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This dissertation, *A Mother's Movement: Exploring the Effects of Exogamy on Maternal Performance in Medieval Romances*, examines medieval maternity from a primarily performative perspective to highlight the importance of analyzing this gendered group without a focus on the body. The other goal of this dissertation is to investigate images, found in Middle English romances, of motherhood in such a way that removes stigmatized understandings of the mother, which are based in the heavily troped depictions of the mother in these narratives. In most Middle English romances, these troped depictions show the mother as either the pious sufferer or the evil usurper of power, as seen with the evil mother-in-law or evil step-mother tropes. I argue that this diminishes her role both within the narrative and our social understanding of the medieval mother. Furthermore, this dissertation examines the cultural practice of exogamy and how it has a direct impact on medieval performances of maternity. Through this study, it becomes clear that the system exogamy, as it was performed in the Middle Ages, was oftentimes problematic. It of course has the positive aspects of avoiding the incest taboo and expanding society, but because the medieval insistence that it was the *woman* who moved, this creates a major power imbalance within a marriage. Women, here, are exchanged, are moved, into a new community. They are made outsiders through exogamous marriage and isolated, forced out of their home. Ultimately, I argue that despite the varying differences in maternal performance that is examined in this dissertation, maternity holds power over the patriarchal system. Masculine power systems attempt to diminish this power, namely through the practice of exogamy. However, maternal power remains despite this attempt; its power is highlighted through maternal practices of love, teaching, protection, and even grief.

A MOTHER'S MOVEMENT: EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF EXOGAMY ON MATERNAL PERFORMANCE IN MEDIEVAL ROMANCES

by
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DEDICATION

For my parents.

APPROVAL PAGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly criticism on women in medieval literature concentrates primarily on the female body. This criticism is based in the medieval understanding of the female/male somatic binary which dictates that women are corporeal beings while men are associated with the mind and intellectualism, a distinction formulated by early church fathers, such as Augustine and Jerome. Further, we see this cultural understanding of the primacy of the corporeal nature of women reflected in medieval literary texts. These texts largely tend to focus on the bodily aspects of the woman: their physical status as virgin or mother, physical suffering as in the saints' lives, and narratives of grief are portrayed corporeally (e.g. women wrenching out their own hair after something mentally distressing happens). This traditional focus on the corporeal woman, I argue, most heavily affects scholarly understandings of medieval motherhood. Although the emphasis on female physicality has dominated past critical examinations of literature, there is a move in recent decades toward considering women and gender performativity. This is in large part due to the theoretical work of Judith Butler. Yet, in my own research on medieval maternity, I have found that mothers are one of the only social/cultural groups left in the study of medieval literature for which scholarship continues to place primacy on the body rather than an analysis of gendered performativity. One goal of this dissertation is to look at maternity in medieval literature from a primarily performative perspective to illustrate the importance of analyzing this gendered group without a focus on the body *per se.* The other goal of this dissertation is to investigate images of motherhood in such a way that removes the notion that mothers are one-dimensional stagnant characters. This current understanding of maternal figures in Middle English romances is due in part to the heavily troped depictions of the mother in these narratives: troped depictions show the mother as either the pious sufferer or the evil usurper of power, as

seen with the evil mother-in-law or evil step-mother tropes. I argue that this diminishes her role both within the narrative and our social understanding of the medieval mother. These depictions of mothers mark them as stagnant characters, denying them a dynamic means of characterization and minimizing the complexity of the real social and gendered group of mothers in the Middle Ages. It is the erasure of such complexities of the maternal that initially led me to engage with this topic for my dissertation. The need to, in a way, recode these mothers as not merely literary devices, but as individuals with intricate lives who face harsh social pressures, stems from my desire to teach students about these characters in a way that respects the social realities that literature attempts to mirror.

In my role as an educator, I often grappled with how to present these mothers to my students. The mothers with power in medieval romances, who exert agency, are presented to readers as the usurpers, as evil, as the villains of the story. On the other hand, the "good" mothers are often passive: they suffer through their fate and are praised for such complacency. The urge to offer a more feminist reading of these characters becomes difficult because of this "good"/"bad" dichotomy. I want to present these mothers as fully developed characters, as literary images who can give us a more "real" understanding of the powers and struggles that these women hold in the medieval period. In asking how such an understanding can be made, I looked toward what all of these literary mothers have in common outside of the bodily functions of pregnancy and birth. The similarity that I found was movement–mothers *move.*

In anthropological terms, exogamy, or out-marriage, is the process by which one marries outside of their social and cultural group.[1] In the Middle Ages, most commonly it was the

[1] See Gwen J. Broude, *Marriage, Family, and Relationships: A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1994). Bernard Chapais, *Primeval Kinship: How Pair-Bonding Gave Birth to Human Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge:

woman who moved in order to fulfill this marriage. Women were exchanged for goods (her dowry) and to solidify power between kingdoms and families. The functionality of these women is to give birth to an heir (namely a son) to maintain a patrilineal line. Ultimately, a woman moved in order to become a mother. As medieval maternity is tied to the system of exogamy, it stands that the system of exogamy directly impacts *how* one mothers; it affects maternal performativity. The interconnectedness between the anthropological theory of exogamy with either lived or literary experiences of women has not been widely studied. Moreover, the effects of having to move away from one's home culture to marry within the system of exogamy is not extensively analyzed beyond how it is an integral part of the construction of societies. Exogamy's direct influence over the performativity of maternity is also rarely, if ever, studied. I argue that one cannot fully understand the performance of medieval mothering in romance texts without factoring in the impact of out-marriage. What effects this exogamous system has on a woman who must integrate into a new social system should be studied. This dissertation, however, is not meant to be an anthropological or indeed sociological study. Rather the effects of exogamy are being used to better understand medieval maternal performance and how that performance translates into medieval literature. By focusing on exogamy in romance texts, I shift away from discussions of the maternal body to analyzing the social system which directly impacts the construction of maternal performance. This dissertation does seek to fill a gap in scholarship regarding a study of the social effects of exogamy as it plays such an important role in maintaining patriarchal power structures. Such a conversation around exogamous marriages and its effects has not been undertaken within the field of medieval literature; rather, when

Cambridge University Press, 1983). Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, translated by James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

exogamy is mentioned, it is often brief without an exploration of the effects it has on characters within these narratives. This dissertation seeks to remedy the glossing of this important social system and attempts to encourage other scholars to do likewise.

Through this study, it becomes clear that the system of exogamy, as it was performed in the Middle Ages, was often problematic. Of course, exogamy has the positive aspects of avoiding the incest taboo within the woman's own family group and expanding society, but the medieval insistence that it was the *woman* who moved creates a power imbalance within this marriage system. Women are exchanged and moved into a new community. They are made outsiders through exogamous marriage and isolated, forced out of their home. Because of this, mothers in medieval romances often experience fear and anxiety over being further displaced (explored in chapter 4). Mothers in these tales are also ostracized or treated poorly by the family into which they marry, often by the mother-in-law, because their marker as outsider is met with distrust and wariness. This environment also allows for husbands to exert a significant amount of control over their wives who are vulnerable and without a support system.

In exploring the effect of exogamy on maternal performance, this dissertation will focus on medieval family-based romances and romances with an adolescent protagonist. I have chosen this genre for several reasons. First, I argue that secular texts offer a more complete narrative of the maternal experience. Depictions of women in religious texts focus on the pious woman, the virgin martyr, or the Blessed Virgin Mary. In contrast, secular texts provide us with a more varied array of women: women who are religious, pious, suffering, evil, background mothers (i.e. minor characters that contribute little to the narrative, but present a mundane depiction of mothering), teachers: in other words, examples that offer a more detailed view of the contemporary social reality in the later Middle Ages. Second, in *Medieval Children,* Nicholas

Orme details evidence that romances were popular among young medieval girls. The significance of his discussion lies in the function of romances themselves, which were texts often meant to teach children and to offer lessons about behavior as well as entertain. The educational value of romances is explored by both Orme[2] and Helen Cooper, who states in "Good Advice on Leaving Home in the Romances": "Romances are commonly thought to offer a more courtly version of such good advice: instruction in good manners in the sense of sophisticated social behaviour and conversation, even instruction in good rule, and not just in piety, household management, financial prudence and so on."[3] The question then becomes, if a large portion of the genre's audience was young girls, what lessons are being taught about maternal performance specifically to young women? Ultimately, I argue that despite the variation in maternal performances that are examined in this dissertation, maternity holds power over the patriarchal system. Masculine power systems attempt to diminish this influence, namely through the practice of exogamy. However, maternal power remains despite this attempt; its power is demonstrated through maternal practices of love, teaching, protection, and even grief.

The first chapter of this dissertation outlines the theoretical approaches I use to examine Middle English romances in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. These later chapters are divided into different narrative categories of maternal performance, and demonstrate how women in medieval romances navigate the system of exogamy and the effect their performance has on that system. In researching medieval romances, distinctive maternal tropes appear. The three categories that I have chosen cover a range of types of narrative maternity in order to show varying ways one can

[2] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 304.
[3] Cooper, Helen. "Good Advice on Leaving Home in the Romances." *Youth in the Middle Ages*, edited by Felicity Riddy and P.J.P Goldberg (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2004), 106.

perform mothering: Suffering Mothers, Isolated Mothers, and Villainous Mothers, respectively.[4] Further, each of these categories are directly affected by exogamy, making them prime subjects of study for this dissertation.

Maternity and Exogamy: A Theoretical Overview

The purpose of the first chapter is to lay the foundation for my interpretation of maternal performativity and the system of exogamy. This chapter provides the theoretical and methodological lens through which I examine the texts in the next three chapters of the dissertation. To begin, I explain my understanding of the mother as abject, utilizing Julia Kristeva's theory of abjectivity. This understanding is integral to my reading as it positions mothers as a force that is feared by the masculine systems of power. The abject mother also allows for an interpretation of the mother that highlights her abilities to ignore boundaries and resist definition.[5] I will be examining, through abject theory, the symbolic mother jointly with the physical, the real, mother. The masculine anxieties surrounding such a symbol, such a woman, are accentuated through exogamy. In discussing the system of exogamy, I will be using anthropological texts to explain the relevance of exogamy in historical marital systems, namely Claude Lévi-Strauss[6] and Jack Goody.[7] Further I will be utilizing Gayle Rubin's influential text "Traffic in Woman" to discuss the problematic nature of commodifying women within the structure of an exogamous marital system.[8] By situating exogamy as a problematic product of the

[4] While these categories do not cover the full spectrum of the varying ways in which maternity can be performed, I chose just these three given the scope of this dissertation and, more specifically, because these three distinct types of mothering occur most frequently in Middle English romances.
[5] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* translated by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.
[6] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Endogamy and Exogamy," in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, translated by James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer, 42–51 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
[7] Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[8] Rubin, Gayle S. *Deviations*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

medieval masculine hegemonic system, I am able to critique certain negative depictions of mothers in medieval romance narratives. These negative depictions are included in these texts, I argue, in order to perpetuate patriarchal power by demeaning or undermining women, namely mothers. Once the theories of the abject mother and exogamy are solidified I will examine what I argue are normative medieval maternal performances, such as acts of love, teaching, and protecting.

Suffering Mothers: Loss, Grief, and Maternal Performance

This dissertation begins with an argument regarding the need to study maternal performativity in medieval romances without focusing on the bodily aspects that are often studied: corporeal transmission and physicality. This chapter further calls attention to that necessity. The mothers in this chapter have lost the defining element of their maternity–their children. It is rare in romances to have young children die; rather they are lost to their families, only to be reunited at the end of the narrative. I am interested in how the mothers in these romances enact mothering within the space between loss and reunion and how we can read these actions as maternal performativity. Romances included in this chapter are Chaucer's *The Clerk's Tale, Sir Eglamour of Artois,* and *Octavian.* In each of these narratives, children are stripped from their mother's care. The mothers believe their children to be dead even though this is not the case. Yet the grief depicted in these romances is very real. The purpose in this chapter is to investigate how maternal performativity operates *without* the child. Mainly this performance revolves around grief. The importance here is that one does not stop performing maternity or *being* a mother after the physical maker of being a mother, the child, is lost. Maternity goes beyond the physical. This motif, suffering mothers, demonstrates the necessity in studying

maternal performativity as separate from the embodied aspects of maternity. Further, in each of these romances, exogamy plays a major role.

This chapter begins with an overview of medieval depictions of grief through an understanding of mourning as a gendered performance. My analysis of the *Clerk's Tale* centers on understanding of Griselda's lack of mourning for her children as a forced suppression: the marriage requirements laid down by her husband, Walter, do not allow her to grieve openly. Griselda's performance of maternal grief may be considered non-normative because of her silence, but her suffering, silent as it may be, ultimately highlights the systemic power imbalances within marriages, an imbalance caused by the exogamous system. Both non-normative and normative depictions of suffering mothers accomplish such an exposure. As is evident in *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and *Octavian,* both illustrate maternal grief in a normative manner, the loss of a child shows not only the lack of integrity of the patriarchal system which relies on a patrilineal mode of succession, but also the negative impacts that exogamous marriages have on women.

Isolated Mothers: Mothering Away from Society

The maternal performance of a mother without a child that I explore in Chapter 2 segues into Chapter 3, which examines maternal performance which occurs without societal influences. Here, mothers are alone with their male children longer than is typical and/or are removed from society, either by force or by choice. What is interesting about this category of maternal performance is that rather than the father figure, the surrounding community, or more largely, medieval chivalric society, the mother has direct influence over their male child. The predominant maternal act that occurs in this space is teaching and advising, a normative maternal performance. Romances that highlight this narrative and are studied in this dissertation chapter

include *The Man of Law's Tale*, *Emaré*, *Sir Perceval of Galles*, and *Libeaus Desconus*. Each of these texts also emphasizes the troubling effects of exogamy by showing how detrimental the exogamous system is on women.

As with the previous chapter, I begin with a discussion of how medieval society understood and enacted isolation more generally, physically or mentally. For context, I discuss ideas surrounding images of the exile as legal punishment along with religious hermits and anchorites. What I have discovered, in terms of maternal isolation, is that those mothers who are forced into exile are depicted in a more positive light than mothers who choose isolation for themselves. We see this in the case of Custance in *Man of Law* and the main character in *Emaré.* However, those who actively *choose* to live an isolated life, such as Acheflour in *Perceval* and the unnamed mother in *Libeaus Desconus*, are harshly criticized and their mothering practices are questioned both within the narrative and in modern scholarship on these romances. Despite the differing treatment of isolated mothers, it is the system of exogamy that causes their retreat from society, whether that is a husband over-exerting his power over his wife or a woman rejecting the exogamous system into which she is forced.

Villainous Mothers: Products of Successful Exogamy

My final chapter will focus on mothers who are depicted as villains in their narratives, namely the evil mother-in-law trope. I offer a reading that proves these mothers are operating within the system into which they have been placed, and their actions are a product of their systemic displacement caused by exogamy. This chapter serves as a culmination of the previous work in this dissertation to demonstrate how detrimental the system of exogamy is to maternal performance, and more generally, women in all medieval narratives. The romances examined in this chapter include *Lay le Freine, Octavian,* and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale.* The women in

these stories operate under the very real fear of a second displacement, after their initial out-marriage, and their actions are a resistance to that potential displacement. As their sons marry, these women must step down from their positions of power and relative security, to be replaced by their new daughter-in-law, who is also a victim of the system of exogamy. The hostility of mother-in-laws focuses on the new brides in these romances, attempting to re-displace the young women in order to protect their own positions in the social order. These mothers-in-law forcibly eject their daughters-in-law, often to the detriment of grandchildren and even their own sons. These acts of aggression create a different understanding of what is considered "maternal" performativity. This performance aligns more with Lee Edelman's work *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* which refutes the supremacy of the child.[9] We see a similar method of maternal performativity in Norse sagas, such as *The Saga of the Volsungs*, where mothers Signy and Gudrun prioritize their blood family (e.g. brothers and fathers) over their families created through marriage (e.g. husbands and sons). The performances of these women further underline the need for a way in which to analyze medieval mothers through performance as opposed to the body. These women, I argue, are not enacting maternity in these narratives. Rather, they are performing a means of self preservation in response to the continuing threats that exogamy places on women and on mothers. It is, therefore, successful exogamy that culturally creates these villains as they have been integrated into their marital home and act out of fear of being displaced from that home.

Ultimately, what this dissertation establishes is that through an investigation of maternal performance and exogamy, scholars and readers of Middle English romances can see just how patriarchally constructed idea(l)s of maternity truly are. Such an understanding of this

[9] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

construction allows us to break down views and biases regarding mothers in medieval literature which code them negatively, as outsiders, villains, or simply bad mothers who make bad decisions. Through engaging with maternity as a performance as opposed to primarily focusing on the body, we can also engage with maternity as a force which highlights the fallibility of various patriarchal systems, such as methods of succession and gendered power imbalances within medieval marriages depicted in romances.

CHAPTER I: MATERNITY AND EXOGAMY: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Unpacking, analyzing, and dissecting the mother, even the mother specifically in the Middle Ages, is worthy of a lifetime of work. "Mother" is a loaded term: it is layered and imbricated with modes of psychoanalysis, gender, embodiment, abjection, societal construction, etc.--which is what makes any project on maternity difficult and complex. In most scholarship on premodern literary works that engage with maternity, the maternal body is the crux of the project. What I mean by this is, most works do not seek to separate the maternal from the body; rather, the body is central to arguments and discussions of maternity. As a medievalist working with images and examples of maternity within literature in the Middle Ages, I often find myself engaging in an examination of the medieval female body during conception, pregnancy, and birth[10]. This scholarly direction is not surprising given that the medieval, particularly the medieval scholar's, interest in women was predicated on the female body.[11] However, the conception of the maternal in this project relies not on the body, but on performativity. I, like other scholars such as Mary Dockray-Miller, Nancy Chodorow, and Shulamith Shahar, conceive

[10] Works that analyze maternity in medieval literature use a body-focused framework. For example, according to Gail Kern Paster in *The Body Embarrassed*, pregnancy was believed to be a disease state, highlighting the centrality of the corporeality of pregnancy. Pregnant and postpartum women were also thought to be contagious.Angela Florschuetz's work *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance: Mothers, Identity, and Contamination* focuses on the medieval anxieties "regarding the permeating influence of the mother's body on her children's identities and thus on her husband's bloodline" (xix). Florschuetz points to a prevalent belief in the physical influences that the mother has on the child's body. For example, the concept of the 'mother's mark' holds that through the mother's will alone the child's physical appearance changes. The mother's mark is thought to be "evidence of a pregnant woman's connection to her unborn child" which "becomes visibly manifest upon her child's body. The mother's mark comes into being as a result of the mother's state of mind either at the moment of conception or at some point during pregnancy" (xv).

[11] When contemporary scholars sit down to unpack woman in the Middle Ages, the body seems inescapable. Gendered relationships were, especially in this time period, predicated on the body. For example, often the humoral, the physical, system reaffirmed male superiority. According to Kern Paster, the humoral system was "instrumental in the production and maintenance of gender and class difference" (7). The male body was deemed a higher form than that of its female counterpart as it was believed that men had better control over their bodily faculties, showing more self-control, self-rule, and that men are not ruled by bodily, or lower, needs. Women's bodies, in contrast, were considered inherently unstable, porus, leaky, and contagious, leading to their classification as lesser and weaker (24-26).

of maternity as a variant of gendered performance. In a sense, it exists separately from the gendered performance of *woman* or femininity. It is its own category. As Dockray-Miller explains in *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England*: "Butler's concept of gender performance allows a realization of the maternal as a category separate from those of masculine and feminine."[12] Maternity is not a subcategory of femininity. Rather, it is an independent system of performance.

While this work does not seek to minimize the importance of the maternal body, it does seek to challenge its primacy. Despite the scholarly importance that is placed on the maternal body, the preeminence of corporeality in discussions of pre-modern maternity leaves a significant gap in the field: leaving out the other complexities that make up the mother--namely how motherhood is performed actually and socially *after* the child's birth. While maternity scholarship principally operates under a "body informs performance" system, most other gendered categories have long since inversely operated: the primacy of performance over the physical body. Scholars today, operating in a post-Butler world, re-evaluate the relationship between corporeality and gendered performance. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler states: "If gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this 'sex' except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that 'sex' becomes something at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access."[13] Medieval literary scholars have adopted Butler's model: the body does not consciously choose to perform gender, rather the body is constructed in and through a performance which undermines the notion of a pre-existing subject. Yet, work on maternity in medieval literature largely still maintains a strict focus on the

[12] Mary Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 2.
[13] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xv.

body and its mechanics. What is lost with such a fixation on the maternal body is an interrogation of the societal factors that inform the construction of maternal performance.

It is my argument, and the focus of this project, that one factor that significantly affects maternal performance is the practice of exogamy.[14] Exogamy, or out-marrying, is defined by Gwen J. Broude in *Marriage, Family, and Relationships* as the "cultural rules that require a person to marry outside a particular social category. This category or social group may be an aggregate of relatives, such as a lineage or clan, or it may be a geographic locale, such as a community or village."[15] For western Europe in the Middle Ages, exogamy was a commonplace marital practice.[16] Exogamy always directly affects the way that maternity is viewed and understood as it places the new wife, and the future mother, in the position of social outsider. It is important to note here that effects of exogamy on behavior have garnered little scholarly

[14] While exogamy is a practice that has been studied in anthropological texts as a means through which societies are formed, little work has been done that investigates the impact on the party who does the moving. Some works that exist on the topic include: Page M. Baldwin, "Subject to Empire: Married Women and the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act." *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 522–56. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3070746. Athalya Brenner, "Ruth as a Foreign Worker and the Politics of Exogamy," *A Feminist Companion to Ruth and Esther*, edited by Athalya Brenner (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999). *ProQuest Ebook Central*. Carol Parrish Jamison, "Traffic of Women in Germanic Literature: The Role of the Peace Pledge in Marital Exchanges." *Women in German Yearbook* 20 (2004): 13–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688971. Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003). Laura Tabili, "Outsiders in the Land of Their Birth: Exogamy, Citizenship, and Identity in War and Peace." *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 796–815. https://doi.org/10.1086/431942. The social changes and lack of familial support have not been looked at in regards to how this affects a person on a systematic scale. By this I mean, comprehensive studies on the emotional and physical impact of such marriages, of such movements, have not been undertaken. The dearth of scholarship in this area means that I am primarily pulling from images created in medieval literature as to the effects that exogamous marriages have on women and mothers. While this chapter, nor indeed this dissertation as a whole, serves as a definitive study on the historical impacts of exogamy, I argue that an exogamous marriage would have effects on both men and women.

[15] Gwen J. Broude, *Marriage, Family, and Relationships: A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1994), 99.

[16] For anthropologists, a major drive and appeal of the practice of out-marriage, of course, is avoiding incest. Kinship structures (Archibald 9), and therefore the incest taboo (Lévi-Strauss 43), are socially constructed. We understand the genetic complications that inbreeding poses, but it was also a way to expand, in every sense of the word, the human race: numerically, spatially, and socially.

attention.[17] Yet, because exogamy is so central to human society, we can extrapolate that it certainly influences behavior and performance: the forced movement that exogamy causes mothers to go through not only serves as a catalyst for the isolation of mothers, but it also makes mothers outsiders in the societies in which they must perform maternity.

In an exogamous society, movement becomes integral to motherhood. Within this system, a woman must move away from her home community in order to marry. The purpose of this union is often to produce an heir, to have a child. One must move in order to *become* a mother. While this movement was, and often still is, a very real and physical undertaking for women to upheave their life and move into their husband's home community, it also mirrors symbolic discussions of the mother. Exogamy makes outsiders out of mothers by making them strangers in their husbands' lands–marking them as other, as abject.

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection is, I argue, central to any discussion of mothers and maternal performance. An understanding of Kristeva's symbolic mother bleeds into how the physical mother is viewed and performed. Through an interrogation of the symbolic and performed reality, I seek to better understand and emphasize the complexities of the relationship between the symbolic mother and the physical mother. This chapter is not meant to reconceptualize Kristeva's theory of abjection, but rather seeks to demonstrate not only theories surrounding the mother, but also to show how notions of the symbolic inform social understandings of the maternal and its performance. I am using Kristeva's theoretical framework as a way to better examine the social treatment of the exogamous mother–the mother who

[17] Bernard Chapais expresses: "Remarkably, the idea that exogamy embodies the essence of human society has received very little attention, and its implications have been little explored" in *Primeval Kinship: How Pair-Bonding Gave Birth to Human Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 13.

moves. The relationship between the mother and the child, whether in the world of the symbolic or the physical, is grounded in movement.

In life as in literature, the child is always moving away from the mother: from conception and beyond, in the symbolic sense and in practical reality. The child physically moves away from the mother's body, out of the womb. The child must separate themselves from her, remove themselves from the driving force of need, a place where there is just *her,* in order to become a self. And, in life, the child grows up, moving *farther* and *further* away from the need for maternal care. To become a self, one ejects themself from the mother, creating a physical separation, a physical self, individual and independent. Yet after all that, the child still must purge the mother from themselves. As Kristeva puts it: "Abjection of self: the first approach to a self that would otherwise be walled in. Abjection of others, of the other ('*I feel like vomiting the mother*'), of the analyst, the only violent link to the world."[18] This violent removal of the mother first distinguishes the self from the mother. Miglena Nikolchina, a theoretical scholar who studies Kristeva's theories in relation to the mother adds: "This metaphor of ungiving birth to the mother against the stream of time names an archaic creative act that establishes the first boundary, the first precarious measurement of space, and the primal irrevocable loss."[19] The boundary, the rejection of the mother, is necessary. Yet, despite being both purged and purger, the mother is inescapable. We are never fully separated from her. I mean this in every sense: the symbolic systems of psychoanalysis, the socially created and sustained familial structures, even biologically--she is always within us. Mother, therefore, is, in all ways, abject. As Kristeva

[18] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* translated by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 47, emphasis mine.
[19] Miglena Nikolchina. *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf* (New York: Other Press, 2004) 43.

states, the mother is "opposed to *I,*"[20] "the jettisoned object,"[21] "*something rejected from which one does not part.*"[22] This, the connectivity between mother and abject, in and of itself, is a contradiction. This conflicting nature stems from the negativity surrounding the abject and the positivity surrounding the inherent "goodness" of a physical (non-symbolic) mother.[23] This contradictory relationship between mother and abject complicates any attempt to understand and analyze the mother in theoretical or phenomenological terms. At the same time, however, her contradictory nature, her complexities, allow her to operate outside of a set system, the same system that requires her existence.

The conflicting nature of the mother, as *mother* and as abject, stems from the image that the masculine hegemony has created of the mother and her actual treatment. The two are dichotomous. On the one hand, in the case of the psychoanalytic view, the mother is what we must be released from--she is abject. Yet, abject is what is "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady."[24] The notion of the abject mother directly opposes how the figure of the mother is coded. By this, I mean scholars of maternity currently understand mothers, those who operate within the socially constructed role, those who *mother,* as caring, loving, nurturing--symbols of unconditional love, patience, and goodness. Kristeva sees this as the emergence of "the cult of mother" in her work *Desire in Language* and defines it as: "tenderness, love, and seat of social conversation."[25] Indeed, the influential sociologist Nancy Chodorow in her seminal work *The*

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[20] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror,* 1.
[21] Ibid, 2.
[22] Ibid, 2, emphasis mine.
[23] I am conceiving of the symbolic mother as the mother who exists within the theories and philosophies of psychoanalysis. On the other hand, I am defining the "physical" mother as the *real* people who raise children, who exist in reality and as characters within works of fiction.
[24] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror,* 4.
[25] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University, 1980), 237.

Reproduction of Mothering defines mothering as being the primary parent/caretaker, socializing the child, and above all else, nurturing the child.[26] Of course a distinction must be made here. *Mothering* is the actions (the performance) that one in the role of mother performs. Yet, despite this, the mother is, within the symbolic, abject. This is where her contradictory binary nature arises: the bad (abject) and the good (socially constructed and compliant) mother.

While abjection exists in the realm of the symbolic, I argue that one cannot separate the symbolic from the physical. As discussed by Kristeva, the abject mother exists within the psychoanalytic symbolic order.[27] Yet, for Lacan, the symbolic order is defined by the tension between the imaginary and the *real*. So too is the concept of mother, caught between the imaginary and the real, the symbolic and the physical. The symbolic cannot and should not be completely separated from the realities of lived experiences. The mother is a prime example of this. The mother is full of contradictions: both in her status as symbolic/real and as abject/good. How do we reconcile this? Ultimately, we don't. Is this lack of reconciliation not abjection? This irreconcilability is what further cements the mother as abject. Through this understanding, she is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules."[28] As abject, this dual nature remains; it simply *is.* Abjectivity thus allows us to discuss the mother's symbolic nature in tandem with her physical reality. It is this symbolic nature that demonstrates masculine anxieties which affect how maternity is understood by the hegemony and therefore how one performs maternity.

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[26] See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
[27] In *Desire in Language,* Kristeva defines the symbolic as the "inevitable attribute of meaning, sign, and the signified object for the consciousness of Husserl's transcendental ego"(134).
[28] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror,* 4.

Masculine anxiety surrounding the mother leads us to discuss her in terms of the abject, as "abjection as a source of horror works within patriarchal societies."[29] Barbara Creed attempts to unpack the relationship between mother, abject, and horror in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine.* She describes how the image of the mother, in connection with patriarchal signifying practices, is reconstructed as a negative figure.[30] The male fear of the monstrous-feminine[31] is what perpetuates, and indeed creates, this stigma surrounding the mother. The conception of the archaic mother, "the parthenogenetic mother, the mother as primordial abyss,"[32] gives us the monstrous-mother. Creed continues: "The central characteristic of the archaic mother is her total dedication to the generative, procreative principle. She is the mother who conceives all by herself, the fertility and the origin of procreation. She is outside morality and law."[33] It is because of this fear that patriarchal powers, as Kristeva explores, use abjection "to subordinate maternal power to symbolic law."[34] The symbolic law, which is created to maintain patriarchal values, codes the abject based on societal norms. Kristeva states: "[B]y way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder."[35] Therefore, what is marked out by society as *other* is done so out of the fear of the animalistic—the natural and pre-societal cognition, the archaic mother. If animalism is

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[29] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 212.
[30] Ibid, 27.
[31] Creed catalogs male fear of the monstrous-feminine: "Freud linked man's fear of woman to his infantile belief that the mother is castrated. [...] Joseph Campbell, in *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology,* drew attention to woman as castrator and witch. [...] As well as its expression in surrealist art, the myth of the *vagina dentata* is extremely prevalent. Despite local variations, the myth generally states that women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas" (1-2).
[32] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 17.
[33] Ibid, 27.
[34] Ibid, 26.
[35] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror,* 13.

representative of sex, then childbearing and childbirth are also representative of animalism. It is this animalism that the hegemony fears, and because of this fear, maternal power must be subjugated. This subjugation then directly affects how society views and interacts with mothers and therefore informs understandings of maternal performance.

Patriarchal society's fear marks maternity as animal, as abject, and as sinister. This negation, this abjection, is enforced in order to control the generative force that only women possess and is used to maintain patrilineal values. We see this rejection of the mother most starkly through the fantasy of the dead mother. Katherine Park, who studies medical practices of the medieval and early modern periods with an emphasis on gendered experiences, explains in her book *Secrets of Women* that the fantasy of the dead mother involves being born of a woman who passed away during childbirth. The child, and this is specific to male children, is born through a cesarean section. The reason this fantasy exists is because, a man being born of a dead mother, through a cesarean birth, symbolizes male strength. This "solves 'the problem of masculinity by eliminating the female' as a generative force."[36] This fantasy of the dead mother further helps to solidify the patriarchal idea that the mother's only function is to give birth. However, though her generative functionality is needed, it is her generative power that poses a threat to the masculine system. Therefore, the patrilineal line must be rid of her once the gestational labor is done. The dominant system maintains control over the maternal body and its functions through the fantasy (and it is just that-–a fantasy) of the dead mother by subjectively coding the mother as abject. This abjectification or othering of the mother has been seen throughout history. Societal practices were created to enforce the perpetuation of this notion, to keep maternal power in check. As I stated earlier, one such practice is exogamy. The problematic

[36] Katherine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 154.

nature of exogamy is that it primarily operates as a way for men to solidify power and the cost of that power is women. The exogamous system treats women as objects.

