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Who can be a hero within the Chivalric Code when the ideologies are rooted in misogyny and cast aside those who do not fit into the narrative? Giambattista Vico's concept of heroic ethos aids in addressing how to rework the chivalric code of medieval heroes central to Arthurian literature by expanding the known "literary canon" to include female counterparts as something more than clichéd roles such as the damsel in distress, the dutiful lady/wife, and the old hag. Contemporary literary criticism of medieval texts facilitates new concepts that become inclusive to those initially deemed othered within this period by pushing the boundaries of what is known to lend a voice to the female perspective. Authors such as George R. R. Martin revitalize archaic stereotypes to build believable worlds that pay homage to earlier works of inspiration while providing a place for female heroes to be present and showcase strength and resilience in a predominantly male society.

How can trauma make a psychological break within a subject through literary works? The idealization of what it means to be a "good woman" is problematic. It affects the mental instability of how women are portrayed in works like Chaucer's Legend of Good Women and religious-based narratives like Esther. The desired attribute of subservience through the male gaze causes harm due to a desire to achieve the perfect image to fit into misogynistic societal based formalities despite the unrealistic standards. Misogyny uses gaslighting and trauma as tools to create these standards of subservience and an air of weakness in women to satisfy the male ego for dominance.

HEROISM IN THE CHIVALRIC CODE: FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN

AND

TALES OF QUEENS AND GOOD WOMEN: RELIGION AND SOCIETAL-BASED

TRAUMA

by

Camille A Smith

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Approved by

_____
Dr. Amy Vines
Committee Chair

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family, friends, and teachers, who believed in me and inspired me to pursue my dreams. Although no longer of this world, I mostly want to thank my grandfather, Ralph Cole, who meant so much to me and inspired me to become an educator. Secondly, I am genuinely grateful for Dr. Amy Vines and committee members' guidance along with my parents' support and encouragement. I cannot name everyone who has helped me on this long journey, but I have learned a lot from this experience and aspire to achieve.

Thank you to my family and teachers.

This thesis written by Camille A. Smith has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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HEROISM IN THE CHIVALRIC CODE: FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN

The world of *Game of Thrones* is a fantastic place with spellbinding pages that ignite the

reader's medievalist imagination. How George R. R. Martin established the social formalities

and expectations which govern society within the stories is intriguing but not as fascinating as

the various depictions of women and their roles. I will analyze how women are portrayed and

viewed in society throughout the first book, *A Game of Thrones*, and the adaptation in

contemporary media will be cross examined in light of Giambattista Vico's concept "On the

Heroic Mind." Furthermore, the influences and impact of women in Modern Medieval Literature

through Martin's use of female archetypes will be explored, along with how they contribute to

the female-led roles within medieval literature and even medieval fantasy.

The research seeks to address heroism within contemporary fantasy with medieval

literary tropes by exploring its functions within the text and the effects of its use in expanding the

known "canon" of contemporary fantasy with medieval literary tropes by lending a voice to the

female perspective. The way heroism is depicted in *A Song of Ice and Fire* compared to

Medieval epics and tales is fascinating due to having more dynamic roles outside of the

stereotypical for female leads and paying homage to older Medieval heroic tropes, such as those

found in Arthurian Literature. The core females created by Martin include Cersei Lannister,

Daenerys Targaryen, Margery Tyrell, Sansa Stark, and Arya Stark. The inclusion of diverse roles

for females can be applied to Martin's work by equipping the rhetorical lens of heroic ethos

described by rhetorician Giambattista Vico.

Giambattista Vico was a rhetorician from Naples, Italy who lived from 1668 – 1774.

Vico was a scholar and author from 1699 till his death in 1744 and his most famous work was a

series called *New Science* (Vico 1983). Vico believed that the world and history were rooted in barbarism and that the imagination played a key role in creating a bridge between the contemporary and historical world in order for man to rationalize societal expectations set in place by man's interpretations of God's will (Vico 1984).[1]Within this concept, imagination can act as a gateway to exploring and build upon pre-established principles, creating the foundation for new ideas to essentially have a seat at the table and make their way into history by incorporating lines of thought that were not initially present. For example, think of the myth surrounding Spartans; according to excavations by Medicine Anthropologist Theodoros Pitsios, Spartans did not throw unwanted newborns off Mount Taygetus. The notion behind Spartan barbarism could have been a strategic move by the two kings and governing council members to enhance the ideas behind the warrior attributes that the culture highly regarded. (Pitsios 2010)

