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“And much more I am
soryat for my good
knyghts”
*Fainting, Homosociality, and Elite
Male Culture in Middle English
Romance*

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Abstract • In Middle English romances, public and semi-public displays of emotion are used by elite men to strengthen and promote hegemonic masculinity. This article examines how male fainting, as an act witnessed and sometimes replicated by an audience of men, serves to reinforce homosocial bonds, and to highlight the heroic qualities that make these characters capable of such deep, public sorrow. Late medieval patriarchy is dependent upon the homosocial bonding of elite men, and as such lionizes not only friendship between individual men, but also their collective unity as a body bound by social, political, and emotional ties. Fainting, as a performative act, provides a physical representation of both this collective identity and of specific virtues associated with male nobility.

Keywords • Arthurian legend, homosociality, masculinity, medieval literature, medieval romance, Middle English

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Sir Mador went with mikel pride
Into the forest, him for to play,
That fl owred was and braunched wide;
He fand a chapel in his way,
As he came by the cloughes side,
There his owne broder lay,
And there at mass he thought to abide.

A riche tomb he fand there dight
With lettres that were fair ynow;
A while he stood and redde it right;
Grete sorrow then to his herte drow;

He fand the name of the Scottish knight The Queen
Gaynor with poison slogh. There he lost both main
and might,
And over the tomb he fell in swough.¹

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In the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, a fourteenth-century Middle English

romance,

Sir Mador goes out for a pleasure ride in the forest and happens upon a tomb, thus learning of his brother's death. Pushed beyond the limits of his physical or mental ability to bear the emotional cost of this loss, he faints. Once recovered, he rides immediately to Arthur's court, demanding justice for his brother's death, and the queen is condemned to death unless a champion will fight for her. Mador, introduced 880 lines into the poem, is a plot device whose function is to put Guinevere (Gaynor) in a position where she is accused of murder. He could easily have been portrayed as a villain who falsely accuses the queen, but instead a few lines make it clear that Mador is acting on noble impulses. The poem offers only a brief description of Mador as a "hardy man and snell [swift]":² and so it is his reaction to his brother's death, his physical and emotional collapse in the form of a swoon, that establishes his knightly integrity and the justness of his quest for vengeance, even if the target of that quest is the wrong person.

In Middle English romances, the physical expression of male emotion serves both to reinforce norms of elite masculine behavior and to promote homosocial bonding. Mador does not faint in spite of his knightly qualities of hardiness, strength, and prowess: he faints because of them, and his swooning is literary shorthand for the nobility this fast-paced poem does not have the space to elaborate. As Barry Windeat notes, fainting occurs so frequently in medieval literature "as to pass for almost commonplace behavior"; the only unusual feature of Mador's swoon is that it takes place without witnesses, since "swoons in literature tend to be witnessed events, implicitly dramatic and performative occasions."³

An earlier critical impulse to view male fainting in medieval texts as effeminizing has given way to a more nuanced reading of the gendered implications of the swoon.⁴ As Gretchen Mieszkowski argues, it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that fainting became specifically considered a feminine bodily act, which has colored subsequent critical readings of swooning in medieval literature.⁵ Despite this work, discussion of medieval fainting remained until recently focused on heterosexual love swooning of the type seen in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, even though fainting happens very regularly in medieval narratives and only some of the time is brought about by lovesickness.⁶ Judith Weiss quite rightly argues against this narrow interpretation of the narrative function of swooning, concluding that we "must de-gender the medieval swoon," even though her analysis of French romances shows that fainting plays a key role in representations of male nobility.⁷ The medieval swoon is certainly not an ungendered act. Nor is it a single type of physical response. In Windeat's terms it is a "convention-governed lexicon of medieval body language" that runs the gamut from physical concussion to a mystical dream state.⁸ In the Middle Ages, fainting, which was understood to be both a medical emergency and an outward manifestation of an inward emotional or

spiritual state, had multiple meanings according to the context in which it took place.⁹ I argue that in Middle English romance, when men faint in front of other men, they are providing a physical manifestation of affective, social, and political ties that together form the foundations of a homosocial society. In order to do this, I must first explain what homosociality means and why it plays a key role in upholding dominant paradigms of gendered power.