Exogamy, I argue, directly affects maternal performance because it is the system by which patrilineal power perpetuates itself, and it is this patriarchal system that seeks to subject women, especially mothers. Before moving forward with exogamy's effect on maternal performance, it is important to explain just how integrated social power systems and exogamy are. One of the functions of exogamy is to generate social capital. It exists to expand the influence of certain societies, groups, and families. Social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss states: "Marriage between outsiders is a social advance (because it integrates wider groups)."[37] Similarly, in *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe,* anthropologist Jack Goody explains some of the factors by which exogamy became a societal norm in Europe:

> distant marriages enlarge the range of social relations. This common 'anthropological' notion was put forward by those great theologians, St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas, who recognised that out-marriage multiplied the ties of kinship and thus prevented villages from becoming 'closed communities', that is, solidary ones.[38]

He continues to describe the need for exogamy by stating that "the fertility of the mother or the health of the children might be endangered"[39] with continued endogamous marriages. Goody emphasizes that it was theologians who pushed for out-marriages, making this practice part of church doctrine. Indeed, it is speculated that out-marriages became predominant in Europe only after the rise of Christianity.[40] Having a correlation between exogamy and the church points to the societal construction of exogamy, enforced by systemic powers.

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[37] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Endogamy and Exogamy," in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, translated by James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 48.
[38] Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 57.
[39] Ibid, 57.
[40] Ibid, 33.

Systemic powers enforce exogamy. While contemporary discussions surrounding the motivations of out-marriage center on avoiding incest in order to avoid physical deformities, in a medieval context, social constructs inform society's need to avoid incest through exogamous marriages. In other words, incest in a medieval context centers around social implications, rather than potential physical deformities that are at the center of the contemporary conversation. Elizabeth Archibald explains in *Incest and Medieval Imagination* that medieval writers rarely mention the genetic dangers of inbreeding.[41] Although, there are biblical laws against incest, marking it as a sin, there are holy figures who engaged in incestuous relationships like Abraham, who was married to his half-sister. Yet, even St Augustine in *The City of God*, while marking incest as a sin, discusses it in terms of the social. He "acknowledges that laws are needed to enforce this taboo, and they are human laws, not natural ones."[42] The threat of incest, however, was certainly at the forefront of the populace's minds. Historian Barbara Hanawalt explains: "Cases in ecclesiastical courts indicated that the populace had considerable anxiety about kinship connections in marriages and, as a consequence, people did avoid at least the obvious kin marriages."[43] Even earlier than marriage, the necessity of separating brothers and sisters was emphasized. Historian Nicholas Orme states: "The clergy cautioned against placing boys and girls together, at least after the age of seven, for fear of sexual consequences."[44] Besides the physical and religious implications of incest, the social effects are also highlighted.

The emphasis on out-marriage was thought to help society grow and to solidify patriarchal power through a patrilineal system. According to Archibald: "St Augustine argued

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[41] Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.
[42] Ibid, 21.
[43] Barbara Hanawalt, *Ties that Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 80.
[44] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 79.

against endogamy on the grounds that the network of social affection should be expanded as much as possible."[45] As St. Augustine puts it in "The Good of Marriage," from marriage (marriages which avoid incest) "comes the propagation of the human race in which friendly association is a great good."[46] What we can take from Augustine's thoughts on incest, is that while, yes it is a sin, it is discouraged because of its effect on human expansion. Politically, exogamy offered a way to solidify relationships that maintained and/or expanded political power. Broude states: "Exogamy has also been interpreted as a strategy for promoting the survival of cultures."[47] Daughters are the cost of that cultural power, or as Lévi-Strauss calls it, the "distribution of women." Exogamy, or *out*-marriage, relies on the fact that someone must leave their "*in"* for exogamy to take place. Almost always, this is a woman, with some rare exceptions. Hanawalt explains that "Residence tended to be virilocal, unless a man married a woman inheriting a house and land."[48] So then, the majority of women who marry must leave their homes, places of relative safety, comfort, and a way of life that they are accustomed to, to enter into a new space, one of the unfamiliar. These women are displaced from their homes, families, cultures in order to marry out, to work within the exogamous system. The purpose of these marriages is procreation. As Chodorow elucidates, "marriage [...] was essentially synonymous with childbearing."[49] This movement of women is ultimately the movement of future mothers who must navigate motherhood *and* a new space with new people as a displaced person. Further still, this mother must maneuver as an outsider.

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[45] Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and Medieval Imagination,* 48.
[46] St. Augustine and Roy J. Deferrari, *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, edited by Roy J. Deferarri (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), ProQuest Ebook Central, 22.
[47] Gwen J. Broude, *Marriage, Family, and Relationships,* 99.
[48] Barbara Hanawalt, *Ties that Bound,* 80.
[49] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering,* 4.

Mothers bear the responsibility of reproducing society through their generative powers. Similarly, the system of exogamy in medieval England relies on this movement of women, this "distribution of women." Gayle Rubin would change this to the "exchange of women" in her formative essay "The Traffic in Women."[50] Rubin's understanding of exogamy in this context is conceived as a "systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products."[51] She sees men using women as a currency to negotiate masculine power structures:

> "Exchange of women" is a shorthand expression for the social relations of kinship systems specifying that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin. In this sense, the exchange of women is a profound perception of a system in which women do not have full rights to themselves.[52]

Women here are a commodity. Similarly, Goody integrates Pierrre Guichard into his work when he explains: "Women circulate, bringing goods and honour; the wife-givers tend to be superior to the wife-takers."[53] While bringing in "goods" could refer to a woman's dowry, more often, it is the commodification of her reproductive abilities. Of course Rubin is not the only feminist theorist that calls attention to this systemic issue. Luce Irigaray is another theorist who mirrors the above arguments. She states in "This Sex Which is Not One": "For woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity."[54] Women's value is represented by their usefulness as generative perpetuators of masculine hegemony. Notably, we can see this operating in medieval society through laws regarding young children. Edward James explains in "Childhood and Youth in the Early Middle Ages" that boys under

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[50] See Gail Rubin, *Deviations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
[51] Gail Rubin, *Deviations,* 34.
[52] Ibid, 46-47.
[53] Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family,* 11.
[54] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 31.

twelve are protected by a heavier fine than an adult, while girls under childbearing age were considered to be the same as a freeman.[55] What this comes down to is that a girl's value to society grew only when she gained the ability to have children. Murdering a girl under childbearing age was less of an offense than killing a young girl who had begun to menstruate. A girl becomes valuable when she is capable of bearing children. Hanawalt expresses that "females' very entry into physical puberty changed their moral and *market status*."[56] Girls become a commodity. Children were not considered equal. A young boy's potential begins at birth while a young girl's potential begins when she is able to give birth.

Of course, as Rubin states above, women have little agency regarding their own reproductive power and life, rather they are an object to be traded by men. Monique Wittig understands this system as the ways in which the patrilineal retains power over the feminine: "For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ('forced residence,' domestic corvée, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.)."[57] We can track this "servitude" through a woman's movement from being subordinated to her father and brothers to being subordinate to her husband.

Exogamy solidifies masculine power structures by continually making women subject to men. This system of power relies on male possession and position around women. The emphasis on familial structures, especially the societal structure of primogeniture, causes a continuation of a patrilineal line, which perpetuates power systems. The continuation of the patrilineal line is of

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[55] Edward James, "Childhood and Youth in the Early Middle Ages," in *Youth in the Middle Ages*, edited by Felicity Riddy and P.J.P Goldberg (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2004), 12, emphasis mine.
[56] Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 12, emphasis mine.
[57] Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 10.

course reliant on women who will birth sons. All in all, the continuation of this social system relies on the exogamous trading of women:

> Given that post-marital residence was usually virilocal, that is, women went to live with their husbands who in turn often resided with or near their fathers, and given that offices were by and large transmitted between men, the system of kinship had a definite bias in favor of the agnatic line.[58]

Ultimately, the trade-in-women is used to maintain a masculine hierarchy. In order to maintain dominance over woman's generative power, the hegemony problematizes her and her reproductive power, marking her and her abilities as abject, as unclean.

Since a woman's social value, what she is being traded for, is linked to her reproductive capabilities, she is seen and regarded as a vessel in this exogamous system. Society's view of her as an object to be traded in order to *produce* children is highlighted by her legal rights to her own children in the Middle Ages. Jennifer Fellows explains in "Mothers in Middle English Romance.": "woman was created in order to propagate the human race, yet, according to an extremely influential tradition of ultimately Platonic provenance, she was in no real sense a parent to a child, at best playing a secondary, passive role."[59] The father, the patrilineal line, must always be in control of what the mother produces; thus, she is treated as an object of production. Often mothers were not even considered the children's legal guardian if their husbands died. In his work on the medieval child, Orme illustrates that should a father, specifically a father of the ruling class, die while his children are still in adolescence, this caused those children to be placed "into the wardship of the feudal superior, who might take custody or

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[58] Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family,* 19.

[59] Jennifer Fellows, "Mothers in Middle English Romance," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*, edited by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42, http://web.a.ebscohost.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzQ4NzBfX0FO0?sid=bc06e0ee-1249-49f1-97d9-f1cb8294aba7@sdc-v-sessmgr01&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_41&rid=0.

sell them into that of somebody else."[60] If a mother wanted to keep custody of her own children, she had to petition her lord and/or pay fines to keep the children in her care.[61] This distinction during the Middle Ages, the prioritization of father over mothers, exists because exogamy completely prioritizes the patrilineal lines as it is the mother who is taken in, who is commodified, by her husband's family.

Through this examination of the exchange of women, we can see that it is the exogamous system that creates the social norm that situates woman's primary function is to give birth. The primacy of a woman's identity being related to maternity is a social construct and should be treated as such. It is society that determines her value in relation to childbearing. Hanawalt states: "One of the most significant contributions a wife could make to the household economy was the bearing and training of children."[62] Exogamy exacerbates and perpetuates this view of women as function, as commodified, which is why an examination of maternity, as it relates to exogamy, is essential to understanding maternal performance in the Middle Ages. The first step into motherhood is, traditionally, through marriage, and in medieval England, that marriage would have most likely been exogamous. Maternity is predicated on a woman leaving her home, the comfortable and the familiar, transformed into an outsider, the other, in relation to her in-laws.

As exogamy produces normative mothering,[63] maternal performance, then, is a byproduct of exogamy. As Hanawalt states above, it is not only the generative power that society values in a bride-turned-mother, but also her functionality as a trainer of children. It is here that we begin

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[60] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children,* 317.
[61] See Barbara Hanawalt, *Ties that Bound,* 222.
[62] Ibid, 148.
[63] By normative mothering here, I wish to acknowledge and recognize that not all children were born within a marriage.

an examination of what normative maternal performance looks like in the Middle Ages. As I am working under the theory that the primacy of woman's functionality to *mother* is due to societal influences, especially that of exogamy, I am also working against the notion that maternity is something that is "natural" to all women. Maternal performance is socially created; it is not biological. To solidify this point, I will be relying on Chodorow's work which is paramount in tracing maternal performativity historically and socially and further investigates the relationship between psychoanalytic study and how one mothers.

Despite the societal insistence that maternity is biological, both in its creation (the physicality of giving birth) and its behavior (the "natural" instincts of a mother), Chodorow persuasively argues that maternity must be separated from the body. She states that childbearing (the bodily aspect of maternity) and nurturing (the performative aspect of maternity) should be treated separately.[64] Further, it is important to note that the one who mothers is not always, by default, a woman. Chodorow states: "We can talk about a man 'mothering' a child, if he is the child's primary nurturing figure, or is acting in a nurturing manner."[65] This removal of a set gender, or even a set body, as the one who mothers, insists upon separating the act of performing maternity and the body. Other scholars, likewise, work with separating mothering from parenting and separating mothering from the biological. We see this occur with scholars who study medieval history and literature, such as Shahar and Sarah Kay. Shahar recognizes that others, who have not physically delivered the child, can still enact mothering: "It is well known that sentiment is not limited to biological mothers: it can be felt by nurses and adoptive mothers as well, and there are isolated examples of dedicated and loving care on the part of a medieval

[64] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering,* 16.
[65] Ibid, 11.

wetnurse."[66] Likewise, Sarah Kay also removes a gendered or biological component to mothering. She envisions maternity as teaching or guiding: "I think 'mothering' is a better model for the relationship between teachers and taught than either 'fathering' or 'therapy.'"[67] What these examples illustrate is that *mothering* is defined by how an individual treats a child rather than a biological connection or by only allowing women who have given birth the marker of "mother". Mothering is performative. It is separate from markers of gender and the body.

Even though maternal performance is separate from the body, we must not then assume that maternal performance is taught, just as one does not "teach" gender. Chodorow states that mothering "[i]s neither a product of biology nor of intentional role-training."[68] Thus, maternity is not incumbent upon a woman carrying and birthing a child; by the same token, maternal performance is a complex system. Chodorow explains: "It is evident that the mothering that women do is not something that can be taught simply by giving a girl dolls or telling her that she ought to mother. It is not something that a girl can learn by behavioral imitation, or by deciding that she wants to do what girls do."[69] Rather, mothering is systematically constructed. Its performance is predicated on societal influence and its cultural reproduction. In the context of the Middle Ages, exogamy is that social influence as it informs the space and with whom one mothers. What adds to the complexity of the performativity of maternity as it relates to systems of power, is that maternity is both reproduced and *reproducer.* Chodorow demonstrates: "Women's mothering is a central and defining feature of the social organization of gender and is implicated in the construction and reproduction of male dominance itself."[70] This centrality of

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[66] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 67.
[67] Sarah Kay, "Motherhood: The Case of the Epic Family Romance" in *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Dr Elspeth Kennedy*, edited by Karen Pratt (Suffolk: D.S.Brewer, 1994), 23.
[68] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering,* 7.
[69] Ibid, 33.
[70] Ibid, 9.

mothering, as it literally reproduces the bodies that will then operate and function within that system, is recognized by anthropologists and family theorists. In Bernard Chapais' anthropological work on cultural perspectives of kinship, *Primeval Kinship,* he states: "Motherhood cannot be removed from the genealogical grid. Motherhood creates kinship whether or not mothers are believed to be involved in procreation."[71] Maternity's generative power reproduces society, physically and socially.

By reproducing society, mothers are also perpetuating patrilineal lines and recreating the hierarchy. In her formative essay "One is Not Born a Woman" Monique Wittig interrogates and criticizes the idea of women as a "natural" group. As such, she also critiques maternity's place within societal power structures. As she puts it, "Matriarchy is no less heterosexual than patriarchy: it is only the sex of the oppressor that changes."[72] What this points to is the complex cycle that maternity gets caught in, that is present in theories surrounding motherhood. Maternity is part of the perpetuation of the hegemony as it reproduces the bodies that will continue to maintain normative systems of power. Yet, through that reproduction, maternity itself becomes subjugated. Maternity must be subjugated because the hegemony fears the mother's generative power, but also requires that power to continue to reproduce itself. Thus, the patriarchal system marks maternity as abject and because maternity is marked as abject, it is feared. Exogamy, then, is a system that can be seen in reality that mirrors the symbolic. Patriarchal powers need women to become mothers in order to continue patrilineal lines. It is through mothers that the system remains. Therefore, men must remain in control of mothers and their reproductive capabilities. This is done through commodifying women through the marital structure of exogamy, which not

[71] Bernard Chapais, *Primeval Kinship,* 55.
[72] Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, 10.

only subjugates women to their husbands but also makes them outsiders in their new communities. Outsiders after all, are often feared–often abject.

Because of masculine dominated system's anxiety surrounding maternity, mothers are removed from the center of the system, jettisoned into the realm of the other, forced into an abject space. By positioning mothers in this way, societal practices emerge that are used to maintain this marginalized status. Sadly, it is not hard to find medieval societal practices that cast the mother in this light–as an outsider and potentially, untrustworthy. One needs only to look at how mothers were treated by the church in the Middle Ages to see how patriarchal powers position the mother as abject. Firstly, it was thought that the only way a woman could redeem herself from original sin (apart from living a completely chaste and pious life) was through childbirth. 1 Timothy 2:15 states, "Yet she shall be saved through childbearing; if she continue in faith, and love, and sanctification, with sobriety."[73] Therefore, women are encouraged, if not coerced into bearing a child to save their eternal souls. However, there is a significant contradiction in this passage. Despite having a child, which is supposed to deliver a woman from sin, a new mother is not allowed into church after giving birth, not because of the need for physical recovery, but because the church viewed them as unclean and full of sin post-birth. Mothers were not allowed to go to their child's baptism for this reason. After the baptism, mothers had to go:

> to the church to be purified, or "churched" as it was known by the fifteenth century. Old Testament law laid down that a woman who gave birth was unclean and should not touch a holy object or enter a holy place for forty days after the birth of a son, or eighty days after the birth of the daughter.[74]

[73] *Douay-Reims Bible*. DRBO.ORG (2021), 1 Timothy 2:15, https://www.drbo.org/.
[74] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children,* 30-31.

The explanation of this "uncleanliness" derives from the bodily humoral system, which depicts porous and leaky women, especially pregnant women, as being more at risk to sin and the influence of corruptive forces.[75] Further still, if a woman died in childbirth, she was not allowed to be buried within the church, but only in the courtyard, as she was not "purified" after birth.[76] The belief in a mother's innate sinfulness and uncleanliness further enforces the mother's position as abject. Characterizing the mother as abject leads to a battery of other negative connotations that permeate discussions and views of motherhood.

It is within this social climate, one of subjugation and negativity, that motherhood during the Middle Ages was performed. Therefore, normative maternal performance is informed by this social structure. What becomes complex is that even when maternity is being performed in a normative fashion, it will still be treated as abject, still be criticized, and these mothers will still be treated as outsiders. I believe that it is important to investigate what was considered "normative" maternal performance in order to create a baseline for understanding social reactions to normative maternal performativity. Then, non-normative maternal performance can be better understood. However, I acknowledge that, like gender, maternity cannot be reduced or simplified to a simple "step-by-step" guide of what a mother, either in the Middle Ages or the present, is expected to *do.* Furthermore, no two mother-child relationships are going to be the same, normative or otherwise. Shahar mirrors this idea when she states: "motherliness is not a fixed and imprinted pattern of conduct which is automatically manifested in the same manner under all conditions."[77] However, I argue that a general understanding of the responsibilities,

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[75] See Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), http://www.gbv.de/dms/bowker/toc/9780801480607.pdf.
[76] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages,* 51.
[77] Ibid, 74.

specifically relegated to medieval mothers, is important because it can show how mothers were treated and understood and their positionality within society and within the family unit.

Before engaging with an understanding of maternal performance in the Middle Ages, it is important to discuss how, as scholars, we are able to learn how one was expected to mother during this period. Primary texts from the period on mothering are few and far between. I argue that part of the lack of primary sources regarding mothering is for a couple of reasons. One, is that most knowledge of the maternal was passed down in an auditory fashion, women helping other women navigate maternal practices by sharing information. Second, it is because, as discussed earlier, there is an understanding, especially during this time period, that maternity and maternal knowledge is inherent and in some ways biological. It is simply *known* to the woman turned mother. Therefore, texts or guides regarding mothering were considered to be unnecessary. Books that do exist during this time period on mothering are often midwifery or women's health texts such as *The Trotula.*[78] But, these texts rarely inform mothers about what is expected of them, their duties, or how they were meant to act in the process of raising their children. However, we do have texts that inform *women* of how they were meant to act.

Information on women's conduct can be found in guidebooks or fictional stories demonstrating how one should behave. The two kinds of texts–maternity/gynecology and conduct–rarely mix. There are messages in works of fiction, narratives in poems, and even the odd comment in conduct or midwifery books, about how to, or how not to, behave as a mother, but these are rare. For example, a book instructing Christian women from 1557 contains brief mentions of maternal performance: "Let the mother never laugh at any worde or dede of a childe, dooen lewdely, shamefully, noughtily, wantonly or pertly, nor kysse it therefore. For chyldren

[78] See Monica Helen Green, ed. *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812202083.

will lightly use them selfe unto such thynges."[79] The instruction for mothers here is brief and is certainly not a major focus of the book. I have not found any texts that are designed specifically written *for* women on the act of *mothering*. Even perhaps one of the most famous guidebooks for women, Christine de Pizan's *The Treasure of the City of Ladies,* barely addresses how one acts as a mother. All we are told from de Pizan is that women of high class must make sure that those educating her children are moral people,[80] a mother should discipline her children[81] and that women of a lower class need to make sure that their children find work and are trained in a trade.[82] Clearly, mothering encompasses much more than what Christine briefly mentions in her work, especially when we know that being a mother was the most common role for women in the Middle Ages. Shulamith Shahar mirrors this notion when she stresses that guidebooks prioritize *wife* over *mother.*[83] This points to the primacy of the husband as the head of the family, the one who must be prioritized. Mothering is secondary in this context. This lack of maternal guidance is likely, as stated earlier, predicated on the fact that mothering was thought to be natural, inherent, and ingrained into a woman. The problem then becomes, if a mother acts in a way society deems non-normative, then she is viewed as unnatural, as missing some integral part to her being.

Through investigating normative maternal performance, it becomes clear that, despite theorists like Chodorow insisting that maternity is performative, we still today see a narrative that situates maternity as inherent or natural. Coding maternity as natural alleviates the need for

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[79] Juan L. Vives, *A verie fruitfull and pleasant booke. called the instruction of a Christian woman. Made first in Latin, by the right famous Clearke M. Levves Vives, and translated out of Latin into English, by Richard Hyrde, 1592*, Gg. ii, *ProQuest*.
[80] Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, translated by Sarah Lawson (London: Penguin Group, 2003), 41.
[81] Ibid, 129.
[82] Ibid, 154.
[83] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages,* 9.

maternity to be explained or explored, as it is thought of as an innate practice. We see this mode of thinking continue somewhat in current scholarship. As stated earlier in this chapter, most work on medieval motherhood primarily focuses on the body. This focus on the body minimizes a mother's role postpartum as it is rarely mentioned in current criticism. Through my own research, it became clear that in order to gain more insight into what it meant to be a *mother* in the Middle Ages, one must look at texts on medieval *children* for the most information regarding a mother's responsibilities and duties, what she performs. Historians like Barbara Hanawalt, Nichlas Orme, and Shulamith Shahar were integral in gaining an understanding on normative maternal practices through their work that studies children in the Middle Ages. Through seeing how children grew up during this time, one is able to see how a mother facilitates this growth. By using the works of these scholars, I was able to interrogate normative medieval maternal performance.

Before diving into maternal performance in the Middle Ages, it is important for readers to understand that normative mothering in a 21st century context is not exactly the same as normative mothering in the Middle Ages. What is normative in one era could be considered non-normative in another. We must check our biases regarding different understandings of mothering throughout history. An example of a major difference between medieval mothering and modern-day mothering is that medieval mothering, on the whole, was more communal. Wetnurses were commonly employed by families that could afford them, neighbors looked out for each others' children, both in the cities and in the country, and it was also common for the extended family to be close at hand. After the industrial revolution, we see the emergence of the nuclear family, where maternity becomes more solitary,[84] which informs how mothering is viewed and

[84] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering,* 53.

performed in a more recent time. Despite changes in maternal performance between the medieval period and today, some factors remain the same. I argue that the aspects of mothering that have remained the same through these historical periods are mothers loving, protecting, and teaching their children. However, the contexts surrounding these three performative acts vary between time periods. The rest of this chapter will investigate these facets of maternal performance and how the exogamous system of the Middle Ages impacts these performances.[85]

While there is a lack of "guides" surrounding how to mother during the Middle Ages, there are some literary works that give us insight into how mothers operated during this time. One such text is the poem "How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter." This poem highlights a mother's responsibilities toward her daughter. It is laid out as a set of lessons to be taught by the mother. The poem is essentially a list of best practices when living one's life. It includes a call to serve God, to be charitable and a good wife. It also goes into more detailed practical advice about what to do when a man proposes and how to run a household. The tone of the poem ebbs and flows from strict to tender. Nearing the conclusion it states: "For a chylde unborn wer better

[85] Before beginning a discussion of parent/child relationships in the Middle Ages, especially in regards to love, it is imperative to take time to address the fact that scholars are consistently having to "prove" that medieval parents loved their children. This is one of the aforementioned biases that often surround readers' understanding of medieval parenting or mothering. There is an understanding, though incorrect, that medieval parents were less emotionally attached to their children because of higher death rates of children. This is of course untrue, but is a discourse that stems from Philippe Ariès's 1960 work on medieval childhood, *Centuries of Childhood*, where he asserts the above claim. He also alleges that there was no distinct childhood period as children were treated like small adults. Current scholarship refutes these claims. Felicity Riddy and Mike Tyler open their introduction to their edited collection *Youth in the Middle Ages* with a rebuttal to Ariès. Similarly, Nicholas Orme's *Medieval Children* opens by countering Ariès, as does Barbara A. Hanawalt in *Growing Up in Medieval London*. Throughout Shulamith Shahar's *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, she pushes back against Ariès's work. Jan M. Ziolkowski states clearly and emphatically in "Laments for Lost Children: Latin Traditions" that Ariés's "thesis has been roundly rejected by most historians" (84). Collectively, what this rebuttal shows is that medieval parents loved their children. Further, Orme explains that they cared for them when they were sick, sang to them, and overwhelmingly, there is evidence that parent's mourned for their lost children (121). While Ariès's work has been staunchly refuted, it is this misunderstanding of medieval parenting that, while debunked in the scholarly field, remains in public consciousness.

/ Than be untaught, thus seys the letter,"[86] leading readers to recognize the strict importance of following these lessons. Yet, moments of gentleness also arise when the speaker tries to warn her daughter of men who may break her heart (or sully her reputation): "All the men be not trew / That fare spech to thee can show."[87] Overall the poem encompasses maternal knowledge being passed down to the daughter, who will then enact these lessons when she herself becomes wife and mother, showing the reproduction of mothering that takes place. Furthermore, the emphasis on domestic practices, socialization, and marriage show the centrality of marital practices within this society, most of which would have been exogamous marriages. This poem ultimately emphasizes what I argue are normative maternal practices: loving, which we see through the tenderness and care of the poem; teaching, such as practical advice and domestic lessons; and protecting, specifically protecting the daughter's soul and heart.

While loving, teaching, and protecting a child are aspects of parenting, I argue that there is a specific way in which a *mother* performs them. A good example of this is the fact that maternal love is often marked as a separate form of love. You certainly hear the phrase "a mother's love" much more than "a father's love." In discussing mothers in medieval romances, Jennifer Fellows uses terms such as "maternal love"[88] and "maternal tenderness,"[89] separating this type of love and tenderness from the universal definition and categorizes them as specifically maternal. The separating of parental love into specifically maternal love draws us to conclude that there is a uniqueness in this maternal performance. It is not equivalent to that of the father; not in the sense that mothers love their children more, but in the sense that maternal and paternal

[86] Eve Salisbury, ed., "How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter," in *The Trials of Joys and Marriages* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), 203-204. https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/salisbury-trials-and-joys-how-the-goode-wife-taught-hyr-doughter.
[87] Ibid, 89-90.
[88] Jennifer Fellows, "Mothers in Middle English Romance," 45.
[89] Ibid, 46.

performance are inherently different. These differences are formed by social expectations that inform both the performance of the maternal and the paternal.

Medieval maternal performance is further separated from its paternal counterpart when we investigate teaching and protecting. It is the responsibility of the parents to teach their children not only practical skills, but also to introduce them to religion, such as teaching them their prayers.[90] The mother's role was to teach in the domestic space,[91] teaching the children until they were around seven years old. This would include a basic education and religious training. Also, mothers dealt with the more practical things, like toilet training. After the age of seven, the father took over the son's education or the boy would have been apprenticed out or fostered depending on class status. Mothers would continue to educate their daughters, especially in domestic matters. Ultimately, the teaching practices of the father are relegated to more material matters: jobs or social positions that affect monetary income. On the other hand, the teachings of the mother are more in line with *nurture,* with manners and religion. This division of labor certainly maintains the normative, patrilineally dominated, system of a male controlled household. Women here are dependent on what fathers could provide on a practical level. Further, it is the material possessions, like land and wealth, that are always controlled by the husband. This system creates a major power imbalance between the mother and father, the father being in complete control. Exogamy exacerbates this imbalance as the mother is completely dependent on her husband, as she has moved away from her home and support system.

This focus on the material continues when discussing the performativity of parental protection. A father's protection remains in the material: physical protection, making sure there

[90] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children,* 204.
[91] Ibid, 244.

are enough resources to support the family, and providing an inheritance for the futurity of their family, and therefore the futurity of the patrilineal line. The image of the protective mother continues to lean more on the side of nurturing. Shahar provides the example: "The mother protecting her child against the cold was part of the image of the good mother in literature."[92] Maternal protection seems to me more in line with comfort rather than the material and bodily and material protection offered by the father. It is a mother's active presence that ultimately protects the child, especially in developmental terms. Chodorow speaks about the necessity of consistency on the part of the mother and how this is integral in a child's development:

> The absence of overwhelming anxiety and the presence of continuity--of holding, feeding, and a relatively consistent pattern of interaction--enable the infant to develop what Benedeck calls 'confidence' and Erik Erikson 'basic trust,' constituting, reflexively, a core beginning of self or identity.[93]

With a mother's consistent presence, children become more secure and confident. While this form of protection is more abstract, we also see more domestically centered means of maternal protection. Referring back to "How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter," a mother's protection also includes helping her children in making good life decisions, like people to avoid socially, or who to marry or not to marry.[94]

Despite loving, teaching, and protecting all seemingly positive aspects of normative maternal performance (things that seem to speak to the "cult of the mother"), mothers are still treated as lesser than their male counterparts; they are treated as abject. As soon as the child is born this distinction begins. Anything that "goes wrong" is immediately blamed on the mother. If a woman were to give birth to a child with deformities, or birth that is considered to be

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[92] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages,* 88.
[93] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering,* 59.
[94] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children,* 337.

monstrous, this is the mother's fault. She brings this harm unto her child because she did not guard well enough against sin, bringing harm to her unborn child.[95] Blame continues to be placed on the mother as the child grows. Orme provides an example that highlights the social understanding of the mother as abject, as the villain:

> The church emphasized the duty of parents to keep their children safe. Bishop Bartholomew of Exeter (d. 1184) discussed who was to blame if a mother put her infant by the fire and a man put water into the cauldron which overflowed, scalding and killing the child. He concluded that the mother was guilty and should do penance for putting the child into a dangerous place.[96]

Despite both parents putting the child in a dangerous situation, the church places the blame on the mother. This anecdote speaks to a larger issue. Despite maternal duties being focused on the domestic and nurturing side of parenting, there is, culturally, a distrust of mothers. By placing the mother into the role of the villain, coding her as abject, the father, and therefore the patrilineal line, are protected. As the "secondary" parent, the mother's necessity as nurturer is devalued, and the father's position, as representative of the patriarchy, is deemed more important. Jeffery Richards explains in *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation*: "When Gratian wrote 'The woman has no power, but in everything she is subject to the control of her husband,' he was merely expressing one of the universally held beliefs of the Middle Ages, the inherent and inescapable inferiority of women."[97] This systemic issue highlights, as Fellows puts it, the "marginalisation of the lives and interests of the female line."[98] It is a system that only functions through the oppression of mothers: through their commodification by means of exogamy.