The concept of heroic ethos, also referred to as the heroic mind, was an extension of his ideas on barbarism by having man create a name for himself in order to make men/them immortal through history. According to Vico, the heroic mind is described as a way for man to create a centralized vision of themselves as the core being, aside from God, to establish their name in history by making themselves the key hero in their own lives.(Vico 1976 p. 888 -889) By examining Martin's use of women through the lens of heroic ethos, others can adapt the ideas of people creating heroes out of one's own image into contemporary work. Vico's concept allows newer authors to contribute diverse lines of thought outside of the fundamental roles for women within contemporary fantasy with medieval tropes that closely align to misogynistic ideas which appeal to a more progressive approach to women in literature. Heroic ethos enables

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[1] See Alexander Bertland's article in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* for more information regarding Giambatissta Vico's theories on *New Science,* including a brief synopsis of "The Barbarism of Reflection."

the core values found in medieval literature to expand and grow like a living being, thus, creating

a gateway for more inclusive roles by retelling or reframing the ideologies to include a broader

audience and female inclusivity.

      The idea of heroism is nothing new to narratives but has been primarily male dominant

for centuries. Consider, for instance, the many tales heard as a child which enact such a heroic

role. Most of the adventures and ideas of saving come from a male gaze that caters to what "boys

should watch and consume versus girls." Take, for instance, religious texts similar to the Bible;

women within this specific construct are praised for obedience and meekness, which translated

over to other texts, such as the story of *Esther*[2] and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Legend of Good

Women*[3]. In Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women: Legend of Cleopatra,* Cleopatra's narrative is

changed from the cunning Queen to a love struck woman who is only as good as her male

partner. The tales by Chaucer continue with moral base narratives to teach principles that help

create the stereotypical male's vision of a dutiful woman. Even in classic Disney fairy tales, the

princess typically is saved by the handsome knight or prince who braves cruel and harsh odds to

save the damsel in distress. The same trope holds true for many texts in the Middle Ages, such as

Arthurian literature and Chaucerian texts, where the women are often maidens who need

rescuing or, in some cases, cruel and sinister spiteful women who are demonized for their

wickedness -- typically portrayed as the mothers-in-law or witches Though, in some instances,

women do portray heroic aspects like the biblical story of Judith. Judith was said to be a

beautiful woman and used her beauty to help overthrow the regime that had taken over her

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[2] See the book of "Esther" in the Bible for an informative parallel on lessons taught to women within a religious context.

[3] See Geoffery Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* for an understanding of a collection of tales of women from the 13th Century and how they are viewed and taught to behave within societal standards during that period.

people's land. She used her abilities as a woman to go undetectable within the enemy camp and beheaded their leader. The difference between Judith's story and other narratives involving women are the amount of coverage given within society. Judith created a name for herself but is not always taught on the same level as more submissive women in the Bible, such as Ruth, Sarah, and Esther, who are praised for their selfless obedience.(DRB)

When thinking of heroism as an overall trope, the central ideas which make up the core framework are commonly based on fundamental structures seen in chivalry through Arthurian literature and classical epics such as Gilgamesh, Beowulf, etc. These primarily male-dominated roles exclude others who do not fit into the mold of who can be a hero or have a heroic role within this time frame in literature. In *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature*, Mary Beth Rose, a Professor of English with a focus in Early Renaissance Drama and early modern gender studies at the University of Chicago, remarks on the outdated concepts of chivalry, stating that "women—or cultural conceptions of the female—are excluded from the kind of behavior and event that both form the heroic subject and characterize his actions" (Rose 1). The act of excluding women in contemporary media from being able to act heroically according to chivalric code is not uncommon despite tales of heroic feats accomplished by women in other literary pieces. Martin employs common maiden tropes and women who are outright demonized for stepping out of societal expectations through his perspective of the Middle Ages. Martin goes further to create female heroes to embody heroism within a male's perspective that is not overtly sexist but still appeals to the male gaze which allows for some inclusivity for women within contemporary media. Within medieval texts, such as Arthurian literature, women who sought roles beyond the dutiful or wretched are often shamed into a type of boxed narrative by the author, usually written by men. Even classic maiden tropes, such as the

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iconic Guinevere, the Queen in Arthurian literature, created a type of systematic bubble trope, in which they serve to advance the heroic male's narrative. Women become plot devices, relegated to background characters to appease the male ego and fulfill chivalric notions of masculinity.