The celebration of behaviors and qualities coded as masculine, an emphasis on the value of male bonding, and the public celebration of those ties, are part of a wider cultural discourse of what we have now come to call “hegemonic masculinity.”¹⁰ As sociologist Scott Kiesling notes, an overuse of this term has resulted in a watering-down of its critical value. Rather than using “hegemonic masculinity” to represent the fluidity, contestability, and variety of masculinities of which only a particular kind is socially dominant, many researchers have begun to use it simply as a replacement for “masculinity” or “patriarchy” rather than defining it in context-specific terms.¹¹ R. W. Connell points out that hegemonic masculinity is “not meant to be a description of real men; rather, hegemonic masculinity represents an ideal set of prescriptive social norms.”¹² Middle English romance, with its heroic archetypes, is a rich source of idealized values around medieval masculinity and masculine culture more generally.

Since the publication of Eve Sedgwick’s seminal *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, the concept of male homosociality has received significant critical attention.¹³ As studies in masculinities grew in prominence in the social sciences, sociological analyses of same-sex social bonding in contexts such as sports clubs and fraternities have proliferated.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the resurgence of pop-cultural depictions of friendship between (resolutely heterosexual) men under the banner of the recently coined term “bromance” has also resulted in analysis within literary and media studies.¹⁵ Even though scholars are happy to use “homosociality” as a shorthand term both for social bonds between persons of the same gender and for the cultural paradigm that privileges male friendship, there has been remarkably little discussion of how homosociality actually operates as a social system. It is vital that homosociality is understood not just as same-sex social relationships, but also as a cultural framework based on networks of socially codified relationships that support hegemonic norms and in so doing maintain mainstream power structures. Modern cultural discourse makes gender solidarity—in its most basic and popularly expressed form, needing “girl time” or “guy time”—seem obvious and natural, when in fact promoting and maintaining homosocial space takes time and energy.¹⁶ Homosociality does not just manifest in a vacuum: it must be introduced, maintained, and developed in historically and geographically contingent ways.

In a patriarchal society like late medieval England, male solidarity or bonding is vital in order to maintain norms of gendered behavior and of social power. Spaces defined as homosocial attract men who want the opportunity to bond with other men, and the social interactions performed in these spaces as male bonding exercises uphold masculine values key to that particular society. Kiesling’s work on modern fraternities has found that, although fraternity members might join partly to gain status or to get access to the powerful social networks into which some privileged fraternities open doors, the overriding reason men would give for joining was because they wanted access to what they saw as a desirable sociable environment populated

by other young men who shared similar values and interests.¹⁷ That is, while there were many social and political benefits to joining a fraternity, the young men who joined them were primarily motivated by personal desires for access to a shared male space.

Kiesling's analysis of the language of fraternities points to a shared vocabulary of masculine experience that problematizes the traditional reading of homosocial environments like fraternities and sports clubs as solely promoting a conventional masculinity described by Alan Klein as featuring "hypermasculine bravado and posturing, ... domination of women and other men through act and language, drinking to excess, [and] sexual conquest."¹⁸ While other scholars have focused on the competitive nature of men's relationships with one another, Kiesling argues that the men he studies use linguistic and social strategies to create ties of solidarity and fidelity between members of a specific privileged group for their mutual benefit. In short: in homosocial spaces, friendship is an essential foundation for establishing the group's social power, a conclusion that resonated with my reading of medieval romance.

It is key that Kiesling writes about elite men, since a homosocial environment is rarely exclusive on solely gendered grounds. Modern American university fraternities tend to select members who are from similar socioeconomically and racially privileged backgrounds. From monasteries to craft guilds to chivalric orders, medieval England was filled with homosocial organizations that were selective on the grounds of social status, occupation, and of course gender. Yet surprisingly, while medieval studies in recent years have seen the publication of major works on social relationships and institutions that may be described as homosocial, such as David Clark's work on male friendship and desire and Christina Fitzgerald's exploration of masculinity and guild culture, the concept of homosociality itself remains mostly uninterrogated by scholars of the Middle Ages.¹⁹ Within medieval romance, socio-economic position, martial prowess, and cultural interests bind men either into explicitly constructed homosocial organizations such as the Round Table, or into looser but still politically significant social groups.