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[95] See Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed,* 90.
[96] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children,* 67.
[97] Jeffery Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 25.
[98] Jennifer Fellows, "Mothers in Middle English Romance," 43.

Normative mothering relies on the precedent that mothers are submissive to their husband, which inherently affects the ways in which mothering is performed. As Chodorow states:

> She [the mother] usually participates in a marriage with a deep sexual division of labor, in which she is financially dependent, and she expects her husband to be dominant. Her mothering, then, is informed by her relationship to her husband, her experience of financial dependence, her expectations of marital inequality, and her expectations about gender roles.[99]

Exogamy makes the above statement even more stark for mothers during the Middle Ages. Not only is there a power disparity between her and her husband, but also between the mother and her in-laws. Effectively, through the exchange-of-women, she is a commodified object to this new family. She has entered into *their* space and transitions into an outsider. Through this societal practice, the mother is controlled and placed into a submissive position. To maintain the control created by exogamy and patriarchal power structures, the mother is placed into the domestic where her influence is minimized. She is the passive parent. While gender norms would define the feminine as passive to the masculine, this passivity seems to be doubled as a woman transitions into the role of the mother. Acting as a scapegoat to protect the patrilineal line becomes the normative definition of mothering.

As explained earlier, we have historical evidence of the prevalence of maternal blame. Not only does this sentiment appear in historical texts, but also in literature. One need only look at the medieval literary genre of the calumniated wives to see how mothers are often wrongly accused in medieval texts. This narrative trope demonstrates the anxieties both fathers and mothers faced. For the patriarchy, we firstly have the symbolic anxiety that surrounds a mother's generative power, which establishes them as abject. In the realm of the real, there is a patrilineal worry that mothers will produce children who are illegitimate or that the mother will in some

[99] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering,* 86.

way contaminate the child. For the mother, then, there is the anxiety of displacement, of being in a space where one marginally operates as an outsider. Through exogamy, a mother is no longer part of the in-group. The authors of "Portraits" in *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World* highlight this notion when they state: "The wife was only a 'half' member of her husband's clan."[100] She must socially navigate a system that uses her as a commodity to maintain the patrilineal line and subjectively understands her as abject. Throughout all of this, the mother must also love, teach, and protect her children–to normatively perform maternity. What follows in this dissertation is an investigation of how whether or not a mother performs maternity in a normative manner, she, as abject, always poses a challenge, a disruption, to patriarchal power.

[100] George Duby et. al, "Portraits." *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1988), 87.

CHAPTER II: SUFFERING MOTHERS: LOSS, GRIEF, AND MATERNAL PERFORMANCE

The most prominent sign of a woman's motherhood is the presence of the child itself. Yet women who have lost children continue to perform maternity through expressions of grief. A mother continuing to perform maternity after losing the most notable physical signal of motherhood, the child itself, situates the need for an examination of maternal performativity and more specifically, maternal grief. This chapter examines the circumstances surrounding a mother's loss of a child in three Middle English romances: Chaucer's *The Clerk's Tale, Sir Eglamour of Artois,* and *Octavian.*[101] While the way these children are lost and the forms of maternal grief vary in each narrative, each example of grief disrupts the systems of patriarchal power in the romances by highlighting the instability of those systems. For the ruling class, children, who are often born as a result of an exogamous marriage, are a necessity for a patrilineal structure to persist. The loss of a child and heir throws the stability of that system into question as their death (and the kingdom's subsequent lack of an heir) fractures the patrilineal structure. This instability exists because patrilineal systems of inheritance rely solely on a healthy living son to inherit and keep land and holdings within the family. In a time of greater child mortality, the chance that a healthy son would survive until he reaches adulthood is problematically low in these narratives. The low number of children in these medieval romances, typically one or two, emphasizes that fragility. Grief draws focus and places an emphasis on the loss of the child and therefore also highlights the potential for the line of succession to be broken. Normative medieval maternal grief was publicly performed and understood to be highly

[101] I say "loss" here because, given the nature of Middle English romances, all of the children are reunited with their mothers by the tale's conclusion. However, the mothers in these narratives are unaware of this fact. Two women have their children stolen: the mothers in *Octavian* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*. And, famously, Griselda in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, believes her children to be dead.

emotional. In contrast, normative paternal grief was meant to be private and emotions kept under check. Therefore, it is the mother's grief that the public, who were also potentially subjects of the family in question, experiences and, importantly, notices. Maternal grief functions as a force which draws attention to the lack of heir, to a fissure in the way the patriarchy disseminates power.

Maternal grief also highlights the problematic nature of the exogamous system, which creates a huge power imbalance between husband and wife. The exchange of women through exogamous marriages ultimately functions as a way to produce heirs, specifically male heirs. A woman's function and worth is predicated on her ability to reproduce. Socially, women of exogamous marriages are already at a disadvantage. They must attempt to integrate into this new culture where they are an outsider. These women are often without the support of their kin group as they have moved away from their family and home culture. This lack of support which would be doubly felt when experiencing the loss of a child. When a woman loses a child in this social system, her "value" is questioned. As her functionality is to provide heirs, the inability to reproduce or the loss of living children puts the woman's position within her marital family and new society at risk. Lack of heirs was grounds for annulling a marriage. As is demonstrated in the *Clerk's Tale,* Walter is able to throw Griselda out of his home and remarry after the death of their two children.[102] Ultimately, maternal suffering publically displays the fragility of a system whose foundation relies on male heirs and highlights this instability of such a system. Furthermore, maternal grief draws attention to systemic issues within the exogamous system which places a woman's value on her ability to produce healthy heirs.

[102] This concept will also be discussed in chapter 4. In *Lay le Freine,* potential infertility is a source of anxiety for the mother as it threatens her place within the marital home.

What is interesting about maternal suffering is that no matter how the grief is performed, normatively or non-normatively, whether the grief is detailed or glossed over, or if it is suppressed or unrestrained, maternal grief *always* showcases the problem with sustaining a system that relies of the birth of healthy boys. This instability directly affects the subjects of the ruling family as this causes them to question the authority of the male ruler. I argue that public reactions against male rulers stems from both an anxiety surrounding succession (or lack thereof) and the patriarchal figurehead's mistreatment of his wife. What I mean by this is that, for the subjects, by not securing an heir, the ruler is leaving his land in an unstable condition, which will directly impact those who live within that land; the ruler's power is then questioned. Furthermore, as stated, maternal grief draws attention to power imbalances within exogamous marriages, and the subjects recognize this as well. For example, we see this most starkly in the *Clerk's Tale* when Walter's subjects side with Griselda during her grieving and go so far as to question Walter's actions. Maternal grief's ability to draw attention to such issues disrupts ideals of masculine power because this undermines patriarchal authority. Medieval literary depictions of maternal grief are a prime site to analyze the power of the mother and her socially disruptive suffering. I have chosen to explore Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale,* and the anonymous fourteenth-century romances of *Octavian* and *Sir Eglamour* because the suffering of the mothers in all three narratives poses a challenge to the authority of male characters of power despite performing grief in different ways. In Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale,* Griselda is not allowed to grieve as it would be a demonstration against Walter's authority over her. Walter's power over Griselda's grief stems from the power imbalance of their exogamous marriage. Despite not outwardly grieving (or grieving in a non-normative manner), Griselda's maternal suffering still undermines Walter's power over her and his subjects, who rally with Griselda against Walter's cruelty and even speak

out against his actions. In both *Octavian* and *Sir Eglamour*, however, the mothers perform normative grief (outwardly expressing emotion), but still, like Griselda, the power of their maternal suffering challenges the men of power within their narrative and highlights the problematic power imbalance of exogamous marriages.[103] This argument offers an analysis of how maternal grief functions in Middle English romances. Through this analysis, I show how a specific facet of maternal performativity, suffering, is a point of maternal power which disrupts masculine hegemonic systems and shows systemic issues surrounding the exchange-of-women in exogamous marriages.

In an effort to further show that maternity is, like any other gendered category, performative, I will begin this chapter with an overview of medieval performances of grief. Just like with maternity, there are some similarities and differences between how we currently understand grief and how it was conceptualized in the Middle Ages. It is important to define *medieval* grief in order to better understand literary depictions of performances of maternal suffering during the period. Additionally, by exploring gendered performances of grief (e.g. maternal grief), I further my argument that we, as scholars, should understand maternity as performance rather than primarily focusing on the maternal body. As with any gendered performance, an understanding of grief can never be simple or universal and is experienced and understood in various ways. As a medieval scholar who focuses on grief, Lee Templeton states "grief is a complex process that has generated a dizzying array of definitions, explanations, and investigations."[104] To attempt to explain *exactly* what grief is, who experiences it, and *how* one

[103] I would like to note that in the case of *Octavian* and *Sir Eglamour* little scholarly attention is paid to the mothers in these narratives. If these mothers are mentioned at all it is in regards to their functionality as a narrative plot device which serves as a catalyst to their sons' adventures. This, I argue, minimizes the importance of these mothers and leaves a significant gap in scholarly conversations surrounding the maternal in the Middle English romances.
[104] Lee Templeton, ed., *Grief, Gender, and Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 3.

experiences it would be futile. Instead, like with mothering, I put forward that it is important to understand how one was *expected* to mourn during this period. By having this general understanding of medieval grief, an analysis of the maternal suffering in the Middle English romances that I have chosen becomes more accessible.

To begin, it is important to understand that, like other emotions, medieval expectations of grieving are certainly connected with gender. Men and women were expected to grieve in different ways, in normative ways. Templeton expounds: "For Butler, the performance of gender is never exclusively a solitary act; rather it is relational, measured and authenticated by one's interaction and proximity to others. The same can be said for the performance of emotion."[105] Furthermore, expressions of grief were also directly linked to Christian teaching, though the interpretation of that teaching and the actual lived experience of grieving was certainly subjective and the teachings were often contradictory. Suffering is an emotion that we often see heavily associated with Christianity, especially being linked with Jesus and Mary. It was believed that human suffering was the closest one could get to Christ. This is also why Griselda is so often associated with Christian suffering, as suffering figures were pious ones. After all, martyrdom staunchly relies on suffering. Yet, more often than not, grieving "too much" was criticized by the church. In "Forbidding Feminine Grief: Affective Exploitation in the Brome *Sacrifice of Isaac,*" Jeffery G. Stoyanoff explains that the church warned against excessive grieving or being angry at God for one's loss because, in the end, it is all part of God's plan.[106] Also, instances of excessive sorrow could be viewed as a person attempting to usurp or liken

[105] Ibid, 7.
[106] Jeffory G. Stoyanoff. "Forbidding Feminine Grief: Affective Exploitation in the Brome Sacrifice of Isaac." In *Grief, Gender, and Identity in the Middle Ages*, edited by Lee Templeton (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 71.

themselves too much to a holy figure: Margery Kempe being a prime example.[107] It was also understood that the deceased was in a better place: with God. Mourners should be comforted by this notion rather than feeling such deep sorrow. Engaging in such sorrow would be to question God or to question the promise of the afterlife. Jan M. Ziolkowski expounds on this point in "Laments for Lost Children: Latin Traditions":

> [D]eath occasioned personal grief, but that it was supposed to bring with it its own solace, since believers were encouraged to recognize that death in the here and now led to a new life in the hereafter. Consequently, lamenting deaths even of children could warrant castigation. Furthermore, the effort of the church to motivate parents to baptize their children engendered centuries of discussion about the grievous fate of unbaptized children, which in effect afforded ample cause for lamentation.[108]

Grief then, in a sense, was regulated by the church: how long, how intensely, and how much one should grieve. It is important to understand the church as a regulatory body in this context because Christian authority certainly affected secular performances as the church, I argue, is a facet of the masculine hegemonic system. The church is part of the social system that enforces and maintains gendered norms of grieving. These norms apply to how a mother should grieve as well. What follows is a review of what would socially be considered normative behavior for a grieving mother during the Middle Ages.

A basic dichotomy of masculine versus feminine grief situates the man as the more stoic one who puts up a strong face, repressing the emotions that he is certainly feeling. In contrast, women were the more outwardly emotional, crying and wailing being common descriptors.[109] In

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[107] See Mary Beth Long's "'Woful womman, confortlees': Failed Maternity and Maternal Grief as Feminist Issues." Long explains that "when Margery [Kempe] does try to partake of sorrow, both Christ and Mary remind her that she's not his actual mother, implying that only Mary is worthy of public grief" (337-338).

[108] Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Laments for Lost Children: Latin Traditions," in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature*, edited by Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 90.

[109] See Jamie Friedman and Jeff Rider, ed., *The Inner Life of Women in Medieval Romance Literature: Grief, Guilt, and Hypocrisy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). See Lisa Renée Perfetti, ed., *The Representation of Women's Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

Grief and Gender 700-1700, Jennifer Vaught states: "men at this time often vent their grief through violent action or respond stoically to loss, whereas women frequently mourn by weeping and wailing."[110] In speaking about how gender affects the grieving process of medieval laments, Anne L. Klink states: "In many cultures the rituals of a lament have been performed especially by women, displays of violent emotion being regarded as, within limits, appropriate for the weaker, but not the stronger, sex."[111] Despite the fact that a woman's outward expressions of grief is considered normal, it is, at the same time, denigrated. As stated earlier, how much and how long one grieved was subject to the church's disapproval. Yet still, even *how* a woman grieved was subject to criticism. In "'Veniance, Lord apon thayn fall': Maternal Mourning, Divine Justice, and Tragedy in the Corpus Christi Plays," medieval and early modern literary scholar Katherine Goodland explains how "proper" feminine grief should be portrayed in contemporary literary texts: "There appears to be an expectation that female sorrow, and especially the Virgin's, should be dramatized as restrained, picturesque, and lyrical rather than angry and vengeful."[112] While this statement pertains to fictional depictions, it can rightly be said that this would be what society expected out of feminine grief. Expressions of anger and vengefulness are not often portrayed or thought of as positives when being performed by a woman.

This gendered division continues into descriptions of parental grief. Yet, much like most feminine gendered experiences, the normative practices of maternal grief are regulated, policed,

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[110] Jennifer C. Vaught, et al. *Grief and Gender, 700-1700* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2.
[111] Anne L. Klink. "Singing a Song of Sorrow: Tropes of Lament," in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature*, edited by Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 10.
[112] Katherine Goodland, "'Veniance, Lord, Apon Thaym Fall': Maternal Mourning, Divine Justice, and Tragedy in the Corpus Christi Plays." *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 18, (2005): 166.

and even chastised by the masculine systems of power. Parental grief is often discussed as its own category, highlighting the intense devastation that the loss of a child causes. Like all modes of grief, parental grief cannot be narrowed down to a specific set of actions or reactions. Furthermore, I feel it necessary to reiterate what I discussed in chapter 1: parents *did* grieve for, love, and were emotionally attached to their children. Despite the high infant and child mortality rates, losses were felt and felt deeply. As Ziolkowski states:

> It may never be feasible or necessarily desirable or useful to establish a grief index and to peg fluctuations in the acuteness of the bereavement that mothers and fathers have felt upon losing children, regardless of the frequency with which the parent has experienced death or the number of surviving children in the family.[113]

What Ziolkowski points to here is that there is no exact formula, nor can there ever be one, when discussing parental grief. Yet, gendered expectations of the differences between paternal and maternal grief are pointed out and discussed by medievalist scholars. Let me state that these differences are how society *expects* parents to grieve: what is "normative" by the expected standards of performance. The characteristics of parental grief are quite similar to masculine/feminine grief. However, there are two additional aspects of sorrow that appear to take place in parental grief: blame and responsibility.

It was commonplace for the mother to bear the brunt of the blame when a child died in the Middle Ages, which, I argue, directly affects performances of maternal grief. In her essay "Child Death and Parental Mourning in the Middle Ages" medieval historian Danielle Griego states: "I argue that medieval authors portrayed women as grieving more publicly than men in order to stress the idea that they were responsible for keeping children safe around the domestic sphere. As a result, in some cases, public grief was used to indicate guilt."[114] The publicness of

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[113] Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Laments for Lost Children," 88.

[114] Danielle Greigo. "Child Death and Parental Mourning in the Middle Ages." *Radical Death Studies*, 20 Aug. 2019, https://radicaldeathstudies.com/2019/08/20/child-death-and-parental-mourning-in-the-middle-ages/.

maternal grief is something that I will return to shortly. Still, blame here seems to be foundational in Griego's understanding of maternal grief. She continues: "Even after the close of the Middle Ages, men were expected to grieve in a reticent manner because they were heads of households, while women were more vocal about their grief and assumed blame if children died under their care."[115] This is reflected in Didier Lett's commentary on a historical account of parents who lost their child in "Parents Distraught at the Death of a Child: Parental and Maternal Emotions in Early Thirteenth-Century England." For parental grief, he states: "Fathers' resistance to expressing their grief immediately in public makes tears seem more feminine, and doubtless sharpened masculine suffering."[116] As for the mother depicted in the account, Emma, she "did not even try to hide her feelings, expressing them in all their contradictory modes."[117] Again, here we see the pattern of a paternal repression of emotions: internal and private. Contrastingly, maternal grief is described as external and public.

The contemporary public's reaction or view regarding maternal grief can often be contradictory. We have evidence of sympathy; here, from Lett:

> In 1393, the wealthy author of the handbook *Le Ménagier de Paris* wrote the following advice to his young wife: "Only a fool would try to stop a mother from crying at the death of her child until she is entirely emptied of tears and has wept sufficiently. Then the time has come to comfort her and to soften her pain by kind words."[118]

The above cited author's view is certainly how we would expect and would hope people and society at large to act regarding a mother after the loss of her child. Yet, we still have examples of criticism regarding maternal mourning. Most often we see this coming from men who hold positions of power and the complaint is the mothers are mourning *too much.* For example,

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[115] Ibid.
[116] Didier Lett. "Parents Distraught at the Death of a Child: Paternal and Maternal Emotions in Early Thirteenth-Century England," translated by Marian Rothstien. *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 47 (2018): 187.
[117] Ibid, 186.
[118] Ibid, 187.

Ziolkowski explains that early church father John Chrysostom disparages "a poor widow for lamenting the death of her only son."[119] Further still, in Mary Beth Long's "'Woful womman, confortlees': Failed Maternity and Maternal Grief as Feminist Issue," we learn that humanist scholar and poet Petrarch "argued that women's [public] displays of grief disturbed peace and order."[120] Despite feminine grief being public, dichotomously opposite the internal private nature of masculine grief, it is this publicness that is criticized here. Maternal grief appears to be "too much" for some of these male figures of authority. The suffering of mothers must be reduced to a "problem" because, as Petrarch says, this grief *disturbs order.* Maternal grief, through its disruptiveness, challenges patriarchal power by drawing attention to the fallibility of patrilineal systems.

Other scholars have also pointed out the disruptive nature of maternal grief. Stoyanoff's analysis of the Brome *Sacrifice of Isaac* is a prime example of the powers of maternal grief to disrupt. Stoyanoff's argument is that the very idea of Sarah's grief disrupts Abraham's quest to obey God and kill their son: "Even though Sarah is not physically here, the very idea of her has disrupted Abraham's actions, and the audience sees the disruption as love rather than disobedience."[121] The disruption is viewed as a positive, as love, but there remains this negation of maternal grief as we see through the ideas of Petrarch and John Chrysostom. Despite being a disruption based in love, it is still a disruption: a disruption that has the potential to impede God's will. While this is an extreme case of maternal power here and Sarah is not chastised for her grief, the implication remains that the power of Sarah's grief is something to be overcome, something that tests Abraham's obedience to God. Typically, in biblical tales, forces that serve

[119] Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Laments for Lost Children," 91.
[120] Mary Beth Long, "'Woful Womman, Confortlees': Failed Maternity and Maternal Grief as Feminist Issues." *Postmedieval* 10, no. 3, (Sept. 2019): 339 ProQuest, http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/s41280-019-00138-8.
[121] Jeffory G. Stoyanoff. "Forbidding Feminine Grief," 62.

as temptations to go against God for one's own gains (in Abraham's case it is to not kill his son) are not treated positively. Maternal grief is treated as a negative force that must be suppressed or overcome and subdued.

Why is such an emotional display, a natural display, spoken of in such negative terms?[122] I argue that it is largely due to the disruptive power of maternal grief that Stoyanoff so rightly points out. He categorizes it as "both an important and disruptive affective technique."[123] This disruption is powerful. It challenges masculine authorities, and in the case of Sarah's maternal grief, even God. I am not the first to point out the power of maternal grief. Goodland argues that "women's wailing should be viewed as strength instead of a weakness."[124] Further, Long sees the policing of maternal grief by attempts to suppress it, in both historical and literary accounts, as a way to "preempt its power."[125] I put forth that what this power *does* comes down to its ability to disrupt patriarchal power. Maternal grief shows inherent flaws within the exogamous driven patrilineal social system, as it shows the inherent fragility of a system in which reconciliation of power is made through the birth of sons. In this system, women are traded for their reproductive abilities in order to produce male heirs that will protect the continuity of the patriarchy. Maternal grief, however, shows the fallibility of such a system. Through the loss of the child, the entire futurity of this patrilineal state is put at risk. The mother's public grieving shows the community this loss and it also shows a potential reduction of power for the ruling or high-status family as there could be no one to continue their line. By seeing this loss, the public is made aware of just

[122] Even within Stoyanoff's article there are terms such as "unproductive feminine grief" (56) which leads to viewing feminine grief as something that needs to be productive and can therefore *fail* at its intended purpose.
[123] Jeffory G. Stoyanoff. "Forbidding Feminine Grief," 53.
[124] Katherine Goodland, "'Veniance, Lord, Apon Thaym Fall,'" 169.
[125] Mary Beth Long, "'Woful Womman, Confortlees'" 329.

how weak the system of power truly is.[126] Thus, the hegemony seeks to minimize or to hide maternal mourning by criticizing it or by telling mothers to grieve *less* since it disrupts their perceived dominance. This happens through real male authorities critiquing maternal grief, as shown above, and by minimizing maternal grief, or glossing it, in medieval literary works. This argument is supported by literary accounts of maternal suffering, specifically the Middle English romances of the *Clerk's Tale, Sir Eglamour,* and *Octavian.*

Medieval literary depictions of grief are not historical accounts, but they can give us insight into real lived experiences. As Templeton states: "Medieval texts do not provide us with lived emotional experiences; rather, they provide representations of actual, authentic, emotions."[127] As such, literary texts give us an idea of how maternal grief was understood and treated in social reality. This chapter demonstrates suppressions, erasures, and/or minimizations of maternal grief in the romance narratives of the *Clerk's Tale, Sir Eglamour,* and *Octavian*– narratively, authorially, and societally– and bring the suffering mother to the forefront of the story to showcase her power and influence despite the pressures that exogamy places on her. In the *Clerk's Tale,* Griselda is forced to suppress her maternal grief and because of this is criticized. In *Sir Eglamour* and *Octavian* depictions of maternal grief are short, quickly forgotten within the narrative. Yet, I argue, all of these women's performances of maternal suffering, despite their varying narrative treatment, disrupt the hegemony through maternal grief's ability to highlight foundational issues in a patrilineal succession system. Furthermore, maternal grief also showcases systemic issues that exogamy creates, namely a large disparity of power between husband and wife that can have disastrous effects.

[126] Most historical examples of the anxieties or problems a lack of heir can cause comes from the monarchy, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.
[127] Lee Templeton, ed., *Grief, Gender, and Identity*, 9.

One of the best examples of maternal grief being suppressed is Griselda's story in the *Clerk's Tale,* which follows Griselda, a young woman of the lower class, who unexpectedly marries the lord of the land, Walter, who "tests" Griselda's obedience to him. I choose to start here because, following Rebecca Krug's argument that the function of this romance is directly related to the negative connotations of mourning women,[128] I want to explore why the suppression of maternal grief is so important in this text and the ramifications of such an erasure. Further, I will use the analysis of this text to highlight erasures or glossings of maternal grief in other romances. Ultimately, no matter how medieval authors choose to deal with, or not deal with, maternal suffering, it *always* highlights systemic issues that disrupt systems of power. I will show that this grief, though silenced, still challenges her husband Walter's authority over his subjects.

This Chaucerian tale has received a lot of, often divergent, scholarly attention. The tale itself is complex, fitting into different medieval literary genres. It can be read as a romance, a tale surrounding the aristocratic class where the female protagonist must endure major challenges along with the narrative of marriage (the tale also belongs to Chaucer's "marriage group").[129] The *Clerk's Tale*, being told by a member of the clergy, is also discussed in terms of a highly Christian narrative about suffering and patience, causing scholars to interpret the tale as more hagiographic. Such discordances in genre also change the way the main character, Griselda, is

[128] See Rebecca Krug, "Natural Feeling and Unnatural Mothers: Herod the Great, The Life of Saint Bridget, and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*" in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature,* 225-242 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010).

[129] See Mary Beth Rose, "Maternal Abandonment, Maternal Deprivation: Tale of Griselda in Boccaccio, Petrarch, Chaucer, and Shakespeare," in *Plotting Motherhood in Medieval, Early Modern, and Modern Literature* 43-71 (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2017)..

read and understood. Is she an allegory of Christian patience,[130]an abused wife,[131] or a mother to be criticized for her supposed complicity in the "death" of her children?[132] It is certainly not a tale that is easily reconciled. Indeed, even the teller, the Clerk, seems confused as to how to explain this story to his fellow travelers. Rebecca Krug states: "the Clerk himself recognizes the tensions in the narrative that he inherits from Petrach and Boccacio."[133] The Clerk even attempts to come up with some kind of lesson or purpose to his story with, I would argue, little success. Krug also mirrors this notion: "But the Clerk, even at the end of the tale, seems at a loss about the lessons readers can learn from the story of Griselda."[134] The Clerk calls for the women in the audience to not *really* be like Griselda, but rather states: "But for that every wight, in his degree, / Sholde be constant in adversitee."[135] Griselda's "constancy" in this narrative is to remain passive–to bury her true feelings and not to publicly react. We could read the Clerk's advice as an impetus to mirror Christian suffering during times of adversity, yet the focus of this tale is that Griselda must *not* suffer as it would show her lack of obedience to her husband; rather, she is

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[130] See Natalie Grinnell, "Griselda Speaks: The Scriptural Challenge to Patriarchal Authority in 'The Clerk's Tale,'" *Critical Matrix* 9, no. 1 (1995): 79-94, https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/griselda-speaks-scriptural-challenge-patriarchal/docview/1307822784/se-2. Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "The Powers of Silence: The Case of the Clerk's Griselda," *Critical Essays of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by Tomas Stillinger, 133-149 (New York: G.K. Hall, 1998). Barbara Newman, "'Crueel Corage': Child Sacrifice and the Maternal Martyr in Hagiography and Romance," From *Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

[131] See M.C. Bodden "Disordered Grief and Fashionable Afflictions in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and the *Clerk's Tale*" in *Grief and Gender, 700-1700,* edited by Jennifer C. Vaught and Lynne Dickson Bruckner, 51-64 (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Gerald Morgan, "The Logic of the *Clerk's Tale,*" *The Modern Language Review* 104, no. 1 (2009): 1–25. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20468120.

[132] See Robert Emmett Finnegan, "'She Should Have Said No to Walter': Griselda's Promise in the *Clerk's Tale,*" *English Studies* 75, no. 4 (1994): 303-321, https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.1080/00138389408598923.

[133] Rebecca Krug, "Natural Feeling and Unnatural Mothers: Herod the Great, The Life of Saint Bridget, and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*," in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature*, edited by Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell, (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 237.

[134] Ibid, 240.

[135] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry Benson (Boston: CENGAGE Learning, 1986), 1114-1145.

forced to suppress, to hide, her grief. It is this suppression, I argue, that ultimately highlights the societal issues that facilitate Walter's spousal abuse.

Before I begin an analysis of the suppression of Griselda's grief and the social implications that this brings forward, I would first like to state that I will not be arguing for Griselda's love of her children. What I mean by this is that I am working under the assumption that Griselda loved her children. Just because Griselda does not outwardly react to the deaths of her children, does not mean that she is not suffering; it does not mean that she does not care. As Natalie Grinnell puts it in "Griselda Speaks: The Scriptural Challenge to Patriarchal Authority in 'The Clerk's Tale'": "neither Walter nor the reader can monitor Griselda's thoughts except through what she says and does, and Griselda, like so many censored voices before her, is capable of expressing two contradictory thoughts."[136] The tale also provides narrative cues of Griselda's love for her children: "Hir doghter that she loved so,"[137] "That parfitly hir children loved she,"[138] and "She loved hir children best in every wyse."[139] It is not Griselda's love for her children or actions that must be critiqued here as she is being forced to give her children over to her husband to kill. Her compliance is forced; she is not a participant. The fact that other scholars, like Grinnell, and myself find it necessary to argue for Griselda's morality as it relates to her children, shows just how negatively mothers are often presented in medieval narratives and in scholarship of the texts. Griselda giving her children over to her husband's demands should not be an act that is discussed in terms of Griselda's motivations, but rather what the

[136] Natalie Grinnell, "Griselda Speaks: The Scriptural Challenge to Patriarchal Authority in 'The Clerk's Tale,'" *Critical Matrix* 9, no. 1 (1995): 87. *ProQuest*, https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/griselda-speaks-scriptural-challenge-patriarchal/docview/1307822784/se-2.
[137] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," 543.
[138] Ibid, 690.
[139] Ibid, 695.

social structure that she is operating within is forcing her to do. We must focus on the societal factors that surround her which allow this "test" to take place. Her love for her children should not be questioned, but rather what should be questioned is a system that forced a mother into this impossible situation.

Along these same lines, the person at fault within this narrative is solely Walter. I am following a line of scholars who view Griselda as purely a victim, both of society at large and of her husband. As Gerald Morgan states in "The Logic of the *Clerk's Tale*": "It is the husband, not the wife, who is to blame for all the misery that is to come, and hence at no point does the Clerk suggest any blameworthiness on Griselde's part."[140] Again, my focus regarding the *Clerk's Tale* is not to advocate for Griselda's morality, rather it is to expose the masculine dominated system's treatment of mothers and its suppression of maternal grief.

This romance begins with a marriage, an out-marriage between Walter and Griselda. Despite Griselda living in the same geographical area as Walter, I argue that this marriage still fits into the realm of exogamy, even though Griselda is not "moving" very far from her father's home. Apart from not being an in/family-marriage, what staunchly places Griselda's marriage to Walter as exogamous is the extreme differences in social classes. I argue the problem with exogamy lies with the total social isolation of the woman who is forced to leave her home community in order to facilitate the continuation of the patriarchal line. In Grisleda's case, she is forced to leave everything from her home behind, down to her own clothes: "And for that no thyng of hir olde geere / She sholde brynge into his house, he bad / That women sholde dispoillen hire right theere."[141] Furthermore, the class division between Walter and Griselda is

[140] Gerald Morgan, "The Logic of the Clerk's Tale," 9.
[141] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," 372-374.

doubly problematic. It is made clear that Griselda is of a much lower class than Walter: "For povrelich yfostered up was she"[142] and "She knew wel labour but noon ydel ese"[143] A lower-class woman entering into her upper-class husband's household is already more disadvantaged than a woman entering into a husband of equal standing's home. Athalya Brenner illustrates in "Ruth as a Foreign Worker and the Politics of Exogamy" that "a low-class foreign woman, a worker without property, will become invisible in the host community. She will be absorbed rather than integrated."[144] In being absorbed into her host community, her identity is erased because Griselda is both outsider and lower-class–a detrimental by-product of exogamy.