However, modern literature has found ways to reintroduce the untold stories and tell them from a female perspective. Due to the sole narrative of heroic masculinity, contemporary authors take older texts and create depth by adding inclusive storylines to sidelined characters. Take, for instance, the reimagining of the story behind Guinevere in a contemporary print. The author, Kiersten White, draws from influences present within one of Martin's characters by adding depth to the possibilities of how their tale could end. The author utilizes the Arthurian source material but creates a version of Arthur's Queen from the female perspective in a way that makes her motives and deception more appealing to a feminine heroic point of view. In the newer renditions and even modern adaptations of the Arthurian stories, Guinevere is interpreted as a strong-willed woman who understood her purpose within the courts but used deception as a tool to protect those she loved. Her betrayal of Arthur becomes justified, as he is a neglectful husband. The sincerity of Lancelot being present and aware of Guinevere's desires allows for the reader to rationalize her love the knight. The author establishes a fake love triangle by adding modern elements that show Guinevere as a type of spy who had to marry Arthur out of duty.[4] In knowing her role, she had to choose between love and duty, similar to Martin's character Jon Snow who had to choose between his love for a woman and his commitment to the Night's Watch. In chapter 55 of *Game of Thrones: A Storm of Swords*, the final nail in Jon Snow's love

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[4] See the books *The Guinevere Deception* by Kiersten White and *Cursed* by Thomas Wheeler for a reimagining of classic Arthurian stories from a different perspective. White uses Guinevere as a way to show women using cunning knowledge of the courts to gain leverage and protect those she loves. Wheeler reimagines the entire story of Arthur by replacing Arthur with Nimue.

life is placed due to Ygritte's death at the battle of Castle Black between the Night's Watch and

the wildlings. Martin writes:

> He found Ygritte sprawled across a patch of old snow beneath the Lord Commander's Tower, with an arrow between her breasts. The ice crystals had settled over her face, and in the moonlight it looked as though she wore a glittering silver mask. The arrow was black, Jon saw, but it was fletched with white duck feathers. Not mine, he told himself, not one of mine. But he felt as if it were. (Martin 622)

The appearance of Ygritte with an arrow presumably to her heart highlights how Jon Snow chose

duty over her earlier in the series. It signifies a loss of love and keeping this love in the past in

order to move on and perform duties expected of him as a member of the Knight's Watch. Like

Jon Snow, White's reimagining of Guinevere consists of a constant battle with duty as a spy,

duty as a Queen, and duty to her love toward Lancelot without a current solution. The idea of

Lancelot meeting the same fate as Ygritte is still unclear, creating a space for White to show an

alternative line of thought to Martin's ending of "love or duty."

According to Giambattista Vico, the theory of the heroic mind incorporates the idea of

how progressive learning through education and advancement, even advancements in literary

tropes, can create a hero out of oneself. (Vico "Heroic Mind"). Vico states:

> [It] is expected of you that you exert yourselves in your studies in order to manifest the heroic mind you possess and to lay foundations of learning and wisdom the blessedness of the human race; "Hero" is defined by philosophers as one who seeks ever the sublime…the hero generates for himself an immortal name. (888)

When applied to medievalist themes, such as those found in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*,

Vico's concept of the heroic mind helps rationalize the reframing of problematic and outdated

ideologies without directly critiquing previous works. By taking the ideas, tropes, and

fundamental understanding of medieval literature and the aspects attributed to the creation of the

period's unattainable embodiment of chivalry and heroism, contemporary media can create

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fantasy genres that pay homage to stereotypes and be seen as plausible by patrons. Chivalry within the realm of this text is constantly being rewritten with respect to who can be a knight and how a knight and other heroic figures display courage, honor, and nobility. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, chivalry is described as "polite and kind behaviour that shows a sense of honour, especially by men towards women" and "(in the Middle Ages) the religious and moral system of behaviour that the perfect knight was expected to follow." (OED) Think about Arthurian Tales and *Le Roman de la Rose*, which are commonly told, and how they can be considered a standard for the chivalric code. When people think of chivalry, the first images to come to mind are usually the Knights of the Round Table and the crusader-like figures. The latter upholds everything that is considered virtuous and moral.

