According to Flannery, 'swooning seems to be the only possible response of womanly shamefastness in the face of such violent masculine lust'.<sup>55</sup> Considering the swoon of Adraste and Lucrece, one can view swooning as ungendered in that both swoons are caused by shame. However, one must conclude the gendered nature of the swoon as what causes this shame differs for men and women. Both are concerned with reputation, but the female reputation is linked to virginity whereas the male reputation is linked to military prowess, or a lack thereof. Again, swooning was gendered in its meaning.

The conclusions regarding swooning and gender in this essay of course contain caveats. For example, while it has been suggested that homosocial swooning in a military context was appropriate, Arthur is criticised by his peers for swooning over the loss of Gawain.<sup>56</sup> Swooning was also often a literary device, tells us of expectations rather than reality. Therefore, these examples are not intended to be demonstrative of an entire cultural context, but rather seek to demonstrate patterns within a cultural context. Swooning on its own was not necessarily gendered; the medical causes of it could sometimes pertain to both men and women. Likewise, men and women could swoon in similar circumstances, for example that of grief and shame. As Mieszkowski stresses, we must consider that the modern-day perception of medieval swooning has been tainted by the emphasis of swooning as a female phenomenon during the Victorian era.<sup>57</sup> However, the contexts of swooning could vary for men and women: a woman might swoon out of devotion to a man, but a man might swoon as part of a political alliance. The key difference was the *meaning* behind these swoons, and this meaning had an evident gendered dimension.

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<sup>55</sup> Mary C. Flannery, *Practising Shame: Female Honour in Later Medieval England*, (Manchester, 2020), p.134.

<sup>56</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men*, p.65.

<sup>57</sup> Mieszkowski, 'Revisiting Troilus' Faint', p.54

*To what extent was swooning gendered in the Middle Ages?*

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