Additionally, though a wife is always subject to her husband, Griselda is doubly so because she is both wife and literal subject. As Walter is the "markys," he is also lord over Griselda. Morgan states: "The relationship that is described here is not so much that of a husband and wife as that of a lord and subject."[145] Being a subject under Walter before being a subject-as-wife under Walter-as-husband, would of course affect Griselda's mental understanding of their relationship and her performativity as his wife. Morgan continues: "This is a matter of psychological outlook as well as of moral conduct. Griselde has long been educated by grinding poverty into the necessity of submissiveness towards those wealthier and more powerful than she herself can ever hope to be."[146] Griselda certainly finds Walter's presence in her home intimidating and unnerving. When he approaches her, she is "quakynge for drede."[147] The juxtaposition between Walter and Griselda's classes is also, of course, found between Walter and

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[142] Ibid, 213.
[143] Ibid, 217.
[144] Athalya Brenner, "Ruth as a Foreign Worker and the Politics of Exogamy," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth and Esther, edited by Athalya Brenner* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1999), 162. *ProQuest Ebook Central*.
[145] Gerald Morgan, "The Logic of the Clerk's Tale," 11.
[146] Ibid, 10.
[147] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," 358.

Griselda's father, Janicula. Walter approaches Janicula first to secure his permission to marry his daughter. Yet, because of Walter's position as lord, Janicula has little choice in the matter; his blessing of marriage is predicated on Walter's social position. Janicula says to Walter when he asks to marry Griselda:

> [...] "Lord," quod he, "my willynge
> Is as ye wole, ne ayeynes youre likynge
> I wol no thyng, *ye be my lord so deere*;[148]
> Right as yow lust, governeth ths mateere."[149] (319-322)

Janicula, even though he is Griselda's father, is effectively outranked by Walter and is not, socially, in a position to refuse him. Therefore, if her own father is not in a position to refuse Walter anything, neither is Griselda.

Though posed as a question, the proposal of marriage and the subsequent promise of ultimate obedience is not a request. Griselda, I argue, like her father, is not in the position to refuse. Therefore, Griselda *must* agree to marry Walter and *must* agree to the demand of ultimate obedience and, as Morgan explained, is socially conditioned to obey Walter as a lord even before she must obey him as her husband. I put this reading forward in order to highlight how this exogamous marriage, a marriage where Griselda is forced to leave her cultural norm in order to produce heirs for the ruling class, places Griselda in a position of forced obedience and submission. It is not a simple matter of telling Walter no. Griselda has, through the conditions of her marriage and the conditioning of society, become isolated and absorbed into her new culture with no one to turn to and no support beyond her husband, who is the cause of her distress. Walter is able to get away with abusing his wife because of the cultural norms that exogamy has created, norms that treat women as tradable goods and silence their voices.

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[148] Emphasis mine

[149] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," 319-322.

Walter enforces his power when he decides to test his wife's obedience, specifically targeting her maternity. In telling Griselda to give up her children to be killed, he targets not only what is culturally thought of as sacred, but also her function as a woman in the Middle Ages: her production of children. The importance of Griselda's reproductive abilities are narratively stressed immediately after she gives birth to her daughter:

> a daughter hath ybore,
> Al had hir levere have born a knave child;
> For though a mayde child coome al bifore,
> She may unto a knave child atteyne
> By liklihede, syn she nys nat bareyne.[150]

The public recognizes Griselda is capable of bearing a child because she gives birth to her daughter, but they are also more concerned with her ability to produce a son and heir. This is, culturally, her function and purpose after all. This is what Walter chooses to destroy.

Not only is Walter testing Griselda's obedience to him, but he is also testing the household hierarchy which dictates that Griselda's place is subordinate to her husband. As Barbara Newman in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist* states: "The demand for sacrifice also problematizes the woman's role, setting wifehood against motherhood and privileging the former."[151] Walter is attempting to reify his position both within his own household and within his domain. The fact that Walter feels the need to test or "prove" his power over his wife and, by extension, his subjects, in and of itself shows the fragility of his power. It is the test, Griselda's reaction to that test (her grief and suffering), and Walter's subjects' reactions that stymie Walter's power. As a representative or symbol of the masculine power system, Walter's *need* to

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[150] Ibid, 443-448.

[151] Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 96, *ProQuest Ebook Central*.

prove his power actually diminishes it, and, therefore, also reduces the power of the masculine hegemony.

Walter's testing of Griselda ultimately calls into question his position of power, even though his purpose in the testing was to solidify that power. He loses the respect and love of his people in an attempt to prove his sole dominion over his wife. This public, we are told, ultimately approves of Griselda as their marchioness. She earns this approval through her actions as a wife and a public figure:

> Nat oonly this Grisisldis thrugh hir wit
> Koude al the feet of wyfly hoomlinesse,
> But eek, whan that the cas required it,
> The commune profit koude she redresse.
> Thew nas discord, rancour, ne hevynesse
> In al that land that she ne koude apese,
> And wisely brynge hem alle in reste and ese.[152]

Furthermore, Griselda brings much needed stability to the community with the birth of her daughter. The reason Walter marries Griselda is because his people were worried about the land not having an heir and needed their marquis to settle down and get married. As stated earlier, the people are pleased with the birth of her daughter because it shows her fertility and gives the land hope for a son. It seems that they could not ask for a better wife for their marquis. Yet, despite public approval and Griselda's good wifely performance, he still feels the need to go through with these tests. He also qualifies his arrangement of their daughter's death by stating that this is what the people, his people, want:

> And though to me that ye be lief and deere,
> Unto my gentils ye be no thyng so.
> They seyn, to hem it is greet shame and wo
> For to be subgetz and been in servage
> To thee, that born art of a smal village.[153]

[152] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," 428-434.
[153] Ibid, 479-483.

This is far from the truth. The people appear to appreciate and respect Griselda for her actions, the way she handles being the lady of the land. When Griselda has her second child, a boy, the people of the land are happy: "Nat oonly he but al his contree merye / Was for this child."[154] As it was with her first child, Griselda is forced to give up her son to her husband's game. She is also not allowed to grieve for the loss of her children. She tells Walter that his actions "Naught greveth me at al, / Though that my daughter and my sone be slayn."[155] Griselda is not allowed to outwardly express her grief, to publicly show her distress, because that would allude to her disagreeing with Walter's actions. A mother's gendered performance of grief was normatively public and bodily. Griselda is prohibited from performing her grief in this matter because of Walter's "game."

Griselda's silence and obedience regarding her children's supposed deaths, her patient suffering, is actually what gives her power and causes the disruption to social order. Griselda is very deliberate in her actions and choice of words. As Gail Ashton states in "Patient Mimesis: Griselda and the 'Clerk's Tale'": "Her patient suffering and idealized femininity combine to resist masculine knowledge and appropriation, and is an ideal amply demonstrated by an exploration of the inter-weaving strands of patience, silence, external behavior or 'chiere', and crucial moments of speech."[156] Her actions, or lack thereof, craft a mask of passivity that serves as a method of self-preservation. Ashton continues: "Women in the audience might equally have recognized the deliberate or instinctive adoption of behavior which both protects and

[154] Ibid, 615-616.
[155] Ibid, 647-648.
[156] Gail Ashton, "Patient Mimesis: Griselda and the 'Clerk's Tale.'" *The Chaucer Review* 32, no. 3 (1998): 323. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25096014.

conceals."[157] This mask also serves as a disruptive force for the social order as her patient goodness further villainizes Walter, turning his subjects against his rule.

Her acquiescence to Walter's demands, I argue, places the responsibility and blame for the children's deaths on his shoulders. For example, she responds to his plan to kill her daughter by saying:

> Lord, al lyth in youre plesaunce.
> My child and I, with hertely obeeisaunce
> Been youres al, and ye mowe save or spille
> Youre owene thyng; wreketh after youre wille.[158]

Essentially, Griselda is saying that her and her daughter belong to him and therefore, he has the right to do what he wishes, even if that is murder. This speech act places all the onus on Walter. Ashton mirrors this notion: "Ostensibly acceding to his wishes, she is able to ensure that all responsibility for his actions are placed upon her husband; infanticide is his desicion."[159] As stated earlier, Griselda does not have a choice in her obedience to Walter; so, by assuming the passive role she not only protects herself, but is also showing that all of these deeds belong to Walter and Walter alone.

It is after the death of her son that the people begin to recognize what is happening to Griselda and her children. Ultimately, the people turn on Walter: "For which, where as his peple therbifore / Hadde loved hym wel, the sclaundre of his diffame / Made hem that they hym hatede therfore."[160] I argue that the people are further roused against Walter because of Griselda's inability to publicly grieve. Ashton explains that her performative patience and passive

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[157] Ibid, 235.
[158] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," 501-504.
[159] Gail Ashton, "Patient Mimesis," 233.
[160] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," 729-731.

obedience calls "attention to the extremity of Walter's actions."[161] While I do not know if one can say if the public is aware of the promise that Griselda made to Walter or of Walter's testing Griselda through the "deaths" of her children, what the audience of the tale is made aware of is that the public knows that Walter is responsible for their deaths and they solely place the blame on Walter saying he has a "crueel herte"[162] and that *he* "Hath mordred bothe his children prively."[163] To me, it is clear that the public is sympathetic towards Griselda because of the terribleness of her husband's actions. When he kicks her out of his home and states that he is going to marry another, people follow her back to her father's house, crying as they go: "The fold hire folwe, wepynge in hir weye, / And Fortune ay they cursen as they goon; / But she fro wepynge kept hire eyen dreye."[164] This public display shows that, in some ways, the public is siding with Griselda over Walter. This "siding" with Griselda displays a power imbalance: Walter's subjects are publicly showing their objection to Walter's actions. While no one stands up against Walter, their thoughts and feelings are known to both the narrative public and the public that encompasses the tale's audience. The people do what Griselda is not allowed to do; they weep. They grieve and suffer *for* her. While Griselda is unable to suffer publicly, her grief transfers over, is shared, by the people. Maternal grief goes beyond Griselda's body and is assumed by the sympathetic public, showing that despite Walter's wishes, Griselda's suffering is still able to be exhibited. The power of maternal grief overwhelms masculine will.

Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* is a tale, I argue along with Grinnell, about a "challenge to the male hierarchy."[165] Even though Griselda is consistently obeying the demands of the systems of

[161] Gail Ashton, "Patient Mimesis," 233.
[162] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," 724.
[163] Ibid, 725.
[164] Ibid, 897-899.
[165] Natalie Grinnell, "Griselda Speaks," 80.

power that surround her, that challenge remains. I argue that the threat to the hierarchy here is maternal grief. A main theme of this narrative is profound suffering–suffering that is silenced. Despite normative performances of grief being considered public displays of emotion, masculine authorities seek to silence that grief. Long notes this odd disparity: "We see competing models of mothers expected to swallow their grief, rendering it invisible or silent."[166] Griselda is the epitome of silenced maternal grief. The masculine dominated system suppresses, abjects, that which they cannot control, what disrupts. Yet, the power of maternal grief resists this suppression. Griselda's grief, though silenced, is still heard through the public's vocal mourning; Griselda's maternal grief does not relinquish its power. While Griselda is forced to conform to society's decree that women must obey their husbands as lords of their families (and in this case, as actual lord), this ultimately backfires on the masculine hegemony. Griselda's voice, though seemingly silenced, is ultimately louder than what this system expected. Walter's influence over his people wanes as the narrative progresses while their love and sympathy for Griselda grows.

Griselda's grief highlights the problematic power imbalance that exogamous marriages create. The public sees how Walter is treating his wife–abuse that is systemically supported–and they demonstrate their disapproval of Walter's actions. The public's awareness of this issue, and their reaction against it, is only made possible in this narrative *because* of Griselda's suffering. The public's challenge of Walter's behavior, I argue, is representative of a challenge to the system that allows and facilitates this abuse of power. Griselda's maternal grief further challenges this system because it, like all maternal grief, draws attention to the fallibility of the continuation of that system. As stated earlier, while supposedly normative, public displays of maternal grief were often suppressed. Yet, the death of a child, which maternal grief publicizes,

[166] Mary Beth Long, "'Woful Womman, Confortlees,'" 331.

shows the fragility of a system which relies on the production of healthy boys for its futurity. Lines of power are potentially ended with the death of a son or daughter, but particularly a son. Mortality was clearly a cause for concern and the ideal that futurity creates, that one lives on through their line and through their children, stems from the somewhat unrealistic expectation that all sons will survive to produce more sons through women who were exchanged to fulfill this purpose. What the *Clerk's Tale* shows us is that maternal suffering continues to affect the public's consciousness even when the wails, tears, hair wrenching, bodily grief is not allowed to occur. It still greatly impacts the way subjects see and understand their rulers and the futures of their society. Maternal grief transcends masculine attempts to suppress its power and continues to disrupt the stability of the patrilineal system.

As scholars we often think of the abject, the disruptive, as non-normative. Within the *Clerk's Tale,* non-normative grief *is* a disruptive force. However, it is also important to note that public displays of bodily maternal grief, what by medieval standards is considered normative, causes just as much upset. In the case of maternal suffering, this grief, no matter how it is performed, is disruptive. In both *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and *Octavian* mothers are "allowed" to bodily grieve for their children. However, the mother in *Eglamour*, Crista-belle, does so in private, while the mother in *Octavian* does so publicly *and* privately (in different ways). Both are considered far more normative than Grisedla. While Crista-belle does grieve privately within her narrative, she still has a "public": the readers of the tale. Her grief is portrayed–unlike Griselda's. According to medieval cultural standards, the way the mothers in *Sir Eglamour* and *Octavian* grieve is how mothers are "supposed" to act at the loss of a child. Still, despite this normativity, both serve as disruptions to the masculine hierarchy, like Griselda, by drawing attention to the

fragility of a patrilineal system and the systemic issue of power imbalances that exogamous marriages cause.

The plot of *Sir Eglamour of Artois* follows several romance motifs: an overprotective father whose daughter's hand must be won through an impossible challenge, the woman on the rudderless boat, and a lost son who is ultimately reunited with his family.[167] I am mainly concerned with the beginning of the tale, where Crista-belle and Eglamour's love results in a child and the consequences of that birth. Sir Eglamour, a "knyght of lytyll lond,"[168] falls in love with the Earl of Artois' daughter, Crista-belle, and she with him. In order for Eglamour to marry her, her father sets forth a series of near impossible tasks that Eglamour must complete: killing a deer, boar, giants, and a dragon. During the trials he and Crista-belle pledge their love to one another, consummate that love, and a child is conceived. When Crista-belle's son, Degrebelle, is born, the Earl banishes Crista-belle and her child because the child was born out of wedlock and against her father's wishes:

> "Dowghtyr, into the see schalt thowe
> In a schyp alone,
> And that bastard that ys the dere
> Cristundam schall non have here!"
> Hyr maydens wepte ylkon.[169]

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[167] *Sir Eglamour of Artois* has not garnered much scholarly attention. For some works that focus on the romance see, Joan Charbonneau, "Transgressive Fathers in *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and *Torrent of Portyngale*," in *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, edited by Albrecht Classen, 243-265 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004). Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell, "Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance," in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, edited by Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton, 96-110 (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2009), *JSTOR.* Richard Firth Green, "From *Sir Eglamour* to 'Old Bangum': The Travels of the Ballad Hero," in *Ballads of the North, Medieval to Modern: Essays Inspired by Larry Syndergaard*, edited by Sandra Ballif Straubhaar and Richard Firth Green, 175-192 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019), *Project Muse*. Nicholas Perkins, "Ekphrasis and Narrative in *Emaré* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*." In *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, edited by Rihannon Purdie and Michael Cichon, 47–60 (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81n72.10.
[168] Harriet Hudson, ed., "Sir Eglamour of Artois," *Four Middle English Romances,* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 66.
[169] Ibid, 785-789.

The problem with the child's manner of birth and Cristabelle's actions in the eyes of her father is that she has usurped her father's power over her reproductive capabilities. The Earl does not find Eglamour suitable to marry his daughter and ultimately take over the kingdom. Yet Crista-belle loves and chooses Eglamour herself, which begins the major conflict of the tale and carries the narrative. As Harriet Hudson puts it:

> The family conflicts arise because the parents and children can not agree on the choice of a spouse. Eglamour posits contradictory models of marriage–marriage for love's sake and marriage for status' sake. The agendas of patriarchy and patrilineage require the latter. [...] Marriage for love's sake, or compassionate marriage, gives greater autonomy to women.[170]

This power that Crista-belle takes in choosing Eglamour directly undermines her father. As his only heir, or rather his only *means* to an heir, Crista-belle takes over her father's choice of successor. Therefore, she and the child cannot remain in the kingdom. Hudson continues: "She [Crista-belle] is a liability to her family since the patrimony will pass to her husband."[171] By taking control over her own reproductive powers and having a child with a man of her choosing, without her father's permission or mediation, Crista-belle and specifically her child show that it is possible for *women* to be in control of succession. Of course, this cannot stand and the normative system must right itself. Therefore, Crista-belle and her son are removed.

Like many women in medieval romances, Crista-belle is put into a boat with her son and set adrift. While at sea, Degrabelle is stolen away by a griffin. Crista-belle's sorrow is brought up constantly (more frequently than other grieving mothers as we will see in *Octavian,* or even other suffering mother's such as in *Sir Degaré*) as well as the bodily nature of her grieving. She expresses her desire to never have been alive in the first place because of the devastating loss she

[170] Ibid, 99.
[171] Ibid, 99.

is experiencing. “Then the lady sayde, ‘Allas / That evyr I born was! / My chylde ys tane me fro!’”[172] This expression of grief was a common one: wanting to switch places with or experience what her child went through. As Katherine Goodland explains: “In performing their grief, the mothers participate fully in the bodily suffering of their children, voicing their mutual pain in lamentation. Their cries articulate not only the problem of evil and the need for justice, but also the rapture of love and the anguish of loss.”[173] In this case, Crista-belle believes her child to be dead, and she herself no longer wishes to be living either. Her sorrow is also expressed as long lasting: “That wroghte the lade both day and nyght / Sorow and mykyll wo.”[174] Internally, she is suffering from a broken heart: “Hyr herte for care hyt clevys.”[175] Externally, she has cried herself hoarse: “The damysell that was so mylde / Had so greet for here chylde / That sche was waxen hose.”[176] And, in a culmination of the physical toll her grief has taken on her body, she faints:

> Sche thynkes how hyre chyld away was born,
> Therfore sorow sche hade.
> Sche grette therfore and sorow gan make
> And all was for hyr sones sake;
> A grett swonyng sche made.[177]

While this depiction of grief is narratively private, as a story, the grief is made public to its readers. They see and feel Crista-belle’s distress and heartbreak. What is also highlighted here is *why* this mother is suffering. The patrilineal system is ultimately responsible for the loss of her son. It was her father who banished them because she broke the rules of that system. Yet,

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[172] Ibid, 820-822.
[173] Katherine Goodland, “‘Veniance, Lord, Apon Thaym Fall,’” 173.
[174] Harriet Hudson, ed., “Sir Eglamour of Artois,” 824-825.
[175] Ibid, 864.
[176] Ibid, 901-903.
[177] Ibid, 1112-1116.

through such harsh punishment, the social system is put under scrutiny. This is often the effect of the overly-protective-father trope that is frequently found in Middle English romances. Charbonneau and Cromwell state in "Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance":

> The recalcitrance of the fathers is even couched in terms of preserving the status quo and preventing the lower classes from rising, even if it means resorting to murder. These romances, by intermingling conflicted gender identities with social and political concerns, raise questions about how unnatural sexual desires within families intersect with other kinds of instabilities and insecurities.[178]

Though focusing on the father/daughter incest trope, Charbonneau and Cromwell are ultimately expressing how through attempting to maintain social order, these men in power ultimately call attention to systemic issues in regards to women. Crista-belle, by taking charge of her own reproduction and having a child with a man of her choice, is condemned to exile and suffering. For an audience, what is central is not her crime, but her punishment, her grief over her lost child. I argue that Crista-belle is made out to be a sympathetic character, rather than a woman deserving of such a punishment.

Under the normative patrilineal system, what Crista-belle does is a major offense, shown by her father's (the Earl) punishment of Cristabelle. Frequently, when a woman breaks social rules (especially those regarding succession, marriage, and sex), she is punished. Of course, Crista-belle does break those rules. She does have a child out of wedlock with a man whom her father does not approve of, and she is punished. Yet, by the end of the tale, Crista-belle is reunited with the man she loves and her child, who she thought was dead. She marries Eglamour; her punishment is reversed. The topsy-turvy nature of this romance shows social instability as

[178] Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell, "Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance," in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, edited by Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 102, *JSTOR*.

Crista-belle moves from the Earl's daughter, to exiled maiden, and back to the lady of the land. Charbonneau and Cromwell explain further:

> Romance texts not only inscribe instability and contradictory roles for women, but also focus on a change in status for many women within the texts, often from good daughters to abandoned and exiled ones, from loathly lady to fair maiden, from wife to nun, and from daughter to wife and mother. These shifting roles destabilize or blur traditional roles of women by creating potential threats to the norms and thus social order.[179]

Crista-belle's threat to social order here, I argue, is powered by her "public" grief. Readers of her suffering would have, of course, been sympathetic. How then, with the power and sway of this grief, could the author, knowing their audience, continue to punish such a woman? Her grief underlines the wrongness of the Earl's actions; even though by society's standards, Crista-belle's punishment was "just." What Crista-belle's grief disrupts here is that notion that she *should* be punished. As with Griselda, maternal grief draws attention to abuses of power that occur within this system. When these abuses are displayed, the public sympathizes and sides with the suffering mother. Because an exogamous culture sees women as exchangeable goods, goods exchanged for the purpose of reproduction, Cristabelle having a child with a man of her choosing, with a man who does not benefit her father, she is exiled. However, because of her "public" suffering, the public sympathizes with Cristabelle and a critical eye is instead turned on her father and the system he represents. This criticism disrupts the patriarchal hierarchy as it questions the system's "rightness" and superiority.

These narratives of grieving mothers, who are placed in the position of suffering because they are unjustly punished, are common in Middle English romances. Alongside *Sir Eglamour,* we have *Octavian.*[180] In *Octavian,* after a period of not being able to conceive children, the

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[179] Ibid, 101.

[180] For more on *Octavian,* see Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell, "Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance." Angela Florschuetz, "Woman's Secret's and Men's Interests: Rituals of Childbirth and Northern *Octavian*," in *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance: Mothers, Identity, and Contamination* (New York:

Emperor and his wife have twin boys. The Emperor's mother, following the evil mother-in-law trope, plots to rid her son of his wife and children. She concocts a scenario in which it appears as though the wife has had an affair and the twin boys are therefore suspected of not being the Emperor's sons. All three are set to be put to death when an impassioned speech by the wife results in their punishment being reduced to exile. However, while in exile, both boys are stolen away, one by a lioness and the other an ape. She believes her children to be dead. She is quickly reunited with one of her sons, but the other is lost to her until the end of the tale. Of course, by the end the family is reunited, the mother-in-law's lies exposed, and the narrative rights itself.

The mother in this narrative has two distinct moments of suffering, both of which draw attention to abuses of power within her marriage. The first is public where she is begging for her children to be baptized and the second when she loses her children during their exile. During her public moment of suffering, she expounds to the crowd:

> "Now Lorde," scho sayd, "of hevens blysse,
> This day thou me rede and wysse,
> And heven qwene also.
> Mary, mayden and modir free,
> My prayere make I to the
> For my childir two:
> Als thou lete tham be borne of me
> Helpe that thay crystoned may be,
> Or that thay to the dede goo."[181]

The nature of this prayer is important. She is not begging for her children's lives, for that would be going against the Emperor's will. Instead, she is pointing out the innocence of these children.

Springer, 2014). Lee Manion, "Fictions of Recovery in Later English Crusading Romances: *Octavian* and *The Sowdone of Babylone*," in *Narrating the Crusades: Loss and Recovery in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature*, 107-145 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), doi:10.1017/CBO9781107415218.004. David Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2001). Glenn Wright, "The Fabliau Ethos in the French and English Octavian Romances," *Modern Philology: Critical and Historical Studies in Literature, Medieval Through Contemporary* 102, no. 4 (2005): 478–500. doi:10.1086/433210.

[181] Hudson, Harriet, editor. "Octavian," *Four Middle English Romances* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 259-267.

She wants them to be baptized so that they can go to heaven. This is a reminder to the crowd that the twins have not even lived long enough to commit a sin. It is this reminder, this request for their souls, that sways the crowd and ultimately the Emperor who changes the sentence to exile. It is also relevant to note that the wife here remains composed in the face of not only her children's death, but her own. Jennifer Fellows notes: "Her prayer is the more effective for its economy and restraint and its conspicuous lack of sentimentality."[182] Rather than grieving in a way that could be described as "natural" (a more "emotional" way), the mother instead plays into the male desire to suppress maternal suffering. By demonstrating this restraint, the men who control her fate listen to her. She plays into the way men want her to act in order to obtain what she wants, her and her children's lives. Ultimately here, the "performance" of suppressed maternal grief allows the mother to usurp some means of power and control over her fate–taking it from the masculine authorities. Like Griselda, even though her suffering is suppressed, the mother in *Octavian*'s maternal grief causes her public to sympathize with her.

Though we as readers can ascertain that the above performance of maternal suffering is indeed a performance for her audience, the mother in *Octavian* grieves in a wholly different manner when she is alone and the only "public" present is the readers consuming the story. Like Cristabelle, the mother's suffering here is bodily and vocal. When her first son is taken we are told that "In swonynge doun scho felle"[183] and similarly when the lion takes the other twin: "In swoghe scho lay for drede."[184] Once both of her children are taken from her, assumed to be dead,

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[182] Jennifer Fellows, "Mothers in Middle English Romance," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*, edited by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 45. http://web.a.ebscohost.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzQ4NzBfX0FO0?sid=bc06e0ee-1249-49f1-97d9-f1cb8294aba7@sdc-v-sessmgr01&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_41&rid=0.
[183] Hudson, Harriet, editor. "Octavian," 339.
[184] Ibid, 348.

she states: “And my two childir er fro me borne; / This lyfe may I noghte dowre!”[185] This depiction of grief is much more intense and less restrained than her emotional state when the three were about to be executed. This is how mothers were *expected* to grieve. However, masculine powers want to suppress this suffering because of its disruptive power which highlights the instability of the patriarchy.

These two very different depictions of the same mother’s suffering show her understanding of the system in which she lives. By giving the crowd, and her husband, the display of grief they want, she is ultimately able to save her life. What this dichotomous display of grief also shows is the problematic nature of that system. As in *Sir Eglamour,* the readers engaging with these texts know that what is happening to these women is wrong. What men and this system are doing to these women is wrong. As Charbonneau and Cromwell put it: “These texts challenge masculine prerogatives and privilege by bringing to light abuses and failures in male-dominated power structures.”[186] By forcing readers to see, and in some ways experience, the suffering of these mothers, they then must acknowledge what is causing this suffering–the patriarchal system. These narratives show a direct causality between the patriarchal system and maternal suffering. Griselda’s husband quite literally (to her knowledge) has her children killed and then forces her never to complain or grieve. Cristabelle’s father forces her onto a rudderless boat after she bears a child with Eglamour, whom he does not approve of, leading to the “death” of that child. The nameless mother in *Octavian* along with her children is nearly executed by her husband. When they are then exiled, by order of her husband, this too leads to the death of her

[185] Ibid, 398-399.
[186] Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell, “Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance,” 110.

twin boys.[187] All of these men hold positions of power in their communities: a marquis, an earl, and an emperor, respectively. What these romances, and by extension maternal suffering, do is highlight the abuses of power perpetrated by the patriarchal system. And yet, these men never are made to suffer. They are never punished at the end of these stories for causing such pain. One could even argue that these mothers' pain is needless; the loss of their children is caused by these men of power, but those children are ultimately returned to them–a narrative equivalent of no harm, no foul. This is, however, what we are left with: brief moments of maternal grief that perhaps take up a handful of lines or are suppressed altogether. Maternal grief is portrayed as a flicker, it is here and then it is gone.

Yet, as we can see, despite this lack of narrative space, the disruption that maternal grief causes leaks out through these texts. Long comments that this lack of narrative attention caused by the authors could be because they "wished to minimize maternal readers' grief or preempt its power."[188] I would argue that if this was the aim, they were unsuccessful. Despite the lack of narrative time spent on maternal suffering, its power cannot be suppressed by the masculine systems within or outside of these romances. Maternal grief, no matter how it is expressed, calls attention to the problematic nature that surrounds the patriarchy. It shows how problematic men's dominion over their wives can be and how a strict patrilineal system is ultimately doomed to fail as it relies on the surety of children. Maternal grief also shows that despite the patriarchal imperative, it cannot be silenced. However, even now, it is not often discussed. While Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* has received a large amount of scholarly attention, very little scholarly work has

[187] Though the mother-in-law here sets these events in motion, I will argue later in this dissertation (chapter 4) that her actions are ultimately the result of the environment that the exogamous forces her into. However, ultimately the type of punishment (or indeed the need for a punishment at all) is the responsibility and decision of the Emperor.
[188] Mary Beth Long, "'Woful Womman, Confortlees,'" 329. Long also offers an alternative reason as to why images of maternal suffering are glossed over: "Readers need not to be persuaded that the loss of a child is devastating" (328). The audience does need narrative intervention to tell them how one feels after losing a child.

been done on Cristabelle or the mother in *Octavian.* Work has been done on grief, yes, but few works have held a focus specifically on the suffering mothers in romances. Long states:

> This erasure of a common maternal experience does both medieval and modern readers a disservice, given both cultures' default of silencing maternal grief. Medieval literature that acknowledges these issues, however problematically, offers a way to open this conversation.[189]

The power that these mothers hold, the power that they channel through their grief, deserves more attention. It is through these suffering mothers that most romances begin; they are a catalyst. The narrative function of these mothers, I propose, is more than a plot device. Rather, through the grief of these fictional mothers, attention is drawn to the abuses that patriarchal hierarchies cause women; they provide a space to question systemic imbalances of power, disrupting their primacy. Ultimately, their refusals to be silenced shows the ability of these mothers to reclaim agency. Maternity continues even without the bodily presence of the child; it is present through their ability to retain strength, the very same strength and agency which causes masculine anxieties that surround woman's generative power.

[189] Mary Beth Long, "'Woful Womman, Confortlees,'" 329.

CHAPTER III: ISOLATED MOTHERS: MOTHERING AWAY FROM SOCIETY

In the previous chapter I discussed the intersections between the maternal performance of grief and the social system of exogamy. Maternal grief ultimately highlights systemic issues of power imbalances between husbands and their exogamous wives[190] and the anxiety around the instability of the patrilineal system of succession. In this chapter, I explore the causality between exogamous marriages and periods of maternal isolation. It is because these mothers reject or are rejected by the society that they marry into that periods of forced exile or chosen isolation occur for mothers; often exogamy serves as a catalyst to this rejection. The purpose of exploring mothering in isolation is to contemplate how maternity, a socially constructed performance, is enacted outside of the society that informs it. It is my aim to explore the effect that isolation has on maternal performance. Much like maternal grief, analyzed in Chapter 2, isolation of the mother and its effect on the various ways women perform maternity demonstrates masculine anxieties surrounding maternal power and the mother's role in an inheritance system. The reason for this anxiety stems from a reliance on woman's generative power and her subservience to that system. Specifically, we see the effect that raising a child with only a mother's influence (specifically her love, teaching, and protection), without paternal, or indeed masculine, influences, has on the child and understandings of maternal performativity. Performances of isolated motherhood are seen in Middle English romances such as Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and *Emaré,* along with the Middle English version of *Sir Perceval of Galles* and *Lybeaus*

[190] While gendered imbalances of power permeate all male/female relationships, and certainly marriages, during this time, exogamous marriages create an even further discrepancy in equality. The woman who moves, the wife of an exogamous marriage, is forced to leave behind her home group and culture to enter into the marriage while the husband remains with or near his own family and culture. This displacement puts the woman at a severe disadvantage as she has no support system, must navigate her position as outsider, and contend with a culture and family who places their power/influence towards the best interests of the husband/home culture, sometimes, as we see in romances, to the wife's detriment.