Vico's theory allows for newer authors, such as George R. R. Martin, to contribute to these ideas constructed from the same period in time due to extensive research and education based on the author's new story concept. The critic of bastardization towards medieval literature and culture especially in terms of sexual violence is appalling but highlights Vico's concept of barbarism and heroic ethos. The cruelty enacted within *Game of Thrones* highlights how history perceived this period in time, similar to the myth surrounding Spartans throwing unwanted newborns off of a cliff. People tend to see the cruelty of the past and use imagination to bring forth the vile deeds that may have not been as prevalent as one initially thought. Yet, through heroic ethos, people like Martin can adapt this sense of barbarism within their writing and draw upon popularly imagined medial tropes to place themselves inside a world that they control in order to be a hero in some shape or form.

In order to understand the place of women within these texts, the standard ideas of heroic ethos must be understood first, and the way in which the ideas call upon chivalry to be used as a

tool to set the bar beyond the reach of many. Heroic ethos calls upon an individual to be courageous and uphold leadership qualities considered exemplary among the commoner. When understanding the practices of chivalry, Pavlac, who composed a book of essays about *Game of Thrones*, states:

> [C]hivalry is both a noble ideal to be lived up to and a set of practices central to aristocratic life and the culture as a whole. This double nature can create problems when discussing chivalry…[b]ut all kinds of warriors manifested chivalry to some degree or another. If they failed to live up to the cultural expectations of knighthood, they were blamed for not being chivalrous. (Pavlac 47)

The code of chivalry is arduous due to its high expectations. These standards defined a fine line between those deemed worthy and those not worthy enough to meet the societal ideals of chivalry. However, women could not meet these standards set by society to be knightly and chivalric. Martin's highlight of Brienne of Tarth's struggles shows how even when meeting the performative expectations of the chivalric code, it is still unobtainable for women if it is solely based on archaic ideologies. The central idea of a hero is perpetuated by heroic ethos, where an individual who has the utmost chivalric attributes is glorified and rewarded for his courage. Yet, for many women within medieval texts, the act of being chivalric is not enough to land them a title other than a "fair and just maiden" or, if they are lucky enough, to receive the honorable status of sainthood for their "good nature." Martin creates his characters intentionally, but they work against the restrictions of contemporary chivalry by fighting harmful stereotypes. By equipping heroic ethos, Martin shows how women can be heroic under the chivalric code despite the pressure and odds of conforming.

Subsequently, the high level of performativity expected of women during medieval times is highlighted in Martin's *Game of Thrones* through the various power dynamics of the noblewomen. By challenging outdated stereotypes, Martin revitalizes the ideas by showing a

spectrum of women and their power dynamics at play. Take, for instance, the character of Cersei Lannister versus Arya Stark. In both the books and the tv series, an expectation for women like Cersei and Arya is engrained at a young age to be used as tools to expand their house's power and claim to landholdings. Nevertheless, unlike most of the older medieval texts, Martin works to reframe the power dynamics of his female characters while maintaining a certain level of historical expectation and accuracy.

Historical research does not enable an author to replicate medieval texts, nor would most want to. Rather, historical research enables Martin to create a plausible narrative to showcase new ideologies that did not exist in previous works within the same genre or period. The believable framework of Martin's series incorporates the fundamental "chivalric values" and ideologies that were present within this period. However, Martin expands the chivalric qualities to include depictions of women allowing for more character development and complexity besides the surface-based persona that are seen in medieval literature, such as reducing the queenly Cleopatra to a lovestruck woman in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. Martin's expansion of the roles of women shows that the problematic use of women in medieval texts, such as the depiction of women in Saint's Lives and Arthurian literature, can be reworked. He utilizes common maiden tropes and the theory of exchanges in a way that promotes power and even upheaval throughout the series. By drawing on sources already present in medieval literature, Martin proves that people within the present see only the barbarism of the time period similar to Vico's correlating theory of barbarism. Martin creates a new experience for readers by providing multi-perspective personas not just for men but women, but allows for violent delights to take place within the narrative in order to give a sense heroic deed to the lines of thought. The multi-perspective personas allow Martin to implement Vico's heroic ethos by creating various

versions of his heroic self or idea of a hero to enact this game for power where everyone within the storyline sees themselves as either a hero or villain. Martin provides a slow buildup of the characters reaching their full potential. By implementing various versions of self, writers like Martin can change the narrative of how the different character dynamics are supposed to function within older tropes and revitalize them to create something new.