Malory's depiction of the formation of the Round Table shows the deliberate establishment of a homosocial environment that soon becomes attractive to elite males because it promises exclusivity, renown, and the company of other elite males. The Round Table is actually a wedding gift from Arthur's father-in-law, and Arthur says it pleases him "more than ryght grete rychesse."²⁰ The Table comes with 100 of its 150 seats filled—a gift with handily prepackaged excellent knights—so Arthur only has to ask Merlin to find 50 more members. He sets the bar high, asking for "knyghtes which bene of most prouesse and worship."²¹ This Round Table is distinct from the court, because shortly after the Round Table is established Arthur loses eight of its knights and Pellinore notes that there are "in youre courte full noble knyghtes bothe of olde and yonge."²² So this is an ultra-elite group within an already elite setting. Bagdemagus is a young knight who is passed over for membership, and is so upset that he goes out into the world, swearing not to return until he has earned "grete worship, and that I be worthy to be a knyght of the Round Table."²³ Individual reputation is part of the currency that gains a man entrance into this elite group, and group reputation is part of why a man wants to join in the first place. The world outside the Round Table recognizes it as the best knightly order a man can join, and Bagdemagus has to go out into that world so that the inner circle of knights will notice

and acknowledge his worth. Malory repeatedly describes the Round Table as the best company of knights in the world, and when the order is irrevocably damaged by Arthur's break with Lancelot and then the dispute between Lancelot and Gawain, Arthur says "now have I loste the fayryst felyshyp of noble knyghtes that ever hylde Crystyn king."²⁴

One of the great tragedies of Malory's *Morte* is that the breaking of the Round Table means that war can no longer be, in Geraldine Heng's terms, a "fusion to a corps of knights whose individual egos, boundaries and identities are temporarily dissolved in the affective intensity of a glorious common purpose."²⁵ In romance, the battlefi eld should be the ideal homosocial space, where individuality is sublimated into a collective elite identity. The *Alliterative Morte Arthur*, with its close attention to both the strategic details and the psychological consequences of battle, provides many good examples, such as this one:

Then our chevalrous men changen their horses,
Chases and choppes down cheftaines noble, Hittes
full hertely on helmes and sheldes, Hurtes and hewes
dow hethen knyghtes!
Kettle-hattes they cleve even to the shoulders;
Was never such a clamour of capitaines in erthe!²⁶

The repetition of *ch* and *h* sounds in this extract not only propels the action forward; it also gives the sense of a great mass of men acting as one body, moving tirelessly onward through the ranks of the enemy. This homosocial space offers a physical and emotional unity rarely replicated elsewhere, because it offers "a group communion of authorized violence."²⁷

War allows knights to fulfil their primary function as mounted warriors and it is a place that provides opportunities for demonstrations of collective masculinity, both in terms of physical endeavor and also in the expression of homosocial bonds. Naturally, then, when the affective bonds between men in romance have been considered it has mostly been in the context of the battlefi eld. But these ties do not spring up fully formed in wartime; part of the reason that knights are able to become a unified body in battle is because their social and affective bonds have been well established in advance. Indeed, in order for the homosocial group to be established and validated, it may at times need the presence of outsiders to reinforce the value of its actions. A good example of this is in the clearly gendered space of the tournament, where women are key as witnesses to the action, but that action is exclusively male. In *Bevis of Hampton*, the hero wins a tournament *and* the heart of a princess, who witnesses his prowess:

So Beves demeynede him that dai, The
maide hit in the tour say.
Hire hertte gan to him acorde,
That she wolde have him to lorde!²⁸

Yet although the tournament is officially established to find the princess a husband, the reason Bevis and his companion Terri have entered is because, in Terri's words, "We scholle lete for non nede, / That we ne scholle manliche forth us bede!"²⁹ That is, he is concerned that their manly virtue or valor should not be called into question,

rather than because either of them state a desire to win a bride. That their performance is primarily for their peers is implied by the text's emphasis on their admiration by "barouns of renoun."³⁰ The functions of the tournament are simultaneously homosocial and heteronormative, and allow Terri and Bevis to demonstrate their rightful place amongst their peer group, as well as their worth as prospective suitors.

Bevis and Terri have a strong friendship bond that by this point in the narrative is well established. The reader is introduced to Terri a couple of thousand lines earlier, where he is sent by his father Saber to see if he can find out what happened to Bevis. Saber, Bevis's former teacher, has been troubled since Bevis was sold to Saracens by the hero's wicked mother. Terri meets Bevis, but does not recognize him, and Bevis tells him that the lost child was killed by Saracens.