Desconus. Mothers who raise their children in isolation, I argue, provide the opportunity to analyze how mothering operates without patriarchal influence and without any immediate criticism and commentary regarding maternal practices. These romances show the outcome of solely maternal influence on a child, specifically sons in the cases of these tales. Furthermore, the reason these mothers are isolated highlights systemic issues, such as the aforementioned power imbalances within exogamous marriages. Emaré and Custance are exiled from the communities they entered through exogamous marriages. Perceval's mother, Acheflour, and the unnamed mother in *Lybeaus Desconus* actively choose to live in isolation, away from their adopted homes. In Acheflour's case, she is driven to isolation because of the culture of chivalry, which valorizes violence and endangers men's lives, often for sport, and ultimately leads to the death of her husband. These two mothers, especially Acheflour, are criticized both within the narrative and by current scholars for their chosen means of mothering. Keeping their sons away from the chivalric system in their formative years can disrupt the system of patrilineal inheritance because their heirs are raised in isolation away from court. By examining the maternal performance of these women in exile in a positive light, their successful mothering demonstrates how unnecessary paternal influence is on the child, weakening patriarchal power.

This chapter will work against the notion that isolated maternity is an inherently bad way to raise a child. We see critiques of mothering in isolation both within the Middle English texts and within current scholarship about those texts. In medieval romances, there is a narrative that women who *choose* to mother in isolation, like the mothers in *Perceval* and *Libeaus Desconus*, are not adequately performing maternity. This stance is also, troublingly, mirrored in scholarship on medieval romances in which a mother chooses a more hermetic approach to mothering. The exception to the negative view of isolated maternity appears when a woman is *forced* into exile

and suffers through it, mirroring the Christian ideals surrounding maternal sufferings, such as in *The Man of Law's Tale* and *Emaré*.[191] I argue that the reason for the negative portrayals of isolated maternity stems from male anxieties surrounding maternal influence that, as Angela Florcheutz puts it, "could manifest in the heir, displacing paternal influence and resemblance."[192] Once again, the masculine dominated social system regularly influences societal perceptions in order to legitimize and perpetuate its anxieties of woman's generative power, as discussed in chapter one. Isolation furthers this anxiety as women are able to birth and/or raise children outside of a masculine influenced system. The threat of women being solely in charge of raising children undermines masculine authority over the child. It is because of the masculine anxiety surrounding the pervasiveness of a mother's influence over their child, especially a son, I argue, which leads to the denigration of the women's mothering practices. The negation of their maternal performance in these romances serves as a way to control how one mothers in order to maintain masculine power and the subjugation of women.

Isolation is something that all of us deal with as part of the human condition: from being physically alone to the feeling of being lonely despite being within society. These physical and mental states certainly impacted people in the Middle Ages, especially women. I will begin with an overview of medieval isolation and the various ways that it was conceptualized in order to better understand and analyze the type of isolation the mothers in the aforementioned romances faced and how they dealt with isolation emotionally. During the Middle Ages, physical isolation was often discussed either in terms of forced physical exile, especially in Anglo-Saxon

[191] While Custance and Emaré are not raising their children completely in isolation, like the mother in *LD* and Archeflour, I still consider them to be "isolated" because of their status as exile, which will be discussed later in this chapter.
[192] Angela Florschuetz, *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance: Mothers, Identity, and Contamination* (New York: Springer, 2014), 67.

narratives, or it was associated with Christianity and a monastic life. Exile, a forced isolation, was a form of punishment that, as William Chester Jordan defines it in *From England to France: Felony and Exile in the Middle Ages,* "was a central feature of medieval jurisprudence and judicial practice throughout Europe. It affected unknown but very large numbers of people (technically, felons) who were the subjects of all these juridical regimes."[193] Exile as a legal punishment was an extreme sentence and should be treated as such when engaging with the literary examples of exile within the period. Both Custance and Emaré are "legally" exiled from their communities. Exile threatens not only one's physical safety, but also, as Anthony Low states in his work on premodern subjectivity, "the core of a person's sense of identity in relation to society."[194] Furthermore, Jeremey DeAngelo sees the emotional toll of exile as creating restlessness and fear for the exile.[195] This is the emotional state of both Custance and Emaré when they are exiled in their narratives. Forced exiles were also oftentimes labeled *wrecca*,[196] which can be understood as one who flees.[197] Through looking at the historical basis of exiles or *wrecca,* cultural context for how one feels in exile and how those exiles were treated by the public becomes apparent. This, I argue, allows us to impart emotional reactions onto the characters in these tales, even when their author glosses over that fear, cultural and communal disconnect, and anxiety caused by this sentence.

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[193] William Chester Jordan, *From England to France: Felony and Exile in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 5-6, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dr36tk.
[194] Anthony Low, *Aspects of Subjectivity: Society and Individuality from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare and Milton* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003) 3.
[195] Jeremy DeAngelo, *Outlawry, Liminality, and Sanctity in the Literature of the Early Medieval North Atlantic* (Nieuwe Prinsengracht: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 43, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=5614539.
[196] Outlaw or exile
[197] Jeremy DeAngelo, *Outlawry, Liminality, and Sanctity in the Literature of the Early Medieval North Atlantic*, 43.

Forced exile appears in narratives about *wrecca* in Anglo-Saxon and Norse texts where a person is forced to leave their home community and set off into the wild unknown or enter into a new community with the title of *wrecca* hanging over their head. Such characters appear in *Beowulf.* Grendel is defined as an exile: "fīfel-cynnes eard / won-sǣlī wer weardode hwīle [He had dwelt for a time / in misery among the banished monsters]."[198] We are also told that Beowulf's father Ecgtheow spent time as an exile after he killed Heatholaf.[199] These exiles are often treated poorly by the new communities which they enter. Themes of exile also appear in Anglo-Saxon poetry such as "The Wanderer" and "The Wife's Lament." Anglo-Saxon literature explores themes of exile more readily than other moments within the medieval period, especially the emotional toll that being in exile causes a person, like Emaré or Custance. Marilynn Desmond recognizes that the speaker in "The Wife's Lament" "describes her geographical isolation and emotional deprivation in terms that effectively express her 'otherness.'"[200] This understanding demonstrates the stark alienation felt by exiles even when they enter into new societies as the *emotional* distance felt within exile creates its own form of separation and isolation, which can be applied to Emaré and Custance after their own formal exiles when they reach a new community.

Exile and isolation can take many forms during this time period. While being sentenced to exile was a form of forced isolation, we also see people actively seeking isolation by choice in the Middle Ages. This applies directly to the mothers in *Sir Perceval of Galles* and *Libeaus Desconus.* These women *choose* to remove themselves from society for personal reasons.

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[198] Seamus Heaney, trans. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2000), 104-105.
[199] Ibid, 459-472.
[200] Marilynn Desmond, "The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 3 (1990): 572-590, https://doi.org/10.1086/448547.

Further, isolation can be understood as more mental than physical. By this I mean feelings of loneliness or social isolation (while not being physically apart from people). Often women felt especially alone *within* society. Low explains that long term mental isolation or loneliness "was causally connected to outward social pressures and to resulting inward psychological alienation."[201] In a poignant piece by Deborah Nelson-Campbell titled "Coping with Isolation: Strategies of Some Medieval French Noblewomen," she explores psychological loneliness and alienation through the loneliness of Christine de Pizan, both in her life and works. Christine de Pizan, a famous writer of the early 15th century, is one of the few available medieval examples where we have textual insight into the inner workings of the mind of a woman who experienced an exogamous marriage and the effects that that type of marital movement had on her, namely here how one dealt with both physical and psychological loneliness. This is reflected in de Pizan's work, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies,* which largely discusses acceptable behaviors of women. Therefore, through engaging with de Pizan, a historical noblewoman (of whom we have insight into her emotions) we are able to apply this understanding to fictional depictions of women in similar social situations (social and physical isolation impacted by exogamy), like the mothers in the various romances discussed in this chapter. Nelson-Campbell discusses de Pizan after the death of her husband and the "isolation imposed upon many" women and how they felt a "separateness from others."[202] de Pizan counsels women in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*[203] "to pursue both the contemplative life and the active life; in short, the two methods that she herself used to combat the solitude of her existence and the challenge of surviving

[201] Anthony Low, *Aspects of Subjectivity,* 2.
[202] Deborah Nelson-Campbell, "Coping with Isolation: Strategies of Some Medieval French Noblewomen," *Publications of the Medieval Society of the Midwest*, vol. 8 (2001): 71-84.
[203] Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (London: Penguin Group, 2003), 14.

successfully at court."[204] The loneliness of women and the problems that courtly life causes, is in large part caused by the largely exogamous marital systems that were in place. Speaking of de Pizan, Nelson-Campbell states:

> She shared the experience of so many noblewomen of spending her life in a country other than that of her birth and of speaking every day a language that was not her first. She further isolated herself from her contemporaries when, after the death of her husband, she chose not to remarry and to support her family financially by writing a traditionally male profession.[205]

What Nelson-Campbell highlights through this passage is the reality of isolation women of exogamous marriages faced along with the desire to not enter into another such marriage. De Pizan took a risk in funding herself and her family through her writing. She chose to pursue a career in writing as opposed to entering into a new marriage which could potentially come with a new culture and family. Women also chose to enter into solitary religious life after the death of their spouse, adding perhaps to the women making up the majority of anchorites.[206] Either way, supporting one's self through a profession or joining the church was a reality many women faced and, I argue, a way to avoid reentering into a marital system which left many women feeling isolated, both physically and mentally. Ultimately, like Acheflour and the mother in *LD,* some women *choose* to lead a more isolated life. This choice is incumbent upon them leaving their place within the patriarchal system. By not remarrying, as in Christine de Pizan's case, she is able to gain agency and independence not afforded to a married woman. Acheflour and the mother in *LD* get to raise their children away from chivalric ideals of violence and physical prowess. The act of leaving subverts the normative system as women create a new space for

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[204] Ibid. 77.

[205] Ibid. 75-76.

[206] Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Introduction: 'No Such Thing as Society'?: Solitude in Community," in *Medieval Anchorites in Their Communities*, edited by Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, Limited, 2017), *ProQuest Ebook Central,* 9.

themselves which removes them from a position of submissiveness that marriage enforces. This is also why, I propose, women in medieval fiction who choose such a life are criticized. Criticism of their actions is a patriarchal attempt to "right" these women's place in society.

When looking at medieval literature's association with female isolation, we often see it depicted as either the aforementioned religious seclusion or exile, rather than images of internal isolation or loneliness. For the Middle English audience, the exile of a woman appears to work in two distinct ways: forced exile or chosen exile. The way these two are depicted narratively and treated culturally are quite different. Typically, we see those who are the victims of forced isolation as just that, victims. Their narratives are ones of suffering, and in this Christian tradition, those who suffer unjustly are associated with piousness and goodness. Their exile is often not permanent and these women ultimately return to society after facing trials caused by their isolation. The trials of exile, as exile is a punishment are in place as an attempt to rehabilitate these women so that they can re-enter patriarchal society. On the other hand, women who *choose* exile are negatively coded and their experiences invalidated. The model of these two forms of social isolation also applies when specifically discussing mothers in these narratives. In the Middle English romances *Emaré* and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale,* the predominant narrative plot is mothers forced into exile. Both Emaré and Custance are held to a high moral standard, both as mothers and as Christians. Examples of mothers who have chosen exile appear in *Perceval of Galles* and *Libeaus Desconus.* Both mothers are criticized, I argue, because of how they choose to raise their sons, isolated from society. We even see contemporary scholars offering critiques of their mothering styles, especially that of Perceval's mother, Acheflour, which I will discuss later in this chapter. I argue that this discrepancy in characterization stems from the loss of male power over these women. In cases of imposed exile, it is male authority

that forces these women out and ultimately facilitates their return. In the cases of chosen isolation, the mothers have left the realm of male authority by removing themselves from society. This also keeps their sons from being raised under patriarchal rule, ensuring that all influence over the child is maternal.

Isolation and maternity are often performed in tandem in many Middle English romances. Typically, the combination of isolation and performed mothering is very brief and mostly occurs within narratives of calumniated queens/wives. In the previous chapter this certainly happens to Cristabelle and the queen in *Octavian.* They are banished *with* their children, though it is often the case that the children are immediately spirited away only to be reunited at the tale's conclusion. The "mothering" that takes place during this short space is minimal, given their short time alone together, in isolation, before an outside force steps in. All that is left is the performance of grief for those lost children.[207] However, in the romances that are discussed in this chapter, more attention is paid to these moments of exile or isolation with the child. The narrative delves into these depictions of isolation, and the time that mother and child spend in isolation together is much greater, which is why I have chosen to analyze these four romances to explore how a woman raising a child on her own, isolated from society, performs maternity along with how exogamy often serves as a catalyst for the isolation itself. This analysis serves to highlight the capabilities of these mothers as they relate to performing maternal duties alone, without the interference of a man. Mothers who actively choose such a life are viewed as a threat to medieval parental roles, which seeks to undermine the mother and leave parental power with

[207] *Sir Tryamour* gives us perhaps one of the shortest instances of isolated mothering in a calumniated wives tale. After giving birth, alone in the woods, she is able to comfort her child (See Harriet Hudson, ed. "Sir Tryamour," *Four Middle English Romances* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 411-417) before the lady is rescued by a knight and provides a home for both her and her son, fostering the boy as he grows, ending this period of isolation.

the father. The centrality of the father perpetuates masculine hegemonic ideals. This is challenged through sons who are being raised in isolation, only left with lessons and guidance from the mother.

I begin with a discussion of Chaucer's *Man of Law* and the Middle English romance *Emaré.* Whereas scholarship surrounding these tales deals with either the passivity of Custance and Emaré, or themes of incest or exchange throughout the tale,[208] I focus on the isolation that these women endure. Isolation, in the cases of these romances, allows maternal influence to surpass that of paternal influence, which affects the way the sons act. Both of the sons in these two narratives are characterized by their good manners, taught to them by their mothers during their time in isolation. Instruction in good manners and courtly behaviors falls under the traditional realm of maternal teachings. What is left out of the upbringing of these boys is more paternal teachings, such as trade skills or physical prowess. However, the boys are not inhibited by this supposed lack of teaching; rather, they are lauded for their courtly manners. Interestingly, maternal teachings secure the boys' inheritance rather than martial skill, which we see in other medieval romances. By performing mothering in isolation, Custance and Emaré have removed their sons from the realm of masculine influence. The power over the child lies with her as

[208] See Gail Ashton, "Her Father's Daughter: The Realignment of Father-Daughter Kinship in Three Romance Tales." *The Chaucer Review* 34, no. 4 (2000): 416–27. Siobhain Bly Calkin, "*The Man of Law's Tale* and Crusade." In *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature*, edited by Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan, (Cambridge, England: D. S. Brewer), 1-24. Robert B. Dawson, "Custance in Context: Rethinking the Protagonist of the *Man of Law's Tale,*" *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1992): 293–308. Carolyn Dinshaw. "New Approaches to Chaucer," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer* edited by Piero Boitani and Jill Mauu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 270-289. Nicholas Perkins, "Ekphrasis and Narrative in *Emaré* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*," in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts,* edited by Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon, (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 47–60. A.M. Richmond, "The broken schippus he ther fonde": Shipwrecks and the Human Costs of Investment Capital in Middle English Romance. Neophilologus 99, (2015): 315–333. Susan Schibanoff. "Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale." in *Exemplaria*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 59-96. Elizabeth Scala, "The Texture of Emaré," *Philological Quarterly 85*, no. 3 (Summer, 2006): 223-246. Marjorie Elizabeth Wood, "The Sultaness, Donegild, and Fourteenth-Century Female Merchants: Intersecting Discourses of Gender, Economy, and Orientalism in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale." *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 37, (2006): 65-85, https://doi.org/10.1353/cjm.2006.0052.

opposed to the child's father. Traditionally, it was the father whose influence dominated a child, especially a son, which in turn perpetuates masculine ideals and performances. However, when a mother is the dominant parent, made possible through raising a child on her own, she controls what is passed on to the next generation through the male line. We see this occur in *Man of Law's Tale* and *Emaré* as they raise their sons on their own. The two romances hold many narrative similarities, and it is important to distinguish them from one another when discussing the effects that exogamy has on the plot and characters. Custance and Emaré both leave their homelands and end up out-marrying. Yet the motivations behind their leaving, while both relating to exogamy, are quite different. In the case of Custance, we have a very typical depiction of an exogamous arrangement. The daughter is sent away from her home by her father to marry. This exogamous marriage is situated in exchange, the exchange of Custance. Marjorie Elizabeth Wood describes Custance as "a passive commodity traded among males."[209] The marriage between Custance and the Sultan is most often understood as a way to solidify and raise the positions of the families, which is highlighted through the emphasis on mercantilism at the beginning of the narrative. The merchants, who are described as wealthy and "sadde [trustworthy] and trewe,"[210] are ultimately the ones responsible for the marriage between the Sultan and Custance as they tell the Sultan of her beauty. Further, a monetary exchange between the families is noted as the narrator states: "And he shal han Custance in mariage, / And certein gold, I noot what quantitee."[211] Brenda Deen Schlidgen's work highlights the commercial exchange between the two families, and more broadly, the two cultures.[212] The exchange of

[209] Marjorie Elizabeth Wood, "The Sultaness, Donegild, and Fourteenth-Century Female Merchants," 70.
[210] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," *The Riverside Chaucer,* edited by Larry Benson (Mason: CENGAGE Learning, 1986), 2.
[211] Ibid, 241-242
[212] Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Pagans, Tartars, Moslems, and Jews in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 55.

Custance is bartered and brokered between the two men, her father and her soon-to-be husband.[213] We are given some insight into Custance's negative feelings surrounding this arrangement, but she acquiesces, stating: "Womman are born to thraldom and penance, / And to been under mannes governance."[214] Custance here directly affirms the masculine system of power as she draws attention to such governance. In this case, part of that system is exogamous marriage where the woman is commodified. The exogamous marriage between the Sultan and Custance is foundationally based in raising influence and financial gains. Also, the exogamous marriage of Custance removes her from the home of her single father. While I argue the undertones of incest are not prevalent in *Man of Law,* the anthropological determinate of an exogamous system is, in part, to avoid the incest taboo. Although this does not appear to be a substantial threat in *Man of Law,* incest is a major concern in the tale's narrative counterpart, *Emaré.* In the case of *Emar*é, we see the text highlighting *the need* for exogamy as Emaré escapes her father's incestuous desires. These desires are made quite clear: "So he was anamored hys thowghtur tyll, / Wyth her he thowghth to worche hys wyll, / And wedde her to hys wyfe."[215] Emaré chooses exile over accepting this relationship. She exclaims:

> Nay syr, God of heven hyt forbede,
> That ever do so we shulde!
> "Yyf hyt so betydde that ye me wedde
> And we shulde play togedur in bedde,
> Bothe we were forlorne![216]

[213] For more on Custance as a tradable good, see Laurel L. Hendrix, "'Pennannce profytable': The Currency of Custance in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 6 (1994) 141–166, https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.1179/exm.1994.6.1.141.
[214] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," 286-287.
[215] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Emaré," *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 226-228.
[216] Ibid. 251-255.

Both women's initial movement is prompted by social and cultural necessities of exogamy: avoiding the incest taboo (literaly in the case of Emaré) or gaining power and money through the out-marrying that Custance must face.

Emaré and Custance are examples of the calumniated-wives narrative where they are falsely accused by their mothers-in-law, which results in another exile (Emaré is exiled by her father and Custance by the Sultaness).[217] After giving birth, both women fall victim to a letter-forging-plot, perpetrated by their mothers-in-law, which makes their husbands believe they have given birth to a demon and are then, on his orders, exiled from their new communities. For Emaré, the order is: "Upon payn of chylde and wyfe / And also upon your owene lyfe, / Lette her have no gryght!"[218] As we saw with the dynamic between Walter and Griselda, the sheer amount of power that a husband, especially when that husband is also a land's ruler, has over his wife is incredibly problematic and frankly troubling. Though we know that the mothers-in-law were ultimately responsible for the circumstances surrounding this exile, it is on male authority that the sentence is enforced. This authority showcases the power disparity between husband and wife and demonstrates the problematic nature of exogamous marriages. This narrative moment, I propose, ultimately exhibits the problematic inequity in medieval exogamous marriages that gives ultimate dominion to one's husband, but also that despite the lopsidedness of this marital system, mothers are able to find moments of agency. Isolated maternity highlights the power of mothers, which a patriarchal based system seeks to diminish, as it shows the capability, and indeed prowess, of maternity as such a performance demonstrates the lack of need for paternal influence.

[217] In the next chapter, I will be exploring the actions of these mothers-in-law in more detail.
[218] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Emaré," 595-597.

As with historic examples of exiles,[219] Emaré's exile is made incredibly public. Of the public nature of such events, Jordan states: "Banishment everywhere, it is safe to say, was made audible and visible—in striking, disturbing, fearsome, memorable ways."[220] For the community that saw Emaré as the wife of their ruler, they were incredibly upset by the turn of events. This public outrage is similar to the people's reaction to Griselda's treatment discussed in the previous chapter. The people hold great sympathy for Emaré in this moment and grieve openly at her forced departure: "Then was ther sorow and myche woo, / When the lady to shype shulde go; / They wepte and wronge her hondus."[221] The crowd's reaction calls attention to two things: first that the people do not agree with the sentence and do not understand why their leader would do this to Emaré, and second that this punishment is incredibly harsh. Yet, despite the grim circumstances that both Emaré and Custance face, the two mothers brave the reality of exile and focus on the wellbeing of their sons, a form of maternal performance.

Once alone on the boat, Emaré and Custance's performances or mothering becomes apparent. As discussed in chapter 1, my characterization of medieval maternal performance, in part, recognizes "protection" as an aspect of maternal performativity. Protection can be understood as both physical protection (taking care of the child's physical needs and keeping them out of harm's way, etc.) and emotional protection (making sure the child understands that they are loved and supported, comforting them, performing *nurtur,* etc.).[222] It is protection that

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[219] See William Chester Jordan, *From England to France: Felony and Exile in the Middle Ages* and Jeremy DeAngelo, *Outlawry, Liminality, and Sanctity in the Literature of the Early Medieval North Atlantic.*

[220] William Chester Jordan, *From England to France,* 60.

[221] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Emaré," 637-638.

[222] While taking care of a child's physical well being may seem quite basic in regards to the duties of mothering, I argue that we must discuss this mode of maternal performativity as just that, performance. It is the function of chapter 1, and this dissertation as a whole, that stipulates that maternity is not innate or biological. Therefore, even what may be considered "basic" must be understood as performance and not the "natural" inclinations of a mother.

the two women perform when they are on the boat with their sons. We see Emaré protecting her son:

> She was aferde of the see,
> And layde her gruf uponn a tre,
> The chylde to her pappes.
> The wawes that were grete and strong[223]

Despite her own fears or concerns, she immediately turns her attention to her child's needs, which, beyond basic survival is also comfort: "And when the chyld gan to wepe, / Wyth sory herte she songe hyt aslepe, / And putte the pappe yn hys mowth" (661-663). Similarly, Custance comforts her son as she says to him: "Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee noon harm" (836). She also attempts to shield him from the elements and allow him to sleep:

> With that hir coverchief of hir heed she breyde,
> And over his litel eyen she it leyde,
> And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,
> And into hevene hire eyen up she caste.[224]

Despite the terrifying circumstances of their exile to sea, both mothers are performing relatively normative maternity in the sense that they are nurturing and protecting their children. What makes mothering here non-normative (other than the physical space in which this is taking place) is the lack of a paternal influence for such an extended period of time. For most sons in calumniated-wives tales, there is, relatively quickly, a male influence that enters into their life, like what happens in *Sir Tryamour* when mother and son are taken in by a man. Instead, in the *Man of Law's Tale* and *Emaré,* the mother and son's time together, alone on the boats, is long. For Custance, we are told that she was alone on that boat "in peyne and wo, Fyve yeer and moore,"[225] leaving her mothering in isolation for an extended period of time. Even once they

[223] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Emaré," 655-658.
[224] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," 837-840.
[225] Ibid, 901-902.

reach land, they are ultimately operating as single mothers and as exiles (both the narrator of the *Man of Law's Tale* and Custance herself refer to her as a "wrecched womman"[226])[227] who have entered the land in which they were banished to, leaving them socially and mentally isolated. While being around people in their new environment, the mothers are still exiles in this space. What I mean by this is despite existing within a community, as exiles there is still a level of isolation and an "othering" that affects them.[228] For example, Low conceives of an exile from a psychological perspective as the "expulsion of the individual person from being or *feeling* himself to be part of the community in one way or another."[229] Through Low's understanding, it is evident that isolation takes many forms–physical and mental. Not only is it notable to conceptualize how these women felt upon arriving into a new space, but also this new communities' reaction to them. An arriving exile was often not welcomed and were thought of as a "disreputable stranger."[230] What is unique about both Custance and Emaré in this regard is that they are able to win over their new peers through their goodness and through the actions of their sons. This perpetuates the notion that forced isolation is something to be endured and that endurance recommends these women to society. Their mothering is venerated despite the understanding that in order for sons to be socially deemed as "good" there must be a paternal influence. The suffering these women endure outweighs the negative stigma of isolated

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[226] Ibid, 285 and 918

[227] Though the word "wrecched" could be understood and interpreted as the work "wretched", Larry D. Benson translates the word to align with *wrecca* or exile (see explanatory note 285-287).

[228] This moment where a person is both within a community, yet separate can also be seen in studies of anchorites. Anchorites were religious figures who lived sequestered away in order to be closer to God. A majority of anchorites, as mentioned earlier, were women according to Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hugues-Edwards. Perhaps the most famous anchorite was Julian of Norwich. For more information on her see Denise N. Baker, ed *The Showings of Julian of Norwich* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005). Amy Laura Hall, *Laughing at the Devil: Seeing the World with Julian of Norwich* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

[229] Anthony Low, *Aspects of Subjectivity*, 3, emphasis mine.

[230] William Chester Jordan, *From England to France,* 58.

mothering. Further, because their exile was imposed by a masculine figure of authority, this isolation is, in a way, sanctioned by patriarchal power.

Readers are able to see the outcome of isolated maternity through the depictions of these female characters raising their sons alone and in isolation (both in a physical sense in their infancy and socially as exiled individuals). Both mothers are praised for their sons' behavior, socially deemed as good because of their excellent manners. For Custance and Maurice, we see this most prominently in Alla's reaction to seeing his son: "Now was this child as lyk unto Custance / As possible is as a creature to be. / This Alla hath the face remembrance / Of dame Custance."[231] Of course, this does speak to Maurice's physical appearance,[232] but I argue that this is also a reflection of Custance's piousness and good manners, which she passes down to her son through her maternal influence. Custance is described to Alla as:

> So vertuous a lyvere in my lyf
> Ne saugh I nevere as she, ne herde of mo,
> Or worldly wommen, mayde, ne of wyf.
> I dar wel seyn hir hadde levere a knyf
> Thurghout hir brest, than ben a womman wikke;
> There is no man koude brynge hir to that prikke.[233]

Maurice acts in a similar manner to his mother as he serves Alla at the feast. It is Maurice's courtesy that ultimately leads to him being recognized as first Custance's son and then Alla's heir. Despite the fear of a mother having too much influence over her child, through Custance's mothering of Maurice (her being the sole influence over him), it is evident that there are positive proofs of performing mothering in isolation. Though the traits that Maurice possesses are traditionally traits that are learned through the mother, they are what recommend him as being

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[231] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," 1030-1033.

[232] See *Marking Maternity* by Angela Florschuetz for an overview of the transference of physical characteristics between mother and child along with an explanation of how mothers were deemed capable of predetermining what their child will look like.

[233] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," 1024-1029.

able to take his rightful place as ruler, demonstrating that paternal influence is not needed for a son to successfully operate within this society.

We see very similar events happen with Emaré and Segramour, but the teaching of courtesy is much more apparent in this romance. Amy N. Vines's work on *Emaré* positions the text as a tool for teaching children etiquette through the narrative's focus on domestic teachings. Vines explains that "*Emaré* incorporates lessons of courtesy and places them…centrally in the narrative."[234] Narratively, we are informed that Segramour thrives under his mother's instruction: "The chylde bygan forto thryfe"[235] and "So curtays a chylde was none."[236] Further narrative intervention tells readers that "Emaré taughte her sone yynge [young]."[237] During the meeting between father and son, before everyone's identities are revealed, it is made clear that Emaré's instructions are what makes Segramour shine and be very courteous and kingly:

> Do a lytull aftur me,
> And thou shalt have my blessynge.
> Tomorowe thou shall serve yn halle,
> In a kurtyll of ryche palle,
> Byfore thys nobull kyng.
> Loke, sone, so curtays thou be,
> That no mon fynde chalange to the
> In no manere thynge![238]

Much like Maurice, it is Segramour's *actions* rather than birthright that ultimately determines his future. Vines explains: "Courtesy and manners–learned at Emaré's feet–are the ultimate accomplishments that bring Segramour and his exiled mother social acceptance, inheritance, and

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[234] Amy N. Vines. "'Who-so wylle of nurtur lere': Domestic Foundations for Social Success in the Middle English *Emaré,*" *The Chaucer Review,* vol. 53, no. 1,(2018): 82–10, JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.5325/chaucerrev.53.1.0082.
[235] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, editors. "Emaré," 727.
[236] Ibid, 738.
[237] Ibid, 973.
[238] Ibid, 845-852

reintegration into noble society."[239] What both of these romances highlight is the positive effect that isolated mothering has on these boys. Indeed, Vines takes time to emphasize how Segramour actions are *only* influenced by his mother: "More importantly, the narrative's eponymous heroine is a mother raising her child alone; all the lessons in courtesy and patience, which ultimately lead to her own and her child's reinstatement, are taught by her."[240] Through their time alone on the ocean and their time socially isolated, Emaré and Custance have impressed upon their sons not only protection and nurture, but also have crafted them in their own image of pious goodness and politeness. This, as stated earlier, is what reforms the family unit of this romance and reinstates the rightful heir. This negates the supposed "threat" of mothers being solely in charge of parental influence over their children and highlights the mother's positive impacts on the child.[241]

Yet, isolated mothering is not always treated as something to be praised. Vines states: "Segramour, Emaré's son, is a beneficiary of maternal teaching *rather than a victim of it.*"[242] I find the wording here of note as it suggests that maternal teaching could be a performance that victimizes the child–that the influence could be detrimental to the child. That is certainly how some women performing maternity in isolation in romances are treated, by narrative interventions, contemporary audiences, and modern scholars alike. However, Emaré and Custance's actions show the wrongness of the ill treatment that women who mother in isolation experience, especially those mothers who *choose* to mother in isolation. Ultimately, I argue that

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[239] Amy N. Vines. "'Who-so wylle of nurtur lere': Domestic Foundations for Social Success in the Middle English *Emaré,*" 84.
[240] Ibid. 84.
[241] It is interesting to note that *Emaré* is one of the few romances that is named for a female protagonist. In a way, the very naming of a story which identifies the protagonist as female is a disruption of the medieval tradition of naming romances either for the predominantly male tellers or the male protagonists which most Middle English romances follow.
[242] Amy N. Vines. "'Who-so wylle of nurtur lere': Domestic Foundations for Social Success in the Middle English *Emaré,*" 84, emphasis mine.

criticism against women who mother in isolation exists because these mothers are actively rejecting the systems of power which they are born into and keeping their sons away from that system. By rejecting the social world that the patriarchy controls, we see that control, that power, over mothers, who are both subject to this system and abject, begin to diminish. As this power over an individual lessens, the masculine hegemony must attempt to regain that power by presenting these mothers who choose a non-normative way of mothering, one without paternal influences, as bad or ineffective parents. We see this concept most strikingly in the Middle English version of *Perceval of Galles* and its narrative counterpart *Lybeaus Desconus.*

The romances of *Perceval of Galles* and *Lybeaus Desconus*[243] are the only two Arthurian romances examined in this dissertation. These two texts have lacked scholarly attention.[244] Most scholarship regarding Perceval tales prioritize Chretien de Troyes or Sir Thomas Malory's version of the Perceval narrative. The grail narrative itself and its discussion of Christian ideals is

[243] Though different versions of this text exist, such as the Old French *Li Biaus Descouneüs,* and appears in six different manuscripts, I will be focusing on the Middle English version from Ashmole 61. See George Shuffelton, ed. "Lybeaus Desconus," *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61-lybeaus-desconus-introduction.