Martin is not the only contemporary writer revitalizing and revising medieval tropes. Victoria Aveyard who created the *Red Queen* series by melding romance, history, *Beowulf*, and Arthurian literature. Aveyard's leads fir into a similar category to Martin 's characters Arya, Daenerys, and Brienne of Tarth. Martin also creates historical connections to the ways his female characters portray themselves in order to create a stronger foundation to allow for series, such as Aveyard's series, to have a place within the subcategory of contemporary medievalism. The connections to medievalism are important to this subcategory in contemporary literature because they highlight Vico's concept of barbarism due to the past and present being used together to create something unique. The new creation, mixing medieval literary elements into modern literature, enthralls readers, enabling them to place themselves in the narrative to either heroes or villains.

Martin's research allows for him to play with the narrative in creating a world of his own desire. By adding a few truthful elements and exaggerated medieval literary tropes, Martin provides a basis to create a story of his choosing that seems real despite the fantastical makeup by displaying fictitious medieval events in *Game of Thrones*, adapting performative roles, and expanding contemporary fantasy with medieval literary tropes. The reframing of women and highlighting of their significant roles through the brutality of the narrative's court system show their wit within the society even if the society deems them incapable due to their gender. Think

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of how Martin's character, Margery Tyrell, uses the maiden tropes of love and feigned naivety to gain the upper hand within the system to become the future Queen. A maiden is described as a young unmarried woman who is fair and a virgin. (OED) The maiden trope's characterization revolves around a youthful woman who is pure and fair, often used as a plot device to move the narrative forward for the male counterpart. The expansion and closer examination of the schemes and power plays of the women within the book rework the notions of preceding texts by focalizing these power dynamics. Martin is narrow minded in his characterization of some women, but he does an excellent job of bringing medieval tropes to the forefront. When looking at women through the male gaze, Martin does a great job of paying homage to older archaic ideas while exploring how women's motives can be used across the board to even the odds or play men to their advantage.

Game of Thrones enchants the reader and provides an escape from reality into a fictious past, capturing the complexity of medieval life in a way that historical texts often flatten. Readers may often find themselves in the characters' shoes and enjoy the humor and wit of playing the game. The game within the context of the book is similar to the games Chess and Risk in the idea of conquering your opponents and creating allies in order to gain control of the Iron Throne. The central point of Vico's Heroic Ethos is that a person creates an ideology that fits into a narrative of the person's choosing. Martin accomplishes this by essentially playing his own version of Risk, with his characters coming to life and conquering one another. By reworking and reframing the game and genre to include more than just his male characters as the primary source of power, Martin is rewriting the game and the formal ideologies of who can be chivalric.

The reworking of chivalry and who can be deemed as chivalrous is different from initial

perceptions of the original chivalric code, which often limits women from participating in these

practices. The exclusivity of these practices is highlighted in the hardships for his female

characters to gain recognition from the courts and outsiders for their skills and cunning abilities

beyond the surface-level tropes that were inflicted on many women within this period. For

example, Arya Stark blatantly refuses to be a dutiful lady, unlike her sister, who romanticizes the

notion of becoming the perfect lady a knight or king would desire. Drawing upon Vico's

theoretical framework enables Martin to expand the canon of chivalry via the use of imagination

by creating the female characters that embody not only older tropes such as the maiden in

waiting but also the warrior queen.