Terri fel ther doun and swough [swooned], His her,
his clothes he al to-drough.
Whan he awok and speke mighte,
Sore a wep and sore sighte
And seide: "Allas, that he was boren!
Is me lord Beves forloren!"³¹

The function of this scene is twofold: to show Bevis that Terri can be trusted, and to show the reader that Terri—to whom they have been introduced only a handful of lines previously—is noble-hearted, his emotional response to the thought of Bevis's death demonstrating that he is a suitable companion for the hero. This function of the swoon is well established in medieval romance, as Judith Weiss points out about the French romance *Gui de Warewic*. As she notes, it is men who do the fainting in this romance, because "it is compassion or *pit * which Gui and Terri feel, that sign of true nobility," which causes Terri to swoon on recognizing Gui.³² Writing about romantic love, Mieszkowski notes that the capacity for "extraordinarily intense, idealizing love is an attribute of greatness in these romances, and fainting is a sign of that capacity."³³ This seems even more accurate when recording the reaction of men to the loss of beloved comrades. In the *Alliterative Morte*, the king swoons and weeps over Gawain's corpse, cradling his nephew's body and mourning so heartily that if had not been interrupted by Sir Ewain, "His bold herte had bristen for bale at that stoude."³⁴ It is partly because of the great loss of Gawain that Arthur's grief is so intense, but it is also because he has such manly feelings.

Given a happier ending than Gawain, Terri's loyalty to Bevis is rewarded by him being married to a princess. This raises him to the rank he has earned by his innate good qualities, the first of which is his devotion to his lord. Terri has the capacity for a kind of heroic empathy that is expressed in physical form by fainting and weeping. Like Sir Mador in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, the swoon here is shorthand, allowing us in only a few lines to understand the virtuous qualities within a character with whom we have previously had a very limited acquaintance. Once again, a short stanza about fainting stands in for a rich cultural discourse about nobility and male virtue.

The faint in *Bevis of Hampton* also has the function of in one stroke reaffirming the affective ties that bound Terri and Bevis when they were children, and of transforming them into a suitably adult bond between men. Swooning is useful to both affirm and create bonds between men; 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. This kind of swooning typically happens

at a point in the narrative where there has been a combination of physical endeavor and a period of heightened emotions: a crisis point brings to the surface the overwhelmingly strong nature of a particular male bond, leading to the swoon.

In *Sir Degaré*, the crisis point is a revelation. In this romance, the foundling Degaré has been searching for his father for a long time and across many miles when he comes across an unknown knight who accuses him of trespass. A fiercely physical fight between the two commences:

Togider thai riden with gret raundoun, And
aither bar other adoun.
With dintes that thai smiten there,
Here stede rigges toborsten were.³⁵

The men are too evenly matched, and so are unable to defeat each other; but they do push themselves to the brink of exhaustion. Thus, when Degaré draws the broken sword and is recognized by his father, both men swoon, presumably from the intensity of the realization coupled with the great physical strain they have just borne:

“O Degarre, sone mine!
Certes ich am fader thine!
And bi thi swerd I knowe hit here:
The point is in min aumenere.”
He tok the point and set therto;
Degarre fel iswone tho,
And his fader, sikerli,
Also he gan swony.³⁶

This scene has a far greater emotional and physical intensity than Degaré’s romantic scenes. *This* is the climactic moment of the romance, far more than Degaré’s brief love affair, and it is one that allows for an outpouring of all Degaré’s hopes and resentments. Degaré swoons because he is overwhelmed, as he has finally found the father for whom he has been searching all his adult life, and also because he is guilt-ridden, knowing he could have killed his father: “The sone cride merci there / His owen fader of his misdeed.”³⁷ The fairy knight’s reason for fainting is not as clearly stated, but given he also swoons at the moment of revelation, it seems likely that his feelings mirror Degaré’s: finally he has his son, and he recognizes that he could have killed that son in a petty squabble over boundaries. Despite the fact that they have just come from an episode of great antagonism and a real physical fight that put them both at risk of death, their mutual, simultaneous fainting shows a moment of perfectly realized harmony in their feelings. If the point of Degaré’s sword being fitted to his father’s blade were not enough to prove their relationship, their mutual swoon proves it beyond doubt. They are, for a moment, in emotional accord powerful enough to make them pass out.