[244] While there are not many scholarly sources dedicated to the Middle English *Perceval of Galles*, works that discuss this particular version include: Phillip C. Boardman, "Grail and Quest in the Medieval English World of Arthur," in *The Grail, the Quest, and the World of Arthur*, edited by Norris J. Lacy (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2008): 126–40, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.cttn33d7.17. Caroline D. Eckhardt, "Arthurian Comedy: The Simpleton-Hero in 'Sir Perceval of Galles.'" *The Chaucer Review* 8, no. 3 (1974): 205–20. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25093269. John Finlayson, "Definitions of Middle English Romance." *The Chaucer Review* 15, no. 1 (1980): 44–62. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25093739. David C Fowler. "Le Conte Du Graal and Sir Perceval of Galles." *Comparative Literature Studies* 12, no. 1 (1975): 5–20. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40246191. Ad Putter, "The Text of 'Sir Perceval of Galles.'" *Medium Ævum* 70, no. 2 (2001): 191–203. https://doi.org/10.2307/43632674.

a common research focus,[245] along with concerns of masculinity and chivalry.[246] As for *LD,* few scholars have given attention to this text,[247] let alone any scholarship that focuses on the unnamed mother. As for scholarly discussions of Arthurian mothers, there is a lot of conjecture about their passive roles within texts. Elizabeth Archibald goes so far as to refer to Arthurian mothers in Chretien de Troyes' work as "part of the furniture."[248] Similarly, Peggy McCracken understands Arthurian mothers as producers of royal lineage, which certainly maintains the perpetuation of the exogamous system. She states:

> Their [mothers'] primary function in these stories is to produce a son. Their presence in the narrative seems to be required as part of a prominent valorization of the hero's maternal lineage, particularly stories about Perceval where the questing knight's maternal uncle is the guardian of the Holy Grail. Yet, despite the importance of the mother's

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[245] See Michael Darin Amey, "Questing the Grail, Questioning Religion: Religion in Modern Grail Narratives," *Arthuriana* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 3-19, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24643468. David Eugene Clark, "Constructing Spiritual Hierarchy through Mass Attendance in the "Morte Darthur," *Arthuriana* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 128-153, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24643433. Peggy McCracken, "The Poetics of Sacrifice: Allegory and Myth in the Grail Quest," *Yale French Studies,* no. 95 (1999): 152-168, https://doi.org/10.2307/3040750. Sylvester George Tan, "Perceval's Unknown Sin: Narrative Theology in Chretien's Story of the Grail," *Arthuriana* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 129-157, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44697497.

[246] See R. Howard Bloch, "Grail Family and Round Table," in *Etymologies and Genealogies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983): 98–207. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Sons and Mothers, Mothers and Lovers," in *Chrétien Continued* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 116–48. Sarah E. Gordon, "The Man with No Name: Identity in French Arthurian Verse Romance." *Arthuriana* 18, no. 2 (2008): 69–81. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27870906. Kathryn Gravdal, "Chrétien de Troyes, Gratian, and the Medieval Romance of Sexual Violence." *Signs* 17, no. 3 (1992): 558–85. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174623. Donald L. Hoffman, "Perceval's Sister: Malory's 'Rejected' Masculinities." *Arthuriana* 6, no. 4 (1996): 72–84. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869223. Irit Ruth Kleiman, "X Marks the Spot: The Place of the Father in Chrétien De Troyes's 'Conte Du Graal.'" *The Modern Language Review* 103, no. 4 (2008): 969–82. https://doi.org/10.2307/20468025.

[247] Little scholarship focusing on *Lybeaus Desconus* exists. However, some notable works on the text include: Rory G. Critten, "Bourgeois Ethics Again: The Conduct Texts and the Romances in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61." *The Chaucer Review* 50, no. 1–2 (2015): 108–33. https://doi.org/10.5325/chaucerrev.50.1-2.0108. Dorothy Everett, "The Relationship of Chestre's 'Launfal' and 'Lybeaus Desconus," *Medium Ævum* 7, no. 1 (1938): 29–49. https://doi.org/10.2307/43626069. Megan G. Leitch, "The Servants of Chivalry? Dwarves and Porters in Malory and the Middle English Gawain Romances." *Arthuriana* 27, no. 1 (2017): 3–27. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26443656. Eve Salisbury, "'Lybeaus Desconus': Transformation, Adaptation, and the Monstrous-Feminine." *Arthuriana* 24, no. 1 (2014): 66–85. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44698307. James Wade, "Ungallant Knights," in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, edited by Neil Cartlidge (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 201–218, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81fr9.18.

[248] Elizabeth Archibald, "The Importance of Being an Arthurian Mother," *Medieval English and Dutch Literatures: The European Context: Essays in Honour of David F. Johnson*, edited by Larissa Tracy and Geert H. M. Claassens (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2022), 338.

> family in the son's adventures, mothers themselves remain isolated from the events that structure the Grail quest.[249]

It seems that the understanding of the narrative functionality of mothers is one of an exogamous wife, moved around and exchanged in order to maintain, and grow, social and political power.[250] It is apparent that Acheflour, Perceval's mother in *Sir Percyval*, married exogamously. The language surrounding her union is one of exchange and ownership: "His syster to take."[251] The mother in *LD* on the other hand is unmarried, she and Gawain conceived their son out of wedlock.[252] The comparison of these two mothers lies not in the similarities between their states of marriage, but in how they mother: in isolation.

In both *LD* and *Perceval,* the mother of the hero lives a reclusive life and raises her son in the same environment. Both are trying to keep their sons away from a chivalric life. The narrator in *LD* explains the mother's insistence on their isolation:

> His moder hym kepte with alle hyr myght
> That he schuld se no knyght
> Armyd on no maner,
> For he was so savage
> And lyghtly wold outrage
> To his felows in fere.
> For doute of wyked lose
> His moder kepyd hym close
> As worthy chyld and dere.[253]

In this Middle English text, the reasoning behind the mother's self-imposed exile is unknown. In other versions of the text like *Le Bel Inconnu,* as George Shuffelton suggests, "Guinglain's mother is a fairy named Blanchemal, but no suggestion of her otherworldly power appears in

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[249] Peggy McCracken, "Mothers in the Grail Quest: Desire, Pleasure, and Conception," *Arthuriana*, vol. 8, no. 1, (1998): 36, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869312.
[250] See Elizabeth Archibald, "The Importance of Being an Arthurian Mother," 336-337.
[251] Mary Flowers Braswell, ed. "Sir Perceval of Galles," *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 36.
[252] "Hys name was callyd Gyngeleyn; / Getyn he was of Sir Gawyne / By a forest syde" (7-9).
[253] George Shuffelton, ed. "Lybeaus Desconus," 16-24.

Chestre's text."[254] Therefore, in this specific variation of the tale that I am analyzing, the verse *Lybeaus Desconus,* we cannot simply attribute her isolation as a trait of the fae who typically live separately from chivalric society. However, even without a clear reason behind her removal, her isolation is apparent and she especially wants her son to be raised away from knights. While her reasoning for hermetic living is unknown, Acheflour's in *Perceval* is made very clear.

Acheflour, sister of Arthur, takes her son to live in the wilderness after the death of her husband who died in a tournament which is an important part of chivalric culture. In fear for her son's future, she chooses to leave society. Like the mother in *LD,* she wants her son to have no part in chivalric culture:

> By nyghte ne be daye.
> Bot in the wodde schall he be:
> Sall he no thyng see
> Bot the leves of the tree
> And the greves graye;
> Schall he nowther take tent
> To justes ne to tournament,
> Bot in the wilde wodde went,
> With bestes to playe.
> With wilde bestes for to playe,
> Scho tuke hir leve and went hir waye,
> Bothe at baron and at raye,
> And went to the wodde.[255]

Moreover, in her introduction to *Sir Perceval,* Mary Flowers Braswell goes as far as to say that Acheflour is "a mother, who abhors chivalry and the courtly world."[256] Yet, I understand this rejection of chivalric society as less to do with hate and more to do with fear. As Archibald puts it: "Arthurian mothers can give us a sense of the anxieties and problems of real-life mothers of

[254] Ibid, note 16.
[255] Mary Flowers Braswell, ed. "Sir Perceval of Galles," 165-180.
[256] Ibid, 2.

medieval knights, and also the problems they could cause their children."[257] It is fear caused by the chivalric system that drives both the mother in *LD* and Acheflour to pursue a hermetic life with their sons. This staunch rejection of a chivalric life serves as a proponent to the masculine anxieties surrounding a mother having dominant influence over her child as opposed to her husband. Patriarchal powers then attempt to erase maternal influence. For example, Eve Salisbury, writing on *LD,* explains:

> When Arthur asks him to state his name publicly, the youth announces the only name he knows–Bewfiz (Beautiful Son)[258]–a term of endearment identifying him exclusively as his mother's child [...] Thus in a gesture that overrides the mother's dominion over her son, the youth is dubbed 'Lybeaus Desconus' and provisionally enfolded into a signifying system until he gains full recognition by the chivalric community.[259]

Lybeaus (or Guinglain) is only accepted into the chivalric system *after* Arthur renames him, removing maternal influence and dominance, returning him to the realm of patriarchal system. The mother in *LD*'s parental decision to separate her son from a chivalric life is revoked. By removing her son from a chivalric life, she withdraws him from the masculine sphere of influence and raises him is a way that is unknown (and indeed unknowable as they remain isolated) to the child's extended family along with the culture and systems that they were born into. This cannot be allowed. It is the unknowability of just how much a mother is affecting her child, especially her son which causes such anxieties.[260] By removing sons and raising them in a separate and unknown way, both the mother in *LD* and Acheflour have the potential to restructure priorities and means of behavior for the next generation, which could threaten the dominant system. These masculine anxieties cause Archeflour's and the mother in *LD's*

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[257] Elizabeth Archibald, "The Importance of Being an Arthurian Mother," 332.
[258] "Beuys" in Ashmole 61.
[259] Eve Salisbury, "'Lybeaus Desconus': Transformation, Adaptation, and the Monstrous-Feminine," 66.
[260] See Angela Florschuetz *Marking Maternity.*

mothering to be called into question as a way to negate mothering in isolation in order to insure that it does not become a normative practice. Salisbury explains that the Middle English poet characterizes Lybeaus' unnamed mother as possessive, as "an icon of shame,"[261] and situates her as "the kind of mother who deliberately attempts to prohibit her son from becoming a knight."[262] This is of course seen as a negative and selfish act within the poem, rather than a means of protecting her son from harm. Of the narrator of *Sir Perceval,* Patricia Rose states: "The tale concentrates upon Perceval, to the exclusion of Acheflour. She is but the instrument of his upbringing and the cause of his naivete."[263] The negation of the maternal practices of these women continues outside of the narrative space and enters into the realm of current scholarship.

When engaging with scholarship, especially on Acheflour (as little on the mother in *LD* exists), regarding these mothers, we see performances of these characters' mothering almost always discussed in negative terms. The mothering that the sons experienced is something to be cured from–something to reject. Sarah Kay states in "Motherhood: The Case of the Epic Family Romance": "Perceval's first duty is to unlearn his mother's instructions, overlaying them with those of his (fatherly) mentor Gornemant, and this leads to errors which he seems unable to resolve."[264] Helen Cooper sees Acheflour's maternal lessons to Perceval as inherent failures on her part. She explains: "His [Perceval's] mother's instructions on the exercise of piety remain useless until they are activated later by further advice from a hermit." Cooper continues: "If she has failed, it is at an earlier stage altogether, in keeping Perceval in such ignorance that he cannot

[261] Eve Salisbury, "'Lybeaus Desconus': Transformation, Adaptation, and the Monstrous-Feminine," 80.
[262] Ibid, 74.
[263] Patricia Rose, "Acheflour: Wise Woman or Foolish Female?" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 46, no. 4 (2004), 454, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40755422.
[264] Sarah Kay, "Motherhood: The Case of the Epic Family Romance," *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Dr Elspeth Kennedy*, edited by Karen Pratt, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1994), 26.

make use of the advice when she gives it."[265] Also, Helen Phillips states that the narrative depicts Acheflour's teaching of Perceval as "particularly idiotic."[266] What this type of scholarship highlights is an understanding that mothering *cannot* be performed in isolation and must be corrected by a paternal force. I, however, take issue with this understanding of Acheflour's maternal performance. What is unique about *Perceval of Galles* is that the audience is actually able to see her performing maternity and the childhood of the Perceval described in a positive way.

Acheflour, even in isolation, performs her motherly duties. We are told that she provides for Perceval:

> That scho myghte appon calle
> When that hir nede stode.
> Other gudes wolde scho nonne nayte,
> Bot with hir tuke a tryppe of gayte,
> With mylke of tham for to bayte
> To hir lyves fode.[267]

While he is away from chivalric society, Acheflour still makes it a point to give her son a weapon of some kind to protect himself and to hunt. This shows that she does not fully ignore the more traditionally masculine aspects of raising a son. He has no problems hunting or fighting, which one would assume would be the responsibility of a male influence. Rather, he is still able to learn these lessons even though they are coming from a maternal influence. This breaks down gendered understandings of parental roles as it is a mother that provides her son with the means to hunt and protect himself physically, a typically paternal practice. This

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[265] Helen Cooper, "Good Advice on Leaving Home in the Romances," *Youth in the Middle Ages*, edited by Felicity Riddy and P.J.P Goldberg, (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 200), 106.
[266] Helen Phillips, "Rites of Passage in French and English Romances," in *Rites of Passage: Cultures of Transition in the Fourteenth Century*, edited by Nicola F. McDonald and W. M. Ormrod (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 88, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81wj0.10.
[267] Mary Flowers Braswell, ed. "Sir Perceval of Galles," 183-188.

demonstrates the lack of need for specifically "paternal" performances of parenting as a mother can perform both normative maternity *and* paternity.

Of course Perceval's upbringing is non-traditional, but Acheflour is still working to maintain normative lessons that were expected to be taught by mothers, such as lessons on Christianity. Though it arrives later in life (when he is 15), Acheflour still tells Perceval about Christ:

> Swete childe, I rede thou praye
> To Goddes Sone dere,
> That he wolde helpe the -
> Lorde, for His poustee -
> A gude man for to bee,
> And longe to duelle here.[268]

The main lesson in Archeflour's maternal performance that she ignores or deems unnecessary is that of courtly behaviors and manners. Most of these behaviors would have been taught as a means of socializing a child. As Barbara Hanawalt states: "Socializing the young is, ultimately, the parents' or guardians' responsibility."[269] Acheflour hastily tries to impart some basic manners onto her son as he is leaving her care, such as telling him to remove his hood when he meets a knight.[270] This small rule is of course just a drop in the proverbial bucket of courtly manners. Yet, this disregard for one aspect of parenting, since she chose a hermetic life for her and her son, would seem reasonable as she did not expect him to encounter the outside world. Despite this one lesson being left primarily untaught, the narrator of the Middle English version of this tale discusses Percaval's childhood and Perceval himself in positive terms: "He was fosterde in the felle, / He dranke water of the welle, / And yitt was he wyghte."[271] We are told

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[268] Ibid, 235-240.
[269] Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 69.
[270] Mary Flowers Braswell, ed. "Sir Perceval of Galles," 402-403.
[271] Ibid, 6-8.

that: "He was a gude knave!"[272] Often however, the positivity of Perceval's childhood is not attributed to Acheflour, but rather *in spite* of her; it is not because of her lessons that Perceval succeeds, but rather due to his physical prowess and the guidance of other men like Arthur and the Fisher King. I, however, want to discuss Acheflour's performance of isolated mothering as a choice and a positive one at that. While mothering in isolation is a non-normative mode of mothering, it is still providing a positive influence over the child. It is the removal from a patriarchal society that raises questions of the properness of these women's mothering skills. Yet, I argue that mothering in isolation serves these women and their children in a positive way. It is because isolated mothering can be successful mothering that the masculine dominated social system takes issue with this practice as it removes masculine influence from the child's life.

I argue that isolated mothering is a positive thing, something that helps Acheflour and the mother from *LD* to raise their sons in a space that they have deemed safe, safe from the negative impacts of chivalry. There is evidence that during the Middle Ages certain forms of isolation had their benefits, such as those who chose the life of an anchorite. According to Denise N. Baker: "Anchorites were recluses who voluntarily vowed to remain permanently enclosed, usually in a small room or cell within or adjacent to a monastery or church and often in an urban area. Their cells typically had one window that looked toward the altar of the church and another through which they could speak to those seeking their counsel."[273] Living an anchoritic life, with its isolation and intense focus on religious reflection lends itself to being an incredibly holy undertaking for those who chose this path; it was understood as a "higher form" of Christian devotion. While anchorites choose a more isolated lifestyle to become closer to God, I argue that

[272] Ibid, 216.
[273] Denise N. Baker, ed. *The Showings of Julian of Norwich,* x.

Archeflour and the mother in *LD* also choose isolation in the pursuit of something greater: the protection and benefit of their own mental health and that of their children. It is through this lens, isolation as pursuit of something greater, that I argue we should be discussing mothers who choose to mother in isolation. Their choice allows for their influence to dominate over that of a father or even society, giving the child the skills and care that the mothers deem valuable. We see this work successfully with the sons of both Emaré and Custance, along with Acheflour and the unnamed mother in *LD.* Speaking further on the positives of solitude Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy state: "In the Middle Ages, however, the solitary sought to *transcend* the self, rather than embrace it, ultimately shedding it in order to reach a state of perfection."[274] Could we not then read these isolated mothers as those who *transcend* the typical expectations and performances of mothering? We know that living an anchoritic life does not mean that one never sees or interacts with other people. Gunn and McAvoy continue: "While being set apart, the anchorite also occupied a pivotal role at the heart of the local community: as role-model, confidante, intercessor and spiritual healer."[275] For Acheflour and the mother in *LD,* their communities are simply communities of two, the community between mother and son. Mothers here are also performing much of the above descriptors, as role-models, confidants, and as spiritual guides. They are able to solely focus on mothering and do not have to enact other gendered social performances like that of a wife or a woman of the court. Rather, they have retreated in order to carve out a better life for their sons away from the trappings of the court and the dangers of chivalric society. Rose conceives of Acheflour's maternal goal in raising Perceval this way as a "challenge to androcentric values and the possibility of replacing traditional

[274] Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Introduction: 'No Such Thing as Society'?: Solitude in Community," 3.
[275] Ibid, 5

destructive values and wisdom with a more inclusive, less violent wisdom."[276] What Rose is pointing to here is what *could* be, the potential for what a maternally guided society could be if they were given the space and dominion over their children.

Isolation and solitude provide a space for mothers to raise their children that can be understood as enlightened or transcendent. Nelson-Campbell expresses that isolation and solitude, though sometimes painful, can be productive.[277] The productivity in this case is the mothering and teaching given to their sons, creating a way of life that is not incumbent upon the chivalric system. Despite not having a narrative image of day-to-day maternal practices that Acheflour and the mother in *LD* perform, readers can recognize the positives of isolated mothering as the women, despite a lack of support, mother in normative ways. As defined in chapter 1, both mothers display normative maternity as they nurture, teach, and protect their sons. Furthermore, both boys successfully integrate into society (despite being removed from it). The difference between these boys who are raised by their mothers in isolation and other chivalric sons is that those raised in isolation place an emphasis on their mothers that is not as stark in other tales.

A dedication to one's mother is often not seen by the sons in these Arthurian narratives, according to scholarship on such texts. McCracken states of Arthurian sons: "The sons leave them [their mothers] behind in the pursuit of chivalric glory."[278] Yet, that is not the case in the Middle English version of the Perceval tale, a tale in which Acheflour is not portrayed negatively.[279] Rather, working against McCracken's above statement, Archibald expresses that

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[276] Patricia Rose, "Acheflour: Wise Woman or Foolish Female?" 457.
[277] Deborah Nelson-Campbell, "Coping with Isolation," 79.
[278] Peggy McCracken, "Mothers in the Grail Quest," 36.
[279] In Chrétien de Troyes version of the Perceval tale, the reasoning behind his mother's departure from society is not discussed at the poem's opening. This takes away the reader's ability to sympathize with and understand Acheflour's reasoning behind her choice for a hermetic life for her and her son. Furthermore, Chrétien's Perceval

"there are some Grail/Perceval romances where the protagonists show great concern for their mothers,"[280] the Middle English version being one of them. Braswell mirrors this statement as she explains the major difference between the Acheflour of other versions and the Middle English narrative:

> Nor is the grieving mother left simply to wander in the woods forever (Chretien allows her to die). Instead she is ultimately sought out and cared for by a more concerned, more considerate son who has now deferentially shed his knightly garb for his familiar goatskins. There is a hint of regeneration as the story comes full circle; the "wilde gerys" [behavior] of Perceval have been tamed.[281]

Rose also sees the positive mother/son dynamic highlighted within the Middle English version of the tale as she showcases "Percval's love for, and dependence upon, his mother."[282] Within the poem it is made clear that this version of Perceval's thoughts return to his mother, and he wonders how she is doing. There also seems to be a longing to return to his life before he entered into chivalric society:

> He thoghte on no thyng,
> Now on his moder that was,
> How scho levyde with the gres,
> With more drynke and lesse,
> In welles, there thay spryng.[283] (1772-1776)

Perceval then acknowledges that his mother is alone and is in need of protection:

> "My modir all manles
> Leved I thare."
> Than righte sone saide he,
> "Blythe sall I never be

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also appears to be more obstinate, which does not reflect positively on Acheflour's mothering. Perceval states of his mother: "Her counsel's no concern of mine; / I'll never make the cross's sign!" (see Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval: The Story of the Grail*, translated by Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 120-121). He even goes so far as to tell his mother to be quiet (390). The knights that Perceval initially meets also comment on his poor manners, stating that "His manners are extremely few" (236). This is a far cry from the depiction of Perceval as a 'good knave' that we see in the Middle English version.

[280] Elizabeth Archibald, "The Importance of Being an Arthurian Mother," 331.

[281] Mary Flowers Braswell, ed. "Sir Perceval of Galles," 3.

[282] Patricia Rose, "Acheflour: Wise Woman or Foolish Female?" 459.

[283] Ibid, 1772-1776.

Or I may my modir see,
And wete how scho fare."[284]

After the initial excitement and adventure, Perceval is set on returning to his mother. It is Perceval's return to Acheflour, I argue, that highlights the powerful nature of isolated mothering. Why this return is so important is because this is what the patriarchal system fears–the power of mothering. By making a real effort to return to his mother, even though his mother is separate from society, Perceval shows that he places his mother in a higher position than that of male society. In essence, this boy turned man shows a higher level of respect and responsibility towards his mother as opposed to paternal influences. This signifies a departure from patriarchal influence as the mother, as demonstrated in chapter 1, is often understood as the secondary or subservient parent. By flipping this role and showing a mother as the head of the family unit as opposed to a father (or even a son), maternity becomes the predominant parental influence giving agency to mothers in place of fathers.

Isolated mothering demonstrates a positive influence over the sons who were brought up in such an environment. While the acts of mothering do appear to be quite normative, having a focus on nurturing, teaching, and safety, it is the isolation that shows a different way of performing maternity. Mainly, here, we see what mothering could look like away from direct male influences, such as a father or foster-father. What we are left with are sons that perform exceptionally well in society. Emaré and Custance's sons, because of the influence of their mothers, are able to rightfully inherit a ruling position and the lands that come with it. Similarly, Perceval becomes a famed knight who goes on the most holy of quests, to seek the grail, because, I argue, of the maternal influence of Acheflour during their time in isolation. Her

[284] Ibid, 1787-1792.

emphasis is not physical prowess, but rather a connection with nature and more feminine concerns, such as manners. However the disparity between the exiles, Custance and Emaré, and Acheflour and the mother in *LD*, who chooses isolation, is troubling. Custance and Emaré are often venerated while Acheflour is especially criticized. I argue that this is because, ultimately, exiles are forced into isolation due to male authority (which serves to reinforce this authority) while Acheflour and those who choose isolated mothering are rejecting that same authority, which undermines patriarchal power. What Acheflour presents us with is an alternative, one that is rarely seen in Middle English romances. Rose similarly venerates Acheflour's actions, stating: "Acheflour's courage and vision, far from being short sighted, may be seen as prophetic and inspirational, encouraging and empowering readers to follow their own dreams, and their own values, in the quest for a better life for themselves, their children, and their communities."[285] Acheflour is a unique, and I agree inspiring, female character in the Middle Ages. She is a widow who refuses to remarry and re-enter into an exogamous marriage. Much like Christine de Pizan, who was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Acheflour carves out her own path for herself and her son. Her mothering, despite previous criticism, I argue is successful.

While Perceval does not at the beginning of the narrative understand other people, let alone chivalric decorum, he proves to be an accomplished knight. The uniqueness surrounding the Middle English version of Perceval is his staunch loyalty to his mother and his return to her. Though he pulls her back into chivalric society, and Acheflour's fears come true when we are told that Perceval is killed while on crusade, he will not continue with his knightly life without her. As with most romances, the patriarchal system rights itself at the narrative's conclusion. The "righting" here is Perceval's full integration into chivalric life, even down to how he dies. Yet,

[285] Patricia Rose, "Acheflour: Wise Woman or Foolish Female?" 470.

his main concern at the end of the tale is not with patriarchal society, but with his mother and her safety. This positionality of placing his mother's welfare above chivalric duties shows the threat that isolated maternity poses to the patriarchal system: namely, it is the power and influence that these women have over their sons. Patriarchal power requires that the main, and only, authority is that of the male leader of the house. By removing the male head of house through isolated mothering, we see the true instability of masculine power structures. Because isolated maternity, much like maternal grief, brings into focus just how fragile the masculine hegemony is, it must be hidden away or completely rejected by society. In the case of isolated maternity, mothering practices are harshly criticized and deemed wrong or ineffective. However, this is simply not the case. All the mothers in this chapter perform maternal duties admirably; the only difference is they do so without male influence.

CHAPTER IV: VILLAINOUS MOTHERS: PRODUCTS OF SUCCESSFUL EXOGAMY

The previous two chapters of this dissertation have focused on different aspects of maternal performance: maternal grief and performing maternity while isolated from society. Both chapters showcase performances in the Middle Ages that could be described as normative and non-normative, yet these performances still include *mothering.* What follows in this chapter is an investigation of mothers who *do not* perform normative maternity, rather they queer maternity, because they cease to perform normative acts of mothering, such as protecting, teaching, and loving. These women are the romance's villains, characters who appear quite frequently in medieval romances: evil step-mothers and mothers-in-law,[286] along with mothers whose actions negatively affect their children–often in terrible ways. Typical indictments of these characters include child abandonment, setting up other female characters (often other mothers) by means of trickery in order to have them killed or exiled, and outright murder. The examples of the villainous mothers discussed in this chapter are taken from three Middle English romances: *Octavian, Lay le Freine,* and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale.* While the mothers in previous chapters are criticized for their actions, they are certainly not understood by the narrator of their stories or by readers as the villains or antagonists. This chapter is the first to discuss mothers who are understood in such terms. In examining this evil-mother-trope in Middle English romances, I have found an interesting narrative similarity between the antagonists: they are well incorporated into their homes. What I mean by this is that despite the struggles that exogamy causes women, as I have shown in previous chapters, these mothers specifically have been successfully integrated into their host community. As Athalya Brenner explains in "Ruth as

[286] For an overview of the image of the evil mother-in-law trope, see Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell, "Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance," in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, edited by Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton, 96–110 (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2009), *JSTOR*.

a Foreign Worker and the Politics of Exogamy," exogamy holds "the possibility of the foreigner crossing cultural boundaries into integration in the host culture."[287] Indeed, integration into the host culture would be a marker of successful exogamy as the one who moves (typically the woman) is now part of her marital family and has been assimilated into this new space, removing her from her natal family. Given the fact that these mothers have experienced successful exogamy (marrying into another family or cultural group, bearing children to fulfill their duty to the patrilineal system, and becoming accepted by the new community), how do we interpret their nefarious actions within these romances? Furthermore, how does this affect our understanding of successful exogamy? If successful exogamy is, as I argue, producing "evil" mothers, whose villainy is marked by ridding their lands of rightful heirs, what does this say about this normative system? Through its very success, integrating outside women who produce heirs, it also causes its own destabilization as legitimacy and succession are troubled by the actions of these mothers. I explore the negative effects of exogamy along with its own systemic failures through these Middle English romances. Furthermore, through narrative descriptions within these texts, a medieval understanding of normative mothering (and the consequences that come with operating non-normatively), and contemporary scholarly discussions and current biases, I trouble the notion that these women are the central villains of their texts. Rather, the true antagonist within these tales is the exogamous system which relies on the exchange of women and their generative powers.

The villainization of these mothers feeds into a dichotomous archetype prevalent in medieval literature: a passive woman is a good woman and a powerful woman is a villain. I aim

[287]Athalya Brenner, "Ruth as a Foreign Worker and the Politics of Exogamy," *A Feminist Companion to Ruth and Esther*, edited by Athalya Brenner (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999), 162. *ProQuest Ebook Central*.

to trouble this strict delineation of women with power and challenge the Manichean view that holds that the mothers in these texts should only be considered as evil. I argue that, though morally questionable or wrong, these mothers are motivated by outside cultural forces, namely the effects of exogamous marriages, that compel their actions. Furthermore, because of medieval cultural understandings of maternity, they are judged all the more critically. If these mothers are considered products of successful exogamy, and it is this system which produces such "villains," then understandings of that success or the functionality of this system also becomes troubled.

In this chapter, I argue that because mothers are culturally expected to perform acts that are nurturing and caring, when they act in a way that is antithetical to those demonstrations of maternity, the immorality of their actions is compounded. Essentially, negative images of mothers who perform immoral acts are exacerbated because of cultural understandings of maternal identity; these women are meant to be ones who nurture and care for others, not ones who bring about the demise of people or worse still, their own children. Throughout this dissertation I have highlighted images of women performing normative mothering, be that through mourning (a display of *nurture*) or through mothering in isolation, and argued for an understanding of maternity that is not predicated on the body, its gestation, and birth of the child. Rather, I argue that maternity is predicated on social and cultural performance, and this chapter will demonstrate the importance of severing that maternal performance from the body. The mothers examined here, unlike the other examples in this dissertation, are not acting in a way that matches with traditional maternal performativity. Rather, they are placing their own security above their children and maternal identity, which codes them as villainous to the audience. What I would like to put forward is that this is not a reason to mark these female characters as villains, as being evil for the sake of being evil. They are choosing a different method of performance.