Martin reimagines who can be a knight by reworking the characterization and creation of

his female knight. The portrayal of Brienne of Tarth exceeds common expectations of what

chivalry is and who can enact the persona of a true knight. She is described mainly in a mocking

tone due to women's perceived place within the chivalric code, often called "Brienne the

Beauty" in chapter 22 of *A Clash of Kings* and "Brienne the Wench" in chapter one of *A Storm of

Swords*. Despite the resistance received towards her character from fellow knights and the

"masculine" personas she adapts, she displays attributes that exceed expectations placed on the

chivalric code. Martin's insistence on showing the trials and hostile environment for this

character to be accepted among other knights highlights the misogynistic aspects of chivalry and

how it can be displayed. Brienne of Tarth's characterization of knighthood is perceived as

othered by fellow knights and readers due to her not belonging within the stereotypical ideas

around knighthood. Despite odds being against Brienne, the character adapts and gains

recognition among the ranks of peers. Portraying a women rise to the chivalric code and often

best those deemed the most knightly, sheds light on the situation and how women can take on a knightly persona without the performative masculinity to contribute to the code of conduct.

Martin's research on the Wars of Roses allows him to show the different aspects of how nobility used chivalry and a series of exchanges to gain the upper hand. Like *Game of Thrones*, the Wars of the Roses were among the nobility who sought to gain more power through deception and assassination. The war changed England through the death of many aristocrats and the succession of the royal family (Hicks 6 – 8; 39). This conflict also resulted in a series of exchanges, also known as the romance of exchange, which is most commonly seen in older texts, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where a young knight must undergo arduous tasks to gain favor among the challenger and the court to gain nobility and power (Trigg 254). When the series of exchanges is enacted upon women, the most common use is strengthening alliances to better someone's current situation or gain more power.

The series of exchanges is also used as a tool within *Game of Thrones* to create alliances through the policing of women and their bodies and bloodline. The parallel that women are not seen as in control yet hold power to create the illusion of control for their male counterparts is intriguing. The illusion of control stems from various points throughout the series. Still, it always has a central puppeteer who orchestrates a beautifully crafted and witty scheme that grants power to one person or another. The characters feed off chaos and control within the series of exchanges to have a higher ground above the masses, while the common folk are orchestrated to love one king or queen and hate another. For example, in similar ways, Sansa Stark, Margaery Tyrell, Cersei Lannister, and Daenerys Targaryen are utilized within the series of exchanges to give their household more power.

When looking at the various dynamics at play among the women in *Game of Thrones* and their role in the series of exchanges, the first person to examine is the stereotypical trope of fair maiden/ damsel in distress. The romanticized attitude of the fair maiden, which is prominent in older medieval texts, is embodied in the character of Sansa Stark. Sansa is often seen as the perfect woman to represent her house within the series of exchanges, and her approach to romanticism is archaic yet pays homage to the feminine tropes of older texts. For instance, at the beginning of both the book and television adaptations of *Game of Thrones*, Sansa is seen sewing, an ordinary skill for women to hold within that period due to the duties and expectations of keeping the house. Her expectations for her life are far from reality, and she is frequently used as a pawn in order to advance a house's rank. Sansa meets the preferred level of performative expectations and is often seen as the embodiment of what a proper noblewoman was to be during that period. Sansa is described to have the attributes needed within the series of exchanges. However, her naïve belief in romanticized chivalric ideas opens the door to many punishable acts that are often out of her control, such as being forced to look upon her father's head on a spike. When coming to terms with the brutality of the circumstance, Martin keeps the maiden trope for Sansa by dramatizing her anguish in a Disney fairytale fashion. Martin writes:

> *Perhaps I will die too*, she told herself, and the thought did not seem so terrible to her. If she flung herself from the window, she could put an end to her suffering, and in the years to come the singers would write songs of her grief. (Martin 620)

Her character does resist the idea of dying, the way she proceeds in romanticizing her own anguish is telling of her stereotypical trope. The need to fit into the societal standards expected of her causes the fantasy to crumble and be shown as it truly is, dark, uncaring, and unloving. Yet, her character continues to cling to the hope of romance and fairness. This romantic idea is different from the performative roles, and even the rejection of specific roles held by the other

women within the book and shown because the illusion of formalities has been lost upon those who no longer or never wanted to accept the fantasy.