Similar moments of shared emotional crisis are seen between men who have received bad news about a third party. In Malory’s *Morte*, Arthur and Gawain both swoon together because Lancelot has killed Gaheris and Gareth in his desperate rescue attempt of Guinevere. Arthur has already heard this news and swooned over it, and then Gawain arrives, is told the news and faints, and then goes to his uncle and they swoon together.

“A, myne uncle kyng Arthure! My good brothir sir Gareth ys slayne, and so ys mi brothir sir Gaherys, whych were two noble knyghts.” Than the kyng wepte and he bothe, and so they felle on sownynge.³⁸

To the modern reader this might sound almost farcical, but there is certainly no sense in the text that this is in any way funny. Modern sensibilities about appropriate male behavior result in expectations that men will “buck each other up” in times of crisis. In medieval romance, such a response to a tragedy of this scale would be inconceivable. While I have found nothing in Middle English that matches the scale of twenty thousand men collectively swooning over the death of Roland, the “sympathetic faint” has an established place in Middle English literature.³⁹ In *Sir Amadace*, for instance, “Thenne all the mene in that halle, / Doune on squonyng [swooning] ther con thay falle” when their lord is faced with the horrific choice between breaking a solemn vow and killing his wife and child.⁴⁰ With a similar empathetic understanding, rather than consoling one another, Malory’s Arthur and Gawain weep and faint together. Seeing each other’s grief reminds them of their own, mirroring and magnifying it so that the only appropriate emotional response is to pass out. In this context, a problem shared is not a problem halved; a hero’s sorrow is ideally expressed to the full through the mechanism of sharing it with someone who understands his grief. Anything less would not be a fitting tribute to those he has lost.

Gawain weeps because he has lost his brothers, but also because they have been killed by Lancelot, who “my good brother sir Gareth ... loved ... more than me and all my kynne,” the man who made Gareth a knight: a relationship that in Malory’s work in particular and in romance generally often forms an extremely strong bond between men. In Gawain’s mind, his brother has not only been murdered, but also betrayed. Arthur weeps because he has lost two excellent knights, because he has anticipated Gawain’s grief and feels keenly for him, and because he feels the negative impact on his fellowship:

wyte you well, my harte was never so hevvy as hit ys now. And much more I am sorryat for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felysshyp of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs.⁴¹

Arthur has foresight enough to know that this is the end of the Round Table. His swoon marks not only the death of two of his nephews and his surviving nephew’s grief, but also the coming break-up of a network of men. Arthur is not experiencing a pragmatic upset at the political disruption the end of the Round Table will cause; he feels a deeply personal anguish at the loss of the fellowship of men who are much more significant in his life than any wife can be.

However, this is not just a moment of shared pain. While that would be valuable in the narrative in itself, it has a further function: that of reiterating a shared bond. At the moment when the Round Table is most in crisis, Arthur and Gawain turn to one another and reaffirm their familial and courtly bond; Gawain calls him “myne uncle kyng Arthure,”⁴² juxtaposing their two relationships: as family members and as lord and retainer. Their shared moment of fainting and weeping is psychologically reassuring, because at a time when both men feel betrayed, for different reasons, by Lancelot, they are comforted by the persistence of their bonds with one another.

This is also significant when we consider where fainting happens. Some fainting does happen in private, which seems to be particularly common when fainting is induced by romantic feelings. Chaucer's Troilus, for instance, famously swoons in Criseyde's chamber. When swooning is induced because of a man's feelings for another man, however, he is much more likely to do it in company. Key to the swoon is that it is witnessed by the homosocial group to which the swooner belongs. In this episode between Gawain and Arthur, we are at Arthur's court. Arthur is brought the news and faints; the text does not specify a location, but on awakening Arthur addresses his "fayre felowis," and "some knyghtes" reply.⁴³ This is not swooning in a private chamber; Arthur is here fainting, if not in front of the whole court, at least in front of a number of the elite members of that court. It is important that on waking he refers to the witnesses as "fellows," which reminds them that they are companions and comrades, and suggests he thinks they will have an empathetic understanding of his grief. There is no indication that he changes location upon Gawain's arrival and their mutual swoon, and so the significance of Arthur's faint is reinforced through repetition in front of the same audience. Here the swoon is translated and thus given additional meaning by the homosocial peer group. The swoon is not read in isolation but is incorporated into the witnesses' understanding of the reputation of the swooner, the relationship that is understood between swooner and object-of-swoon (or mutual swooners in the case of a double faint), and the reputation of the swoon-object. The more highly each of these elements is valued by witnesses, the more significant the impact of the swoon.