Furthermore, my argument complicates the "good/evil" dichotomy into which many fictional mothers are placed. I will show that their actions are motivated by a need to maintain personal security that the exogamous system threatens, which calls into question how successful exogamy is defined. It is exogamy, I argue, that triggers the actions and performances of the "evil-mother" characters in *Lay le Freine, Octavian,* and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale.*

To begin, it is important to state just how anxiety-inducing exogamy was to young women. This anxiety, I argue, greatly affects all areas of feminine gendered performances, especially maternity. Exogamy transforms women, soon to be mothers, into outsiders. It also turns them into objects: tradable commodities capable of producing heirs. The marginalization and objectification that mothers experience due to exogamy, I argue, causes a great deal of fear on the part of the mothers, specifically a fear of further displacement.[288] As both outsider and object, one's position and security would be unstable. Further displacement here means if a woman cannot, does not, or ceases to fulfill her functionality, then a second displacement occurs. Childlessness or infidelity were reasons for divorce or annulment as both threaten the patrilineal line.[289] The dissolution of a marriage would force the former wife to move back to her father's

[288] While exogamy is a practice that has been studied in anthropological texts as a means through which societies are formed, little work has been done that investigates the impact on the party who does the moving. Some works that exist on the topic include: Page M. Baldwin, "Subject to Empire: Married Women and the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act." *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 522–56. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3070746. Carol Parrish Jamison, "Traffic of Women in Germanic Literature: The Role of the Peace Pledge in Marital Exchanges." *Women in German Yearbook* 20 (2004): 13–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688971. Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003). Laura Tabili, "Outsiders in the Land of Their Birth: Exogamy, Citizenship, and Identity in War and Peace." *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 796–815. https://doi.org/10.1086/431942. The social changes and lack of familial support have not been looked at in regards to how this affects a person on a systematic scale. By this I mean, comprehensive studies on the emotional and physical impact of such marriages, of such movements, have not been undertaken. The dearth of scholarship in this area means that I am primarily pulling from images created in medieval literature as to the effects that exogamous marriages have on women and mothers. While this chapter, nor indeed this dissertation as a whole, serves as a definitive study on the historical impacts of exogamy, I argue that an exogamous marriage would have effects on both men and women.

[289] See Sara M Butler, *Divorce in Medieval England: From One to Two Persons in Law* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013*), ProQuest Ebook Central*, and Bridget Wells-Furby, *Aristocratic Marriage, Adultery and*

home, to the home of another husband, or to a convent. The system here works against women whose lives are destabilized and the threat of further destabilization looms large, which is why, as this chapter will show, wives and mothers go to extremes in order to maintain their positions within their husband's community. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 2, the nature of exogamy situates men as always holding an abundance of power over their wives, which makes way for abusive relationships. The power stems from the displacement of the woman, who is alone, away from her home community, with no support system. In a 2021 study done by Peter Eibich and Chia Liu, the authors demonstrate just how difficult being a woman affected by exogamy is: "Assuming that in-laws are more likely to be around if one is partnered with a native, exogamous immigrant women's mental health might be the poorest of all."[290] The act of being an exogamous woman is mentally taxing. The ultimate goal for these women is to become incorporated into their new kinship group and assimilate into this new community. What this chapter investigates is what happens when the stability of an exogamous wife, who has assimilated, becomes threatened and how this series of events changes maternal performance. The changes in maternal performance are considered non-normative, which contributes to the villainization of these mothers. Despite operating in a normative manner and acquiescing to an exogamous marriage and all it requires, they are still threatened and forced to take actions that code them as villainous, which calls into question the stability and functionality of the exchange of women that exogamy facilitates.

The types of maternal performance showcased in *Lay le Freine, Octavian,* and *Man of Law's Tale* are non-normative; the mothers act in ways that staunchly opposes traditional

Divorce in the Fourteenth Century: The Life of Lucy De Thweng (1279-1347) (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), *JSTOR.*

[290] Peter Eibich and Chia Liu,"For Better or for Worse Mental Health? The Role of Family Networks In Exogamous Unions," *Population, Space and Place* 27, no. 6 (2021): e2437. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2437.

maternal values. It is important to understand here that, in the cases of these romances, *mothering* is not taking place. In non-normative maternity there are no actions that could be construed as the performance of *mothering*. Examples of this could be child abandonment or murder (of others or even of one's child). What the women discussed in this chapter offer is a view of women who have given birth, but who do not put their maternity first. Rather, they are mothers who choose to stop performing normative maternity, to stop mothering, by putting their children's and grandchildren's lives at risk and/or consciously attempting to circumvent the happiness of their sons by concocting false adultery plots. Ultimately, they look out for *themselves*; they do not put the child first. The mother's need for the child here becomes relative.[291] This notion that a mother is placing something over her child, to the child's detriment, disturbs the cultural system of expected behaviors for maternal performance. Indeed, we either recognize these women as those who have given birth but do not perform maternity, or we consider their performance of maternity as queer. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive,* Lee Edelman's work challenges the notion of reproductive futurism where the image of the child is placed above all others, a thing that must be protected. Edelman's understanding of the child mirrors the system in which medieval exogamy operates: "The Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust."[292] And furthermore, "The function of the child as the prop of the secular theology on which our social reality rests."[293] The medieval patriarchy is reliant on the patrilineal system, which depends on the female body to produce heirs. The women in this chapter all in

[291] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 69.
[292] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 11.
[293] Ibid, 12.

some way attempt to disrupt the patrilineal lineage system by having rightful heirs removed in order to preserve their own positions and safety.

The non-normative performances of maternity, or the queering of maternity, that takes place in these narratives is when a mother acts in a way that works against the interests and/or safety of her children or even grandchildren. When a mother commits one of these actions, she is all the more vilified *because* she is a mother, as a mother is understood in the Middle Ages as a nurturer and was expected to exude goodness and love.[294] As Clarissa W. Atkinson explains: "motherhood became a necessary component of a woman's virtue and an essential element in the good order and prosperity of household, church, and state [...] A good woman was a good mother."[295] Because of this construction of motherhood, it was beyond the realm of understanding that a mother would act outside of this norm, and therefore she is understood as doubly evil. What is important to note here is that while child abandonment and murder are certainly acts that are denigrated in the text, the severity of that denigration is, like maternity, culturally constructed. Throughout this chapter I will demonstrate that the actions of these women, and importantly the culpability of those actions, must be questioned because interpretations of both are culturally constructed. If the primacy of the child is removed through queer maternity and the mothers in this chapter are situated as protecting themselves, we are able to reevaluate the characterizations of these women and break down the hard dichotomy of the good/evil mother. In the Middle English romances chosen for this chapter, the Lady in *Lay le Freine* puts not only her husband's line of succession into question, but also that of her

[294] See Mary Beth Rose, *Plotting Motherhood in Medieval, Early Modern, and Modern Literature* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 2017). Shari Thurer, *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994).
[295] Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 242. doi:10.1353/book.68525.

neighbor's. Octavian's mother and Donegild in *The Man of Law's Tale* seek to remove their sons' wives and children. The Sultaness in *Man of Law* completely usurps her son's line when she has him killed and takes over his position of power. Even when some of these women's actions are attempting to protect their communities, ultimately they are vilified because they put children at risk. They threaten the futurity of the system by posing a threat to the children (and rightful successors). Edelman states: "*queerness* names the side of those not 'fighting for the children.'"[296] The negative coding of these women lies in their queering of maternity, as mothers who do not fight for children.

The mother in *Lay le Freine* (hereafter "the Lady") is one such example of a mother who does not perform normative maternity; she does not protect her child, but rather is concerned solely for her own safety. The need to protect herself from being accused of adultery (and the potential displacement such an accusation would cause) highlights the anxiety women had over their position in their home community. In this Middle English romance, the Lady chooses a course of action that narratively depicts her as selfish and jealous. However, I argue that these actions are made out of fear over potential ostracization by her husband and community. These actions, I suggest, are performed out of desperation rather than cold-heartedness and should be read as such by scholars who, like me, seek to demonstrate a more complex female character within medieval romances. By reading this mother (and the others in this chapter) as desperate rather than cruel, the "blame" of the Lady's actions shifts from herself to the exogamous system which put her in a position where child abandonment seemed to be her best option.

Lay le Friene deals with issues of paternity, feminine anxiety, and a woman's security. An early fourteenth-century Middle English retelling of Marie de France's *Lay le Fresne, Lay le*

[296] Lee Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

Freine[297] opens with the wife of a knight making a hostile comment about the birth of their neighbor's twin boys: "Wele may ich man wite therfore / That tuay men hir han hadde in bour; / That is hir bothe deshonour."[298] Accusing someone of infidelity is a dangerous accusation to levy against a woman in medieval society as it threatens her position in her home and potentially her life. Furthermore, the accusation relies on displacing children from their rightful place within that family as their legitimacy is also questioned. The concept of twins being the product of two fathers is not without precedent in the period. The romance's editors state that "the tale incorporates widespread superstition that virtuous women produce one healthy child at a time and that multiple births reflect multiple fathers."[299] This concept is what the Lady utilizes in her accusations. What I find interesting is the way the narrative describes the Lady just before she makes these damning statements:

> A proud dame and an envieous,
> Hokerfulliche missegging,
> Squiymous and eke scorning
> To ich woman sche hadde envie.[300]

Given that the two neighboring knights and their wives are of similar social standing, the malicious comments apparently stem from the Lady being jealous over her neighbor having children while she remains childless. She is attempting to draw attention away from her own childlessness and onto the potential illegitimacy of the neighbor's sons. Her desperation here

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[297] Much of the scholarship on this narrative concentrates on Marie de France's *Le Fresne* or translation differences between Marie de France's work and the Middle English version discussed here. Some works that concentrate on the narrative of *Lay le Freine* include: Shearle Furnish, "Thematic Structure and Symbolic Motif in the Middle English Breton Lays." *Traditio* 62, (2007): 83-118. Mireille Séguy, "Le Passé Recomposé des Lais Bretons en Moyen-Anglais: Le Lay le Freine, Sir Orfeo, Sir Degaré, Sir Launfal et The Franklin's Tale," *Etudes Epistémè* 25 (2014), https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.207. Claire Vial, "Clothing the Debate: Textiles, Text-Isles and the Economy of Gift-Giving in Four Middle English Breton Lays," *Études Anglaises* 67, no. 1 (Jan, 2014): 3-18.
[298] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Lay le Freine," in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 70-72.
[299] Ibid, 62.
[300] Ibid, 60-64.

highlights systemic issues within the marital system where a woman fears for her position because she is unable to fulfill her "function." Within this exogamous system, the Lady's worth is predicated on her ability to reproduce. It is this uncertainty of her own position, I argue, that forces her to act in this manner. Molly Robinson Kelly analyzes Marie de France's analogue narrative *Le Fresne* as a "very female oriented story of how mother and daughter cope with social realities of fertility and lineage."[301] Robinson Kelly, however, discusses fertility in relation to Le Fresne's own sex life (which miraculously does not lead to a child out of wedlock) and the Lady's supposed "hypersexuality"[302] (as she gives birth to twins). I believe that some attention should be paid to the problem of fertility *before* the accusing Lady becomes pregnant with her own set of twins. Because the exogamous function of women is to bear a child to produce an heir, and the childless Lady has not fulfilled that expectation, her position in this community is at risk, as infertility could be a reason for a marriage to be annulled. The lack of a child and heir is of course a major concern in romances. Even in *Octavian* we see the lengths a couple is willing to go to produce a child. In that tale, after seven years of childlessness, the couple builds an abbey specifically to pray for a child:

> A ryche abbaye schall ye do make
> For our swete lady sake,
> And landis gyffe theretill,
> And scho will pray hir Son so fayre
> That we may samen gete an ayere,
> The land to welde with skyll.[303]

[301] Molly Robinson Kelly, "Sexuality and Fertility in Marie de France's *Lais*," in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme,* edited by Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 249.
[302] Ibid, 248.
[303] Harriet Hudson, ed. "Octavian," in *Four Middle English Romances* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 76-84.

However, the anxiety surrounding childlessness in *Lay le Freine* seems to be felt solely by the Lady rather than both husband and wife, as we see in *Octavian.* This anxiety would make the Lady worry about her future. In *Divorce in Medieval England,* Sara Butler explains that separation from one's husband could mean "economic vulnerability, custody disputes, and even social or familial ostracism."[304] The fear and anxiety of the repercussions of childlessness could explain the Lady's jealousy, which, I argue, to be the motivation of her slander of her neighbor. This of course does not excuse her from throwing her neighbor under the proverbial bus but shows just how detrimental the exogamous system could be to women. When their movement and purpose is culturally associated with bearing children, the inability to do so would create intense pressure and anxiety. The exogamous marriage would not be considered "successful" until a child is produced. This pressure and anxiety created by exogamy, I argue, would affect the actions and decision making performed by these women. We see the negative effects of this pressure when we examine the actions of the Lady when her position is threatened.

Once the Lady gets pregnant and gives birth, her words come back to haunt her as she delivers twin girls. She is now faced with the repercussions of the ideology that she has been unfaithful because she birthed twins, a notion that she herself drew attention to. Now, her fears are twofold–that she would either be considered an adulteress or a liar:

> Or ich mot siggen sikerly
> That tuay men han yly me by;[305]
> —----------
> And yif ich knaweleche to ich man
> That ich worth of old and yong
> Behold leighster and fals of tong.[306]

[304] Sara Butler, *Divorce in Medieval England: From One to Two Persons in Law* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 59. *ProQuest Ebook Central*.
[305] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Lay le Freine," 96-97.
[306] Ibid, 109-112.

Either of these outcomes has consequences for the lady. Perhaps most pressingly, the purported infidelity raises suspicions of the illegitimacy of her children. Legitimacy here is a major issue. Should there be doubt or question about the twins's paternity, the patrilineal system is put in jeopardy. When discussing the repercussions the neighbor's wife faces, Dollian M. Hurtig states in "'I Do, I Do': Medieval Models of Marriage and Choice of Partners in Marie De France's 'Le Fraisne.'":

> The moral code of the laity rigorously condemns adultery on the part of a woman. As *caput mansi* or head of the household, the husband of the mother of the twin boys, should he choose to repudiate his wife, would be following a convention deemed appropriate to *protect the social order* with respect to unfaithful wives.[307]

Just like with the neighbor's wife, the reality of being abandoned by one's husband, further displaced, and further ostracized from varying forms of community, is apparent when we study this scene. Even the wife in *Octavian* is even exiled for her supposed adultery. Adultery was one of the grounds for divorce during this time. Butler explains that "early Christian legislation put forward by Constantine permitted divorce for adultery but restricted it to the wife as the perpetrator."[308] Because adultery threatens the patrilineal system, it is not tolerated. The Lady understands this cultural reality and makes decisions that will protect her position rather than face accusations of infidelity.

In order to avoid the fallout that the birth of the twins would cause, the lady considers infanticide her only way out, even though she understands the immorality of the act. She recognizes that she will have to do penance.[309] Furthermore, she is distraught by her decision. We see her reaction through the eyes of her trusted lady's maid: "Sche saw her kepe this sori

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[307] Dollian M. Hurtig, "'I Do, I Do: Medieval Models of Marriage and Choice of Partners in Marie De France's 'Le Fraisne,'" *Romanic Review* 92, no. 4, (Nov. 2001): 367, emphasis mine.
[308] Sara Butler, *Divorce in Medieval England,* 15.
[309] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Lay le Freine," 114.

chere, / And wepe, and syke, and crye, "Alas!"[310] The act of contemplating infanticide cannot here be read as simple villainy. Indeed, it is complicated by the Lady's motivations: maintaining the security that her position and husband provides and protecting herself from the exogamous patrilineal system that relies on legitimate children. The culpability of the actions against the child here, I argue, does not fall on the Lady, but rather the patriarchal marital system which relies on the exchange of women. It is the system which forces the Lady to make such terrible decisions out of fear, not out of a moral failing on her part.

The Lady, I argue, is not to blame for the intrusive thoughts surrounding potentially killing her child. The blame here lies on the system which has placed her in such a position. Unfortunately, placing sole blame on a mother was quite normal. In chapter one, I discussed how women were often used as scapegoats, as holders of blame for the death of a child. This analysis was discussed in terms of failing to protect a child. The mother and father could equally place a child into a harmful situation, and it is the mother who is generally held responsible. In the introduction to *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, the editors explain that "Women were often presumed to be guilty in cases of child death—even when the death could more likely have occurred accidentally."[311] We see similar language surrounding infanticide. According to Shulamith Shahar, "Infanticide was regarded as a feminine sin and crime."[312] She explains that infanticide cases were treated differently from murder cases in which the victim happened to be the woman's child. Murdering was thought to be an act of insanity on the mother's part, rather than a nefarious premeditated act, but was still considered a major offense.[313] Yet, such a

[310] Ibid, 124-125.
[311] Eve Salisbury, et. al. eds., *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts,* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 11.
[312] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 128.
[313] Ibid, 126.

consideration is not given to the Lady for even thinking of this possibility. Yet, despite this insistence that infanticide and accidental child death are maternal issues, there are of course instances where the father is at fault. What we sometimes see regarding fathers who kill their children is a sense of "rightness," an authority over the rights of life of their children. This perhaps stems from the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, the Bible story that shows the willingness of men to sacrifice their children as proof of their faith: "Take thy only begotten son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of vision: and there thou shalt offer him for an holocaust upon one of the mountains which I will shew thee."[314] Abraham does just that, but is stopped just before he kills Isaac. Abraham's willingness to murder his son was not viewed negatively; rather it was an example of his devout faith and he is even rewarded.[315] Similarly, the late thirteenth-century romance *Amis and Amiloun* depicts a father killing his children in order to heal his best friend's leprosy.[316] Amis kills his own children, sacrificing them for the sake of his friend's life. In the end he is rewarded: his friend is cured, and his children are miraculously returned to life. Amis is rewarded because the killing of his children is viewed as a sacrifice rather than murder. Another example of a father killing (or attempting to kill) his son is Arthur. His Herod-ian action of killing all of the boys around Mordred's age in the hopes of killing his incestuously produced child demonstrates just how skewed paternal and maternal violence towards children truly is. For Arthur, this event is understated within Arthurian narratives, and he is still the heroic king of his stories. If a mother had performed such an act, she would have been villainized and certainly not depicted as heroic, good, or just. All of this is to say that depending on the context, actions, even those as immoral as killing one's child, is predicated on a cultural

[314] *Douay-Reims Bible*, (DRBO.ORG, 2021), Genesis 22.2, https://www.drbo.org/.
[315] Ibid, Genesis 22.17.
[316] See Jessie Laidlay Weston, ed., "Amis and Amiloun," in *The Chief Middle English Poets*, (Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1914, pp. 174–204.

understanding. Arthur attempts to kill his son in order to maintain his position as King and protect his life. Is this not what the Lady in *Lay le Freine* is also doing? Yet, she is narratively treated far differently from her fictional male counterparts.

Negative reactions to women taking the same level of control over the literal lives of their children is a cultural understanding. One may think that filicide was universally reviled, but it was not. We can see this cultural construction when we compare the treatment of the Lady's actions with mothers who perform similar actions in a different cultural context. I draw upon the example of the women in the Norse *Saga of the Volsungs* and will briefly point out narrative reactions within tale*,* along with evidence of contemporary medieval audiences' positive reactions, which demonstrate the mothers in the *Volsungs* are treated much more positively in comparison to both the Lady and the mothers in the Middle English romances also discussed in this chapter.

The Norse epic follows a family through several generations. In two of the main story lines, mothers kill their children. Both of the murders are enacted by these women as acts of revenge for their husbands' roles in their brothers' murders. After Signy's husband Siggeir kills all of her brothers except for one, Sigmund, Signy and Sigmund plot their revenge. This involves training Signy and Siggeir's sons to kill their father. If they are found weak, Signy orders Sigmund to kill them: "'Then take the boy and kill him. He need not live longer.' And so he did."[317] She also orders the death of her youngest children as she enacts her revenge. The other mother, Gudrun, kills her two sons for the same reason. Her husband, Atli, kills her brothers. For revenge, Grudrun herself kills her two sons and then feeds them to her unsuspecting husband. While both women attempt to die by suicide (Signy dies, but Gudrun survives her attempt), they

[317] Jessie L. Byock, ed. *The Saga of the Volsungs,* (London: Penguin Group, 2013), 42.

are not vilified. No narrative intervention by the author or the narrator marks them as such. While the recognition of the wrongness of murder is there, marking them as the antagonist and evil is not. Rather, these women seem heroic to their narrative kin group and audiences of the text, helping to defeat their evil husbands.

Gudrun's story appears in both the *Saga of the Volsungs* and in *Antál in grœlenzku*, found in the *Elder Edda*, a verse collection of Norse myths and legends written down in the late thirteenth century. In both of these works, Gudrun's own sons do not seem enraged when they realize what their mother is about to do to them. In *Antál in grœlenzku* the sons state: "Sacrifice, if you will, your children, no one will stop you; / a rest from anger will be brief, if you bring this about."[318] Similarly, in the *Saga of the Volsungs*, they say: "'You may do with your children as you like,' said the boys. 'No one will hinder you, but there will be shame for you in this act.'"[319] While it is noted that Gudrun will be shamed for her actions and out of her own shame and guilt attempts to die by suicide,[320] she is not made out to be the villain. In fact, her reception is quite the opposite. Gudrun, as Jenny Jochens argues in *Old Norse Images of Women*, was an extremely popular character.[321] Her story is retold in various texts; indeed, the name Gudrun appears in different texts for a variety of different characters. Furthermore, Jochens also attests for Gudrun's popularity through the fact that Gudrun was also a popular name for ordinary people. Jochens explains: "More than 10 percent of the entire population carried the name in 1703 according to the first Icelandic census, and today, it remains the most common female name in modern Iceland."[322] Jochens speculates that the reason that Gudrun was so popular was because

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[318] Andrew Orchard, trans. *The Elder Edda*, (London: Penguin Group, 2013). 226.
[319] Jessie L. Byock, ed. *The Saga of the Volsungs,* 104.
[320] Ibid, 105.
[321] Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 26, *JSTOR*.
[322] Ibid, 28.

of her loyalty to her natal family: "Gu∂rún [...] is admired for her more violent acts because she performs them on behalf of the men in her native family."[323] This admiration is due to Norse culture's relationship with revenge[324] along with prioritizing one's natal family over the family one marries into. Gudrun is therefore not negatively portrayed or vilified in her narratives, rather she is a popular character. On the other hand, from the medieval English perspective, a mother who caused the death of their child would be vilified.

While the Lady does not go through with killing her daughter, she does abandon her. It is the lady's maid (a woman who is of noble birth[325]) who comes up with this plan and it is this woman's reaction which further shows that this narrative is not merely the story of an evil mother. While also not a "good" moral plan, it shows the true state that the lady has put herself in. What I mean by this is, if another woman of noble birth, education, and cultural understanding also deems that the best scenario is removing the child from the home, we cannot just simplify the Lady's actions as being selfish or villainous. Rather the lady's maid's actions reaffirm that the birth of twins would have major consequences for all involved.

Child abandonment as a literary trope is something that we see in medieval romances. Yet, not all instances of abandonment are expressed in the same tone. More often than not, they have the same motivation. In *Lay le Freine* the lady is villainized for her actions and coded as selfish, mean, and jealous. On the other hand, we have romances like *Sir Degaré,* where child

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[323] Ibid, 28.

[324] It was expected and accepted in this culture that if a family member was murdered, that person would be avenged. A way to negate this violence was through *wergild* (man payment): the party who committed the murder could pay the family of the murdered person to put an end to the cycle of revenge. Another way to stop this violence would be through marriage. A woman, or a *friþwebba* (peace-weaver) would be given through marriage as a way to end a feud between families. For more information about Old Nordic legal practices as it related to murder, see *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás, the Codex Regius of Grágás, with Material from Other Manuscripts*, translated by Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980).

[325] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Lay le Freine," 121.

abandonment also takes place, but the woman is presented as a victim. In this tale, a young woman is raped by a fairy knight, resulting in a pregnancy. Her choice to abandon her child stems from a fear that people will believe that the child is the product of an incestuous relationship between her and her father. She abandons her child in order to save her own reputation as well as her father's. Both of these women's fears and extreme reactions are not unfounded; indeed Shahar explains that some "women who feared for her good name" abandoned their children.[326] Furthermore Laskaya and Salisbury explain: "shame, economic pressures, cultural biases, as well as other forces could work to encourage child abandonment."[327] Child abandonment here is not only a narrative motif, but also a cultural reality and something that would have been part of the social consciousness.

Child abandonment was a last resort for some families. Often it would have been a matter of lack of resources to care for the child. There was also an element of hope to abandonment cases where the parent(s) would hope that the child would live a better life. In *The Kindness of Strangers* John Boswell states: "The single most characteristic feature of high medieval abandonment literature is its hopefulness. It is predicated, like its ancient antecedents, on a universal belief that exposed children not only survive but flourish."[328] We see this hope reflected in both *Lay le Freine* and *Sir Degaré.* The mother leaves her child with items that would mark them as being from a high social standing in the hope that whoever finds them will care for them in a way that is befitting of their station. There is also the trope that these objects, in the end, will lead the lost child back to their parents, which, of course, happens at the

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[326] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages,* 122.

[327] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Lay le Freine," 62.

[328] John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 394, *ACLS Humanities EBook*.

conclusion of these tales. Returning specifically to *Lay le Freine,* the lady is not simply getting rid of her daughter because she wants to, but because she *must.*

I offer the comparison of the mother in *Sir Degaré* and the mother in *Lay le Freine* in order to show that the same action is read in different ways depending on narrative context and intervention regarding the moral fiber of the women in question. It is not the act itself that is coded as villainous, rather it is the women behind the act. Both mothers are reacting to the societal pressures that exogamy has placed onto women: the necessity to maintain a good name and a secure familial line, both of which offer security. I argue that the Lady in *Lay le Freine* is not coded as bad because she abandons Le Freine, but because of her callous comment, which, narratively, places her in the situation where child abandonment is seen to be her only option.

The Lady's true fault therefore seems to be her snide remark as opposed to child abandonment. This notion does have a narrative basis. Unlike the other mothers who will be studied in this chapter, the Lady in *Lay le Freine* is not punished at the end of her tale. Once Le Freine's true identity is revealed, narratively, there is not much action. All we are told is that the Lady faints and then tells her story. Both daughters are happily married and no punishment comes to the mother. In Marie de France's version we get the knight's reaction to the discovery of his second daughter and his wife's part in her abandonment:

> Unc mes ne fu[i] si haitiez.
> Quant nostre fille avum trove,
> Grant joie nus ad Deu donee,
> Ainz que li pechez fust dublez.
>
> [I have never been so happy.
> Since we have found our daughter,
> God has given us great joy,
> rather than doubling the sin][329]

[329] Marie de France, "Le Fresne," in *The Lais of Marie de France,* translated and edited by Claire M. Waters (Peterborough: Broadview, 2018), 486-489.

Here, again, the lady is not punished. We are also told that the Lady and her husband attend their daughter's wedding. The main difference between the two texts is that the knight relates the lady's actions to sin, acknowledging the wrongness of abandoning Le Fresne. Hurtig states:

> The father's reference to a sin "doubled" is somewhat puzzling. The most apparent sin that the text illumines is the abandonment of Le Fraisne by her mother. What the passage suggests is that to deny Le Fraisne her birthright a second time by refusing her the opportunity to make a suitable marriage as a daughter of a wealthy feudal lord would be a sin twice over.[330]

What Hurtig highlights here is that the Knight's main concern is securing a *proper* marriage for his *legitimate* daughter. Yet again, this shows that the concern is for maintaining the patrilineal line. The tale ends with both daughters in suitable marriages.

By abandoning Le Freine the Lady protects herself, her reputation, and her social position. Though in some ways this is a situation of her own making, it speaks to the larger issue of what medieval women are conditioned to do as part of the exogamous system and this directly affects their performance and actions. Here I am referring to the pressures that the system of exogamy places on these women turned mothers, which skews how they understand security and safety. When mothers operate within a system where they are treated as commodities, whose function is not only to reproduce, but to "legitimately" reproduce in order to maintain the line of succession, their security and positions are incumbent upon their generative abilities. Therefore, in order to protect themselves from further anxiety, displacement, and marginalization, mothers can be seen, like the Lady, going to extremes to protect the patrilineal line to avoid punishment. Yet, though she is trying to avoid questions of legitimacy, the Lady's actions are directly disrupting the patrilineal line by removing an heir. It is she who decides what will become of her

[330] Dollian M. Hurtig, "'I Do, I Do,'" 374.

husband's heir. Though they are twins, it is not stated which was born first and therefore the "rightful" heir. The abandonment of a child directly negates and disrupts the patrilineal line as it undermines normative lines of succession and situates mothers as the ones who are in charge of who remains in the household to inherit its wealth and position. While chapters 2 and 3 also deal with disruptions of succession,[331] those mothers do not directly benefit from the removal of their children. Indeed, the actions of the mothers in those chapters further remove them from positions of power. For example, Griselda is removed from her husband's home and he is set to marry another after she performs maternal grief and Archeflour completely removes her and her son from courtly life as they live in the forest and she performs maternity in isolation. The Lady and the other mothers discussed in this chapter, the mothers-in-law in *Octavian* and *Man of Law*, solidify their own standing within the familial power structure through disrupting the futurity of the patrilineal line.

Mothers as disruptors of the patrilineal line are often situated as the villains of their narratives. In Middle English romances, we see this most starkly when discussing the evil-mother-in-law trope. The disruptive forces of these mothers-in-law initially, I argue, stems from feminine anxiety that is perpetuated by exogamy. What is most interesting about the evil-mother-in-law trope is that, unlike the Lady in *Lay le Freine,* they have performed their function, a function dictated by exogamy; they have produced heirs who are ready to take over a position of authority. The anxiety here is not centered around a woman worrying over her reproductive functionality, but rather the concern here is a mother being cast aside once that function is fulfilled. The idea of further displacement is central to the feminine anxiety that exogamy causes.

[331] As discussed in chapter 2, performances of maternal grief draw attention to the fragility of the patrilineal system as the death of an heir causes anxiety over who will inherit seats of power. Similarly, the children in chapter 3 are removed from lines of inheritance, though not through their deaths. Instead, they are removed from society and raised in isolation by their mothers.

For mothers-in-law, that second displacement is imminent once the heir (most often a son) marries and a new woman takes the position that the mother-in-law once held. This is why we so frequently see mothers-in-law in romances trying to be rid of their daughters-in-law as it is the daughters-in-law who are a catalyst to their second instance of displacement. While romances portray these mothers-in-law as power hungry usurpers, I believe that we should be investigating the motivations behind their immoral actions as a method of self-preservation that is caused by exogamy's continuation of moving women in order to maintain a patrilineal system. Therefore, exogamy is the true impetus for the actions that these mothers perform. The performances of queer maternity displayed by the "evil" mothers are a reaction to the constraints placed on these women by the exogamous system. Marking them as villains, I argue, is the patriarchally driven system of exogamy's attempt to regulate the agency these mothers exude through queering maternity. This evil mother-in-law trope is exemplified in Middle English romances such as *Octavian,* Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and *Emaré.*

Octavian, a tale popular in late medieval Europe,[332] opens with the emperor, Octavian, and his wife having fertility issues and then seven years later the queen gives birth to twin boys. Octavian's mother formulates and executes a plan to get rid of her daughter-in-law immediately after the birth of her grandchildren. She tells her son that the children are illegitimate, which is more believable given the cultural understanding surrounding twins (as shown in *Lay le Freine*). Octavian's mother says:

> sone myn,
> Wete thou wele thay are noghte thyn,
> And that lykes me full ill.