Compared to Sansa's romantic approach to life, Cersei Lannister and Arya Stark play their roles in a way that gives them some power and leverage within this world. As the Queen, Cersei uses manipulation tactics and her family name to maintain a claim on the throne for herself and her children. She is often seen using her wits to get ahead in the game and plays the role of dutiful queen mother very well at the beginning of the series. In one instance, Cersei is seen conversing with a young Sansa on the expectations and duties needed to maintain a place among the courts. Cersei explains that a woman should use more than just charm and beauty to get ahead in a man's world, implying that wit and knowledge of her sex are handy tools for getting what she wants. In Martin's work, Cersei is perceived as the demonized woman, similar to older tropes where women who think are often seen as the bad guy. Instead, it exposes how women used manipulative tactics in the same fashion as men but were seen more sinisterly within the courts. Cersei's character does not shy away from the horrid use of women within the system. She uses ideas of chivalry to her advantage to make the system work in her favor and manipulate the board.

Arya Stark is a striking contrast to both Sansa and Cersei; she is of strong, noble bloodlines similar to Cersei and is sister to Sansa. Arya is described as a tomboy who is mainly overlooked as a source of family expansion due to her sister, Sansa. She rejects all forms of expected performative expectations set in place for a lady and spends most of her time dressed as a male to seek recognition outside of what society states. Arya constantly refutes her father's idea of her being a proper lady by speaking of how she wants to learn the art of dancing (swordsmanship), similar to her brothers and other knights. When talking with her father, Arya

states: "I don't want to be a lady!"(Martin 185). Her rejection of the societal expectation of becoming a lady does not take her father by surprise even though he briefly pushes back on the notion of not accepting her place in society. Unlike the treatment of Brienne of Tarth, Arya is not blatantly an outcast due to her lack of desire to play her part in the series of exchanges among men and finds teachers who are more than willing to teach her. But– Arya has often butted heads with her sister and even Cersei at the beginning of the series due to being unwilling to participate. Martin places his women on a spectrum when it comes to tropes, with Sansa being archaic and stereotypical and Arya being more modern and outspoken on what she wants.

The performative aspects and even the rejection of specific performative roles expected of the individual hinder the series of exchanges in which men can progress their conquests over policing the woman's body. The refusal of a woman to reject her "intended purpose" based on the ideologies of that time is detrimental because she no longer holds value in the eyes of society. The rejection of these societal formalities is essentially a progression in Medieval Literary influences due to the inclusivity of allowing others to participate in exclusively male-dominated roles. When speaking about the female body and the level of performativity which goes into the expectations, Judith Butler states:

> To do, to dramatize, to reproduce, these seem to be some of the elementary structures of embodiment. This doing of gender is not merely a way in which embodied agents are exterior, surfaced, open to the perception of others. Embodiment clearly manifests a set of strategies of or what Sartre would perhaps have called a style of being of Foucault, "a stylistics of existence." (Butler 521)

The characters Martin creates, demonstrate how the original performative aspects of what it means to be a woman are based on this idea of womanly embodiment. Womanly embodiment is the abstract idea of what society expects of the female and her role within the community. (Rose xix; 26 - 30) In Martin's books, he reframes the known embodiment and body politics of women

during the Middle Ages by giving more depth and life to some of the characters and their interactions within a series of exchanges, similar to most Arthurian knights and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Take, for instance, the character arc of Daenerys Stormborn Targaryen, who was initially sold in the series of exchanges to allow an alliance that strengthened her house.

In Vico's heroic mind, the idea of becoming one's own hero is fascinating because it allows the subject to immerse themselves in roles that were otherwise not present. Martin's ability to closely examine the female archetypes taking a role in the forefront of this society to balance out the power struggle aids in reframing how the audience visualizes the inner workings of the power dynamics of his fictional world. According to the book *The Philosophy of the Imagination in Vico and Malebranche*, Vico's idea of the heroic mentality is built upon passions that equip imagination as a critical tool. Vico states:

> The hero is a visionary; his thoughts are linked to a few images of a religious character, the myths, which overtake and inflame the mind. The hero thinks always thoughts of facile comprehension, for which reason, he generally possesses a great persuasive ability. The persuasion of the hero originates always from the understanding that the hero has of himself, because there is no persuasion of others without the conviction of oneself. (Fabiani 284)

To a certain extent, Vico's concept is similar to Martin's characters, Daenerys Targaryen and Arya Stark. They often think back to heroes they have idolized as an example to get what they desire most. Daenerys Stormborn Targaryen, also referred to as the Dragon Queen, is one of the most famous characters in the series and views herself as the rightful heir. Daenerys is said to have similar chivalric attributes to her oldest brother Rhaegar who was said to be noble, valiant, honorable, and beloved by many. She uses persuasion and charm as tools to gain allies and support for her claim to the Iron Throne and even goes through a period of self-discovery to find her "inner dragon." She heeds warnings wisely but considers herself the savior and heroine of the

narrative, similar to the god-like complexes seen in most chivalric and knightly characters in older literary pieces.