What happens between Arthur and Gawain is given depth and complexity because it is performed in front of witnesses. Performativity does not negate the sincerity of their emotions; Gawain and Arthur feel as keenly about the death of Gareth and Gaheris as the weeping and swooning Arthur in the *Alliterative Morte* does over the death of Gawain when he declares: "This real red blood run upon erthe! / It were worthy to be shrede and shrined in gold,"⁴⁴ which turns Gawain's blood into a relic and thus his nephew into a saint. Malory's Arthur is in his court, and must as a monarch perform his expected role, as must Gawain as one of his most celebrated knights. Their mutual swooning and mourning reinforces, in the mind of a group that has been shaken by the loss of Lancelot to exile and also the knights Lancelot killed, that they are still bonded together. Although Arthur recognizes that the Round Table can never be whole again, by sharing his nephew's grief he demonstrates to his court that he is still emotionally invested in their remaining fellowship. It is both a profoundly human moment that demonstrates the personal nature of the lord/retainer bond, and also a perfectly political moment of social bonding that reminds the witnesses that they are led by extraordinary men, capable of extraordinarily heroic feeling.

In his study of American fraternities, Kiesling reported on a speech intended to boost flagging membership that was given by a young man to his former fraternity. He earnestly reinforced the value to the individual of feeling like a member of a homosocial collective: "I was wearin' my letters, I felt safe, I felt comfortable y'know, and hey I'm Gamma Chi Phi here I'm surrounded by all these people, I feel OK, those were the best feelings ever."⁴⁵ For Malory's Arthur, the stakes are much higher than a dwindling population of a fraternity house. He is faced with the loss of the greatest community of knights that the world has known. He already knows that the perfect homosocial unit of the Round Table cannot be saved, but he must be king

to those who remain. In his act of fainting, he grieves for a world that is lost, but he also reminds his audience of what is truly valuable to men like them: individual heroism and capacity for great feeling, and the collective ability to form lasting bonds that, because of their social and political value, are more important than ties of blood or marriage. Men in romance do not just faint because they have lost; they faint because they love, and their swooning is both a commemoration of grief and a celebration of masculine bonds.

Notes

1. *Stanzaic Morte Arthure*, ll. 888–903, in *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthure and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994). Summary: Sir Mador went into the forest for recreation. He came across a tomb at a chapel, and the inscription revealed the name of his brother, murdered by Queen Gaynor (Guinevere). On reading this, he swooned over the tomb.
2. *SMA*, 884.
3. Barry Windeat, "The Art of Swooning in Middle English," in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, ed. Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 211–212.
4. Chaucer's Troilus has been a particular focus of criticism that sees fainting as emasculating and feminising, as his swoon in Criseyde's chamber has been characterised as evidence of his passivity as a lover. Jill Mann and Gretchen Mieszkowski have offered robust criticism of this: Jill Mann, "Troilus' Swoon," *Chaucer Review* 15, no. 4 (1980): 319–335, and Gretchen Mieszkowski, "Revisiting Troilus's Faint," in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 43–57. See also Windeat, "The Art of Swooning," and Judith Weiss, "Modern and Medieval Views on Swooning: The Literary and Medical Contexts of Fainting in Romance," in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Michael Staveley Cicho and Rhiannon Purdie (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 121–134.
5. Mieszkowski, "Revisiting Troilus's Faint," 45–47. See also Judith Weiss on Mieszkowski's work in "Modern and Medieval Views on Swooning," 121–122.
6. Troilus's swoon takes place at ll. 1086–1092. *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). See Windeat's "The Art of Swooning" for a clear overview of the multiple contexts in which swooning occurs in medieval narratives.
7. Weiss, "Modern and Medieval Views on Swooning," 122. For her discussion of noble male swooning, see the same article, 128, which I discuss further later in this essay.
8. Windeat, "The Art of Swooning," 212, 225.
9. *Ibid.*, 225. On the medieval medical understanding of swooning, see Elizabeth M. Liggins, "The Lovers' Swoons in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Parergon* 3, no. 1 (1985): 96.
10. The most commonly cited discussion of hegemonic masculinity is R. W. Connell's *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1987). For the historiography of the field since then, see R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829–859.
11. Scott Fabius Kiesling, "Homosocial Desire in Men's Talk: Balancing and Re-Creating Cultural Discourses of Masculinity," *Language in Society* 34, no. 5 (2005): 701.