[332] See Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell, "Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance." Angela Florschuetz, Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance: Mothers, Identity, and Contamination (New York: Springer, 2014). Lee Manion. "Fictions of Recovery in Later English Crusading Romances: Octavian and The Sowdone of Babylone," in *Narrating the Crusades: Loss and Recovery in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 107-145. doi:10.1017/CBO9781107415218.004.

For thou myghte no childir have,
Scho hase takyn thy kokes knave;
I will it prove thurgh skyll.[333]

The mother-in-law's plan comes to a head when she orders a man to lie in the queen's bed as she sleeps:

His modir iwhils garte calle a knave
And highte hym grete gyftis to hafe,
A thowsande pownde or mare.
To the chambir bothe thay tuk the waye
There the Empryce in childbed laye;[334]

Octavian enters the bedchamber and kills the man whom he presumes is having an affair with his wife. The queen is falsely accused of infidelity and then faces a trial where both her life and her children's lives are in jeopardy. She begs for her children to be baptized before they are put to death, and this heartfelt plea saves her life and she is sentenced to exile, aligning with the mother-in-law's plan to be rid of her daughter-in-law.

The actions of the mother-in-law in this romance are often read as villainous and certainly not traditionally maternal. Narratively, we know how the fictional characters in the tale feel about her actions as she is brutally punished and the story's conclusion: "And alle than gafe juggement, / That his modir sulde be brynte / In a belle of brasse."[335] However, interestingly, in *Octavian* there are no narrative interventions indicating that Octavian's mother is evil. Rather, the author gives a direct portrayal of her actions, with no adjectival indicators of her goodness or badness (a far cry from Chaucer's Sultaness whom he describes as a "welle of vyces"). Unlike the Lady in *Lay le Freine,* whom we are told is jealous of her neighbor, or the mothers-in-law in the *Man of Law's Tale* and *Emaré,* who are described as evil for the sake of being evil,

[333] Harriet Hudson, ed. "Octavian," 112-117.
[334] Ibid, 124-128.
[335] Ibid, 1821-1823.

Octavian's mother's motivations are not defined in the work. There is no narrative intervention that characterizes Octavian's mother beyond her actions. This ambiguity, that is largely unique to the mother-in-law in *Octavian*, allows for more scholarly interpretation. Given the ambiguity surrounding Octavian's mother's motivations and given the nature of the exogamous system, I understand her defamation of her daughter-in-law as a fear response: fear of a second displacement.

Octavian's mother has most likely already been displaced from her home to marry her husband. She gives birth to Octavian, the heir, and has seen him marry. But, now what? She has lived within Octavian's household, awaiting the birth of his children. None were born for seven years until the birth of the twin boys. Now that the queen has performed her function, providing the kingdom with heirs, it is only at this point that the mother-in-law acts. I argue that with the birth of Octavian's heirs, the mother-in-law sees her position and security slipping away. Whereas the queen's position solidifies through giving birth, the mother-in-law's position in her son's home and kingdom diminishes. She does not even appear to have a fixed position in the home she is living in. Angela Florschuetz refers to the mother-in-law as "an apparent […] guest of Octavian's."[336] The home that she has lived in, we can assume, since her marriage is no longer hers, but rather she is downgraded from queen/lady to guest. The romance, Florschuetz continues, "explicates the complexities of identity available to the medieval aristocratic mother, as well as the resultant equivocality of her political and spiritual status."[337] Her position is uncertain. While not a justification for her perfidious behavior, it is the ambiguity of her domestic and social status that perpetuates the mother-in-law's fear and, I argue, results in her

[336] Angela Florschuetz, *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance: Mothers, Identity, and Contamination* (New York: Springer, 2014), 14.
[337] Ibid, 2.

desperate actions. By removing her daughter-in-law and raising questions of the twin boys' paternity, she maintains her position within her own home. Because of the way exogamy functions, women's value diminishes after their ability to give birth. This was the mother-in-law's way of maintaining security after her societal value has been removed. Though her act of child abandonment queers maternity as the Lady places her own well being above that of her child, it is the system of exogamy that is to blame for forcing the Lady to act in this way. Donegild in *Man of Law* also queers maternity as she too is threatened by the effects of exogamy.

Evil mothers-in-law ultimately pose threats to the patriarchal system of exogamy. Not only are they not performing normative maternity, but they disrupt hegemonic systems. The non-normative maternity produced by these mothers-in-law is ultimately caused by the very system their actions are disrupting. Much like the mother-in-law in *Octavian,* the character Donegild depicted in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale,* and its counterpart *Emaré,* is staunchly labeled as one of the villains of the narratives.[338] While Donegild certainly holds power within this narrative, the power that she exudes is not to be praised, rather female power here is congruous with female villainy. However, I argue that her actions and motivations, much like the other mothers

[338] For how the Man of Law villainizes Donegild, see Susan Nakley, "Beyond the Pale: Chaucer's Other Women in English", in *Living in the Future: Sovereignty and Internationalism in the Canterbury Tales* (University of Michigan Press, 2017), 209-238, *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9336263.10. Susan Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale," *Exemplaria* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1996), https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.1179/exm.1996.8.1.59. Manish Sharma, "Vengeance and Forgiveness in Fragments 2 and 3," in *The Logic of Love in the Canterbury Tales* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 100-135. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctv2jhjx50.7. For connections between Donegild and incest, see Diane Cady, "Damaged Goods: Merchandise, Stories and Gender in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale." In *New Medieval Literatures* 17, edited by Wendy Scase, Laura Ashe, and David Lawton, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2017) 115-149. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1kgqvpb.8. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). For analysis of Donegild's letter-forging-plot, see Joan Ferrante, "Public Postures, Private Maneuvers: Roles Medieval Women Play," in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 217-218. Sarah Stanbury, "Women's Letters and Private Space in Chaucer," *Exemplaria* 6, no. 2 (1994): 271-285, doi:10.1179/exm.1994.6.2.27. For more on Donegild as villain, see Gerald Morgan, "Chaucer's Man of Law and the Argument for Providence," *Review of English Studies* 61 no. 248 (2010): 1–33. doi:10.1093/res/hgp049.

discussed here, need to be given more attention, especially how her performances are directly influenced by the exogamous system.

Donegild, much like Octavian's mother, seeks to rid her land of Custance, her now daughter-in-law, through ruining her reputation. She falsifies documents that lead her son, the king, Alla, to believe that Custance gave birth to a demon; Custance and her child are exiled out to sea. Donegild's narrative closely resembles that of Octavian's mother: she acts against her daughter-in-law after the birth of her grandchild, the catalyst to the mother-in-law being displaced a second time. However, what sets Donegild apart is that we are narratively told more of her motivations and Custance's character is more established than the culminated wife in *Octavian.* By this I mean that we are told by the narrator that Donegil has another reason along with the preservation of her own position in Allah's house to plot against Custance.

After Custance is set adrift, arrives in Northumberland, and eventually marries the lord of the land, Alla, his mother, Donegild, tries to rid her land of Custance in order to protect it. Despite being described as "ful of tirannye,"[339] Donegild's problem with Custance is her extreme status as outsider, as strange and as stranger: "Hir thoughte hir cursed herte brast atwo. / She wolde night hir sone had do so; / Hir thoughte despit that he sholde take / So strange a creature unto is make."[340] It is Custance's strangeness that causes Donegild to act. Because Custance is an outsider, she is not trusted and is viewed as marginal and even somewhat monstrous. Florschuetz explains: "Chaucer explicitly locates Donegild's hostility as a response to Custance's otherness [...] Donegild's objection to Custance's strangeness has a great deal to do with her status as a stranger without a past."[341] As such, Donegild worries about the children that would be produced

[339] Geoffrey Chaucer, "Man of Law's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry Benson (Boston: CENGAGE Learning, 1986), 696.
[340] Ibid, 697-700.
[341] Angela Florschuetz, *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance,* 108.

from the union between her son and Constance. Florschuetz continues: Donegild's "hostility arises from a specifically dynastic concern, the potential for her son's mysterious wife to hijack his lineage by producing a child marked by her own strangeness."[342] Through the letter-forging plot, Donegild rids her land and her son of Custance and her dangerous influence and, as she sees it, protects the integrity of the patrilineal line. What is interesting to note here is that while exogamy's effect on Donegild still matches that of Octavian's mother (fear of a secondary displacement when her son marries), she is also protecting her society *from* an exogamous force. She sees Custance, who is representative of an exogamous marriage, as a harmful presence and acts against maternal norms to remove Custance and to maintain the status quo of her society.

Donegild's thoughts and actions show multiple negative effects that exogamy forces upon women. Firstly, like Octavian's mother, we see how a mother's "evilness" is triggered by the emergence of a daughter-in-law and specifically a new heir. The daughter-in-law, in this case Custance, commandeers the position of lady of the house, leaving the mother-in-law without a position or purpose. The fear of being displaced and disposed of is a major factor in the mentality of these mothers, which is shaped by exogamy, who are trying to maintain their own personal sense of security. In order to protect this security they act in ways that are antithetical to mothering, like orchestrating the deaths or exiles of her daughter-in-law and grandson. Yet still, Donegild's actions are twofold, not only is she acting in defense of her own self, but also in defense of her society. She views Custance as a threat not only to her but to her land and people. It is this understanding of a marginal woman that is a prime example of the ostracism women marrying *into* a new family and often new culture can face; this rejection of outside women is a major systemic problem of exogamy. The derision that Donegild holds toward Constance is

[342] Ibid, 109.

because she is an outsider, because she moved from a foreign land into Donegild's home, and therefore can not be trusted. Donegild is protecting herself and her people from the consequences of exogamy.

Like Donegild, the other antagonist in this story, the Sultaness, is acting as a protector *from exogamy*. The Sultaness is protecting her community from Custance. However, her actions have much more detrimental effects and are much more heinous. Let me begin by stating that the Sultaness herself would not have been a product of an exogamous marriage, nor would she expect her son to make an exogamous match. According to anthropologist Jack Goody, Arabic cultures maintained endogamous ideals.[343] Rather, here, we have a woman protecting her culture from an outsider coming in to marry her son, a practice that is not the cultural norm. The Sultaness's villainy lies in her arranging the murders of her son and his supporters. Markers of villainy for the Sultaness, and the other mothers in this chapter, stem from their attempt to regain some form of agency, agency that exogamous marriages threatens, by operating as protectors. They protect against the impacts of exogamy, defending either themselves or others, like the Sultaness and Donegild. The Sultaness has motivations that lead to her queering maternity and her immoral behavior. The Sultaness fears the consequences of the effect that Custance, the outsider entering her community, is having over her son and her people. Namely, she fears the religious consequences of their nation converting to Christianity, a condition of the Sultan and Custance's marriage. The Sultaness states:

> What Sholde us tyden of this newel awe
> But thraldom to oure bodies and penance,
> And afterward in helle to be drawe,
> For we reneyed Mahoun oure creance?[344]

[343] Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 27.
[344] Geoffrey Chaucer, "Man of Law's Tale," 337-340.

The Sultaness fears not only for her soul, but also the souls of her people. It is for this reason that she is cast as the villain of this narrative. Yet, sacrificing one's child for one's religion should not have been a new concept to the contemporary audience. As mentioned earlier, The Bible story of Abraham and Isaac shows the willingness to sacrifice one's child for the sake of religion. The problem with the Sultaness is that a woman, a mother, is the one sacrificing here. Peggy McCracken explains in *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero*: "There are no Biblical examples of mothers who sacrifice their children; when a mother kills her child, the infanticide is always a murder."[345] So, not only is a mother performing a "paternal" act, but she is also a non-Christian mother, making her actions all the more sinister to the primarily Christian audience.

In part due to these cultural stigmas, the marker of the "evil mother-in-law" rarely escapes the Sultaness. But, like Octavian's mother and the Lady in *Lay le Freine,* her motivations complicate this description. She is not being immoral simply because she is innately bad; rather, she is attempting to protect her society's way of life. I propose that the reason she is portrayed as the antagonist in this narrative is not because she is a *parent* who orchestrates murder, but rather that she is a *mother* who orchestrates murder. Her actions go against everything that defines a mother in this period. Narratively, she is not even described as a woman. Florschuetz tells us that "the Man of Law severs the sultaness from femininity altogether, describing her as a virago, a serpent under or hidden by femininity, and a feigned woman."[346] By having her son killed, the Sultaness violently removes her maternal marker. This act shows that not all mothers choose to perform normative maternity. What I mean by this is that despite giving birth, encapsulating the bodily aspects of maternity, a woman can still choose

[345] Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature*) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 42, *JSTOR*.
[346] Angela Florschuetz, *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance*, 111.

not to participate in normative maternal performativity, as they do not act in ways to protect their children, just the opposite. Rather, they *queer* maternity. The act of not placing the child first and choosing not to "mother," I argue, is queering maternity.

Through queer performances of maternity, all of the mothers discussed in this chapter place the safety and happiness of their own children beneath their own personal security within their communities. There is a concern over their own well-being that an incoming daughter-in-law threatens. The cycle of exogamy causes this issue. Once the next generation comes to power, the women of the previous generation are left in a state of limbo, having fulfilled their patriarchal duty of producing heirs. It is also made clear that they are now comfortable in the homes that they presumably married into. Further, and perhaps more importantly, they have *integrated* into those communities. None of these women's plans would have worked if there was not a level of trust and support that came with their positions in that community. Both Octavian's mother's and Donegild's lies are believed, Donegild and the Lady in *Lay le Freine* have accomplices to their actions, and the Sultaness, despite not being a product of exogamy herself, convinces her followers to massacre a group of people. All of their actions are a method of protection, whether it be protecting one's self like Octavian's mother and the Lady of *Lay le Freine,* or protecting one's community like Donegild and the Sultaness. Their protective actions are all caused by exogamy: protection from the exogamous cycle of moving women or from an exogamous woman. Ultimately, their communities and personal positions depose their maternal performance. It is because they are mothers not acting in a maternal way that leads to their villainization. Rather than their deeds being on trial, I argue that it is the negation of maternal performativity that ultimately leads to the coding of these women as monstrous villains.

Furthermore, the catalyst for their actions is the threats that they face from the exogamous system.

Theoretically, the monstrous mother is nothing new. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is, according to Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed, the patriarchal system's fear of a woman's reproductive power that leads to this image of the monstrous mother. Motherhood is being weaponized by the masculine hegemony and used against mothers. Essentially if a woman acts outside of maternal performative norms, which are established by the patriarchy, then she is coded negatively. They are treated as abject, as deviant, as queer. And more to the point, following Kristevea's theory, to be mother is to be abject. Ultimately, no matter the actions, no matter the performance, that these mothers produce, abjectification has already occurred. To be abject is to be disruptive, and what the mother-in-law's actions in these romances are also doing is disrupting the patrilineal line. All of the mothers examined here are ultimately undermining the patrilineal line of succession. What these romances show readers is how fragile this system truly is. Simple actions from a woman upend the whole thing. The Lady in *Lay le Freine*'s abandonment of her daughter shows how one decision can drastically change succession and marriages (how the system maintains itself). Through her vocalized grief, her lady's maid offers to take Le Freine away. Also, her lies about infidelity cause her neighbor's heir's validity to be questioned. Lying about fidelity is also what Octavian's mother does to her daughter-in-law. By lying about Octavian's wife's fidelity, the line of succession is questioned. We know, of course, that they *are* Octavian's sons and rightful heirs, which makes this systemic fragility all the more apparent. A few sentences cause the king himself to banish his heirs and leaves the kingdom without a line of succession. Donegild acts in much the same way. The Sultaness most violently upends patrilineal succession by ordering her followers to kill her son. The words of mothers

cause huge disruptions to this patriarchal system. What this ultimately shows is how exogamy is a system that has little solidified power. Exogamy here is the cause of the mother-in-law's actions. As an exogamous wife and mother, the mother-in-law's position is never stable no matter if she does what the patriarchal system dictates: providing heirs. Therefore, she acts to protect herself and her position. One lie upheavals an entire kingdom, highlighting its instability and ultimately, its lack of power. Being the cause of this disruption by drawing attention to patrilineal instability, these mothers are further villainized. Not only is she contending with extremely negative societal reactions to non-normative maternity, but she is also a threat to the functionality of the exogamously dictated system, further placing her into the narrative of villainess. Middle English romances tend to end with the system "righting" itself. The threats to its futurity must be eliminated or suppressed and here we see the biggest threat to the system is its most successful product: the mother-in-law.

As I have explained, it is because of the system of exogamy that these women perform the actions that they do. If, then, through successful exogamy these women reject or queer maternal performance in a way that disrupts the system exogamy perpetuates, what then is successful exogamy? Does successful exogamy exist? These are the only women in this project that fully integrate into the system of exogamy, and yet, villainy is the narrative outcome. Much like Kristeva's archaic mother, the masculine system is like an ouroboros, a cycle that the hegemony has placed itself in: it fears the mother's reproductive power so it portrays the mother as abject, and because the mother is abject, they fear the mother. Exogamy here is no different. Exogamy makes outsiders of women and they become abject through maternity, these women perform as abject, marking them as queer, as disruptors of the system. Mothers are what the hegemony abjects. Yet, Edelman states: "The political regime of futurism, unable to escape what

it abjects, negates it as the negation of meaning, of the Child."[347] The systems are reproducing themselves, making them unachievable. And yet, it is through this system that we are judging these characters and marking them as the antagonists in narratives. We must rethink our reading of mothers, because the system in which they are operating will always make them abject. The systems that define maternity are enamored by the ghosts of possibility–of what things should be but never can–because of their tautological nature.

[347] Lee Edelman, *No Future,* 153.

CODA

This dissertation began as an exploration of maternal performance, an area of study that I argue is lacking due to the emphasis placed on the maternal body in medieval literature and scholarship, especially Middle English romances. Maternity is a complex gendered category no matter the time period or context. When studying medieval romances, I found it impossible not to notice the mother's position within the family unit always seemed to be at risk, from Custance and Emaré's exiles to the calumniated wives of *Octavian* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois.* This led to an investigation of exogamy's effect on the social performance of motherhood because this system of marital exchange that causes wives and mothers to feel disenfranchised after their marriages and the subsequent births of their children. Exogamy, as anthropologists such as Jack Goody and Claude Lévi-Strauss explain, is an integral part of growing societies. Goody explains that exogamy exists for "economic rather than social reasons," highlighting the emphasis on exogamous marriages being used for material gain.[348] Further, he connects the rise of exogamy in Europe to the integration of Christian teachings, such as Augustine's notion that out-marriage helps perpetuate the species and avoid the incest taboo.[349] Lévi-Strauss argues that exogamy creates social advancement "because it integrates wider groups,"[350] allowing for the spread of power and influence. Though out-marriage is a necessary practice to maintain a healthy gene pool, this system is weaponized by patriarchal powers against women, especially in the Middle Ages. As demonstrated by Gayle Rubin, women are commodified through exogamous marriages.

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[348] Jack Goody, The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 11.
[349] Ibid, 33.
[350] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Endogamy and Exogamy," in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, translated by James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 48.

Rubin explains that exogamy maintains and perpetuates "that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin."[351] They are exchanged by men and for men. It is the trade in women that negotiates power and status, exchanges monetary gains, brokers peace, and combines households or communities. The emphasis on women as tradable goods, as expendable, facilitates my criticism of exogamy in the medieval romance texts throughout this dissertation. Despite being such a normative part of medieval life, exogamous practices are often overlooked or underrepresented in scholarship on the period, both historical and literary. While exogamy or out-marriage is certainly mentioned in scholarship, an intentional focus on the system and its impacts has yet to be seen on a meaningful scale. Part of the motivation behind this dissertation is to draw attention to the importance of this systemic practice: its effect on the people who must move, on the people who must accept the outsider into their home and communities, and the people who take advantage of this system. I encourage medieval scholars, and of any time period, especially those invested in the study of family dynamics, not to discount an anthropological system that appears to be so integrated in our understanding of the functionality of marriage. Just because we understand exogamy to be necessary, especially in the avoidance of the incest taboo, we should not discount the influence that such movement has on the ones who move, who are mainly women. This dissertation demonstrates through an analysis of Middle English romances how detrimental being commodified and isolated through marriage was to women's mental and physical well-being.

Ultimately, what I discovered is that despite exogamy's attempt to disenfranchise women through a marital system which commodifies, subjugates, and makes women outsiders, the system of exogamy is still threatened by maternal power. Jessica Elbert Decker states: "In order

[351] See Gail Rubin, *Deviations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 34.

for patriarchy to function, the powerful maternal body must be repressed."[352] Decker argues that the way the patriarchy attempts to repress the maternal body is through stories and myths. She continues: "The myth also reveals that, within the male imaginary women and techne[353] are essentially linked, although this relation has been repressed in favor of male mastery."[354] Essentially, stories (created by men) highlight a masculine desire to usurp generative power and place the male at the center of creation.[355] This feeds into medieval cultural understandings of the generative process (put forth by Aristotle) in which "the male parent provides the principle of organized and necessary form while the female parent acts as a receptacle for his seed and provides the requisite matter. While both parents are clearly necessary to this process [birth], the male's role in providing form is implicitly distinguished as superior."[356] Such ideologies are methods by which masculine authorities attempt to preempt female generative power by asserting that the most vital part of reproduction belongs to male influence.

Patriarchal suppression of female generative power often comes through attempts to censor the maternal. By this I mean patriarchal emphasis on maternity as other, as abject, leads to a denigration of motherhood which allows for the subjugation of such power. Barbara Creed states: "All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about women that is shocking, horrifying, abject."[357] Ultimately, I argue, the aspect of femininity that

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[352] Jessica Elbert Decker, "Hail Hera, Mother of Monsters! Monstrosity as Emblem of Sexual Sovereignty," *Women's Studies* 45, (2016): 746

[353] Decker is pulling from the Ancient Greek definition of "techne" here, and states that techne "implies not only mechanical creation but art, craft, and the mode of intelligence proper to these designs" (743). In essence, patriarchal understanding of techne shows that it is men who have techne, especially in regards to procreation, and that women do not have such control over the reproductive process.

[354] Ibid, 746.

[355] For more on masculine usurpation of woman's generative power, see Siri Hustvedt, "What Does a Man Want?" in *Mothers, Fathers, and Others* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021).

[356] Jessica Elbert Decker, "Hail Hera, Mother of Monsters!" 744.

[357] Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," in *The Monster Theory Reader,* edited by Jeffery Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 211.

is so terrifying is her generative power. This fear leads to patriarchal connections between the maternal and the monstrous which are pervasive during the pre-modern period and beyond.[358] During this time, it was believed that the maternal body was capable of producing monsters. As Lori Schroeder Haslem explains: "In the Middle Ages, and dating back to much earlier times, fear of monstrous offspring was rooted in the belief that such occurrences were signs from God and often directly attributable to moral failings in the parents of said monsters."[359] Monstrous births also serve as a connection between the female reproductive body and monstrosity. In her work on mothers in medieval romances, Angela Florshuetz explains: "The persistent tendency to attribute monstrous births to maternal influence via menstrual contamination has its typographic parallel in the manuscript tendency to conflate *menstruum*, menstrual blood, with *monstrum*, or monster."[360] The connection between mother and monster is quite clear. In chapter one, I highlight associations between the symbolic mother and the abject. I argue that the images of mothers discussed in this dissertation are comparable to Jeffery Jerome Cohen's definition of the monster in his important work "Monster Theory (Seven Theses)." He explains: "The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence."[361] The fears, desires, anxieties, and fantasies interposed on the mother stem from the patriarchal influence. Monsters, Cohen tells us, are generated by an "intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical)."[362] In this instance, the

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[358] See Abigail L. Palko and Andrea O'Reilly, eds. *Monstrous Mothers: Troubling Tropes* (Ontario: Demeter Press, 2021), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1vbd22k. Lori Schroeder Haslem, "Monstrous Issues: The Uterus as Riddle in Early Modern Medical Texts," in *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature,* edited by Andrew Mangham and Greta Depledge (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 34-50.
[359] Lori Schroeder Haslem, "Monstrous Issues," 37.
[360] Angela Florschuetz, *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance: Mothers, Identity, and Contamination* (New York: Springer, 2014), xxiii.
[361] Jeffery Jerome Cohen, "Monster Theory (Seven Theses)," in *The Monster Theory Reader,* edited by Jeffery Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 38.
[362] Ibid, 39.

monstrous mother is created and stems from masculine anxieties about maternal power. By marking them as monsters, the patriarchy attempts to undermine maternal power through such dengration and othering. By turning mothers into monsters, patriarchal forces are trying to push mothers into marginal spaces. Yet, I argue, in many ways, this patriarchal construction backfires on the ruling gender.

Despite the negative connotations surrounding the marker of monstrosity, monsters hold power and agency. Creed sums up this complex relationship between the patriarchally made monster and female agency: "On the one hand, those images which define woman as monstrous in relation to her reproductive functions work to reinforce the phallocentric notion that female sexuality is abject. On the other hand, the notion of the monstrous-feminine challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity."[363] While being defined as monstrous by the patriarchal system is of course a problem, I and other scholars see the moniker of monster as a site of power and a tool with which to undermine masculine authority. Decker notes: "Monsters provide feminist theory with a methodological image, a model that resists the patriarchal conditioning that would produce good sons and daughters of patriarchy."[364] While monstrosity can be a tool to work against patriarchal authority, Creed's concerns over expressing reproductive functions as abject remain. However, this dissertation demonstrates a method of analyzing the marginalized mother, the monstrous mother, without a discussion of the facets of the maternal body (conception, pregnancy, and birth), but rather, performance. In discussions of the mother as monster, as disruptor of patriarchal forces, we should focus on performative aspects of maternity to highlight the agency monstrosity provides instead of more corporeal

[363] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 151.
[364] Jessica Elbert Decker, "Hail Hera, Mother of Monsters!" 755.

features, such as generation, monstrous births, maternal impression/imagination,[365] or myths such as the *vagina dentata.*[366] Although such a simple separation of body and performance does not of course solve the problematic nature of the monstrous-feminine that Creed highlights, it does allow us to focus on the agency portrayed by women who patriarchal society has already marked as monster.

By looking only at maternal performance, we are still able to complicate the social systems which impact all manners of performance. In this dissertation, I discuss how exogamy affects the way maternity is depicted in Middle English romances, and those discussions lead to a more critical examination of the cultural problems of the exchange of women and how maternity often undermines power structures which attempt to suppress maternal agency. For example, through performances of grief, as discussed in chapter 2, mothers draw attention to the fallibility of a system which relies on the birth of healthy boys for its perpetuation. Maternal grief, the suffering women face, also draws attention to power imbalances within their marriages. While a power differential between husband and wife was understood and normative at this time, maternal grief exposes the dangers of such an imbalance and creates public sympathy with the wife and leads to that public actively working or speaking against the husband, who is often their ruler in Middle English romances. Performing mothering in isolation highlights the ability of women to mother without patriarchal influence and pass down primarily feminine traits to their sons who reenter medieval society with a different set of ideals. This downplays patriarchal

[365] Maternal impression or imagination is the concept that a woman can physically alter the appearance of her child during gestation through her own will. For more information on this topic see Jessica Elbert Decker, "Hail Hera, Mother of Monsters!" 744-745. Angela Florschuetz, *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance: Mothers, Identity, and Contamination*. Lori Schroeder Haslem, "Monstrous Issues," 37-38. Jeffery Andrew Weinstock, "Introduction," in *The Monster Theory Reader,* edited by Jeffery Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 11-12.

[366] The myth that women have teeth in their vagina that must be removed.

power over the ways women mother and serves as a threat against the continuation of more masculine traits that would have been passed down paternally. Through mothers like Acheflour and the unnamed mother in *Lybeaus Desconus,* discussed in chapter 3, women's desire to remove themselves and their children from a system that negatively impacts them becomes pronounced. Lastly, images of "villainous" mothers complicates the system of exogamy because it is that system itself which produces or is culpable for the actions of these women. The culpability, I argue, of the actions of the mothers (analyzed in chapter 4) in *Lay le Freine, Octavian,* and Chaucer's *Man of Law* and its narrative counterpart *Emaré,* must be moved away from them and placed onto the patriarchal power which enacts the exchange on women. The very threat of having to relive exogamy, to be moved, retraded, and reintegrated into a new social system or family, causes these women to act in a way medieval society marks as villainous.

Typically, in the family romances, the performances of these mothers break patrilineal lines of succession. As I argue, the actions are spurred by the exogamous system; it is then the system itself which disrupts normative means of succession.[367] This directly relates to Decker's understanding of the monstrous mother as a force which undermines patriarchal perpetuity. She states: "The monster demonstrates the fragility of the patriarchal control of generation, which is why the maternal body is the most monstrous of all–because she is a monster herself, all that she produces retains a trace of her monstrosity."[368] Ultimately, if maternity is equated with monstrosity, then all performances of maternity work to subvert masculine power systems which seek to undermine and usurp feminine power. Maternity, in all its forms, draws attention to such attempts at subjugation, as we can see starkly with maternal grief, for example. Cohen states:

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[367] Such a frame can, and should, be applied to other medieval romances and tales that exist outside of the scope of this dissertation. It can also be easily applied to early modern texts, especially those with an emphasis on a villainous mother, such as Isabella in Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II.*

[368] Jessica Elbert Decker, "Hail Hera, Mother of Monsters!" 747.

"The monster's destructiveness is really a deconstructiveness: it threatens to reveal that difference originates in process, rather than in fact (and that 'fact' is subject to constant reconstruction and change)."[369] The "deconstructiveness" Cohen mentions highlights that our understanding of the mother is socially created, dictated, and enforced by patriarchal ideals. Such an awareness of the impact of the patriarchy on cultural construction of the maternal allows for us to question that construction. It draws attention to the conflicting images of the mother that are imposed by the patriarchy which creates the symbolic mother as abject monster while at the same time enforcing expectations of perfectionism onto the lived experience of real mothers.[370] It is this dichotomy that the patriarchy enforces, the monstrous mother or the perfect mother, just as in medieval romances we are presented with the passive/good or the evil woman.

The patriarchal construction of the maternal is contradictory and tautological. By design, this construction attempts to reduce the maternal, especially the maternal body, into the marginal monster. Yet, to be a monster is to have agency, to have the power to instill fear and anxiety. This circular logic is the patriarchal fallacy which undermines its power: the patriarchy fears maternal powers of generation so they mark them as monster to lessen that power, monsters, then instill fear which gives them power. Despite the agency afforded to the maternal monster, however, it is still a negative term and a way to undermine women. What we are left with is a

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[369] Jeffery Jerome Cohen, "Monster Theory (Seven Theses)," 47.

[370] In our modern world, mothering ideals are prevalent and widely discussed, so too are women's anxieties and fears surrounding their inability to meet such standards. This topic is the subject of physiological and sociological studies along with many self-help books. These texts work against the patriarchal enforcement of the "perfect" mother and seek to deconstruct such ideals. For more on the interconnectedness between mothering and perfectionism see Barbara Almond, *The Monster Within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), *ProQuest Ebook Central.* Rima Apple. *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), *ProQuest Ebook Central*. Jessica Grose, *Screaming on the Inside: The Unsustainability of American Motherhood* (New York: Mariner Books, 2022). Linda Rose Ennis, *Intensive Mothering: The Cultural Contradictions of Modern Motherhood* (Chicago: Demeter Press, 2014), *ProQuest Ebook Central*. Judith Warner, *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005).

minority group working against the central system of power in order to carve out space and agency for themselves by using the power system's means of marginalization against itself. In other words, while the patriarchy will continue to adjust the negative ways mothers are understood and discussed for their own gains, in turn, mothers will subvert such attempts through the performance of maternity.

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