12. R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 76. Steven L. Arxer provides further historiographical context for this in “Hybrid Masculine Power: Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Homosociality and Hegemonic Masculinity,” *Humanity & Society* 35, no. 4 (2011): 392–393.
13. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
14. Some recent examples I have found useful include Alan Klein, “Dueling Machos: Masculinity and Sport in Mexican Baseball,” and Laurence de Garis, “‘Be a buddy to your buddy’: Male Identity, Aggression, and Intimacy in a Boxing Gym,” both in *Masculinities, Gender Relations, and Sport*, ed. Jim McKay, Michael A. Messner, and Donald Sabo (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 67–86 and 87–107, and the collection *Men’s Health and Illness: Gender, Power and the Body*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1995).
15. See Amanda Lott’s discussion of the word “bromance” in a media context in her *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21st Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 8. Chapters 4 and 5 extensively deal with male friendship in cable media. See also the collection *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, ed. Michael DeAngelis (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2014).
16. Many modern depictions of same sex friendship are built around the idea that having friends of the same gender is a vital part of a happy life. For example, in the recent film *I Love You, Man*, the hero is happily engaged to a woman and has several close friends, all of whom are female. The story is focused on his search for a best man for his wedding, and the underlying message of the film is that the hero’s life has been lacking the crucial element of male friendship. *I Love You, Man*, dir. John Hamburg (De Line Pictures, 2009). See also analysis by Peter Forster, “Rad Bromance (or *I Love You, Man*, But We Won’t Be Humping on *Humpday*),” in DeAngelis, *Reading the Bromance*, 191–212.
17. Kiesling, “Homosocial Desire in Men’s Talk,” 705–706.
18. Klein, “Dueling Machos,” 68.
19. David Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Christina M. Fitzgerald, *The Drama of Masculinity and Medieval English Guild Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
20. Thomas Malory, *Malory: Works*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 60.
21. *Ibid.*, 60. 22. *Ibid.*, 80.
23. *Ibid.*, 81.
24. *Ibid.*, 685.
25. Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 176.
26. Summary: Our chivalrous men changed their horses, chopped down noble chieftains, hewed down heathen knights: there was never such a clamour of captains. *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, in *King Arthur’s Death*, ed. Benson, ll. 2989–2994.
27. Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 176.
28. Summary: because of the way Bevis behaved that day, the maiden’s heart began to desire him as her lord. *Bevis of Hampton*, ll. 3827–3830, in *Four Romances of England*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).
29. *Bevis*, ll. 3777–3778.
30. *Bevis* l. 3791.
31. Summary: Terri swooned, and tore his hair and clothing. When he awoke he wept for the loss of his lord Bevis. *Bevis*, ll. 1309–1314.
32. Weiss, “Modern and Medieval Views on Swooning,” 128.

33. Mieszkowski, "Revisiting Troilus's Faint," 50.
34. Summary: his bold heart would have burst from sorrow. *Alliterative Morte*, l. 3974
35. Summary: they fought fiercely, unable to bring each other down. They struck such powerful blows that their horses' backs were broken. *Sir Degaré*, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), ll. 1042–1045.
36. Summary: the fairy knight says he is Degaré's father; he recognises the sword, and has the matching point in his pouch. When they put the sword pieces together, both men faint. *Degaré*, ll. 1058–1065.
37. *Degaré*, ll. 1066–1067.
38. *Malory*, 686.
39. This mass swooning occurs shortly after the death of the hero. Gerald J. Brault, ed., *The Song of Roland*, 2 vols. (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 1978), vol. 2, ll. 2415–2416.
40. *Sir Amadace*, in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, ed. Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), ll. 786–787.
41. Summary: Arthur says he grieves more for the loss of his knights than for his queen, because he might easily have other queens, but there shall never be another such fellowship of knights. *Malory*, 685.
42. *Ibid.*, 686.
43. *Ibid.*, 685.
44. *Alliterative Morte*, ll. 3990–3991,
45. Kiesling, "Homosocial Desire in Men's Talk," 709.