However, in the beginning, the performativity expected of her is very similar to how women were perceived as pawns in the series of exchanges to gain resources and allies. As her narrative goes further, Daenerys's performative nature is aligned with goals that are more warrior queen than dutiful maiden to bring alliances for her family. She maintains a certain level of due respect through the first part of the series to highlight the nobility of her origins and gain favor among people to not upset the male ego. In accepting her role and rising above expectations, Daenerys can accomplish what Cersei could not, which is to become the one who holds power within the male-dominated society. The idea of her being the dragon, a mythical creature with immense power, is attractive due to the parallel of women having little to no success in gaining that level of agency and respect among their male counterparts – yet she succeeds in achieving that goal.

Martin's character Arya goes through a similar journey of self-discovery to find her inner heroic self, someone younger Arya would aspire to emulate. Arya would not romanticize the biopolitics of society and the outdated tropes of fair maidens like her sister. Still, she does romanticize the warrior queens before her time (the Targaryen bloodline before Daenerys). The idea of a strong woman being the hero is a primary driving force for her character arc. Arya creates her own level of performativity within this narrative to be the woman she envisions as a true hero, following her idea of chivalry and knighthood. The character's ideas of knights are unmistakably different from her sister, Sansa, who envisions the knight and damsel in distress trope with a happily ever after ending. The character arc of Arya's journey to becoming a warrior in her own right is fascinating and takes Vico's understanding of the heroic mind and being one's

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own hero into practice by actively pursuing her desired heroic archetype. Martin's ability to bring the modern ideals of heroism into Arya's character helps create a new framework for how women can be included in roles of knighthood.

Understanding *Game of Thrones* as a base to rework pre-existing medieval concepts and modernize the material by going in-depth with the power dynamics among the key players enables others to see themselves rise above stereotypes and immerse themselves within a medieval fantasy literature. According to Vico:

> The heroic society diffuses the passions within its body in order to support the structure that binds and keeps it together, but, on another hand, with the conatus, is inclined to limit the intensity of the passions. An incontrollable passionfulness dissolves any possible social and emotive connection, while some passions like military valor, pride, shame, admiration, and fear contribute to the preservation of society. Language is the element in which imitation, communication, and emotivity join together and become the most important social binding factor. The imagination is the producer of natural languages and language is the tool with which an infective imagination passes from one patient to another. The world of the imagination penetrates the pagan mind and moulds it to its semblance.(Fabiani 283 - 284)

By Martin implementing his imagination into written work, he creates connections to readers by playing on their emotions to keep them enchanted within the narrative. Martin allows readers to play out their own fantasies within the created society to make them feel an emotional connection. The use of language within Martin's books equips imagination and literature from that period in a way that fantasizes the approach to Medieval characterizations. The fantasy emphasizes the atrocities of the reality for women versus the atrocities of women in a text; when the fantasy is shown to be horrific, it assists in offering the reader a harsh reality, a reality that the author usually seeks to change in some shape or form. When the reality within a text reflects that of the real world, Vico's heroic ethos allows for authors, such as Martin and Aveyard, to implement

change based on their personal preferences; reflecting on what they aspired to be or change to include the self and others who wish to escape the harsh reality of the world.

By using language with aspects of historical accuracy, the author can create realistic scenarios where the prospect of heroism is plausible. Taking common motifs from medieval literature and creating a world that explores the depths of humanity from the reality of an actual war was brilliant because authors can delve into individual character storylines to accentuate the various dynamics at play within the power struggle. Using imagination and language to reframe previous concepts and women's roles is essential for *Game of Thrones* to work because it adds more depth to how the characters interact with one another and their functionality in society and the plot.

Placing the women on a type of spectrum to show older tropes, like Sansa's character, and new ideas, like Arya and Daenerys' characters, makes the progression of inclusion available to other writers to expand the literary canon. Having a broader range of characterizations help strengthen the women who played crucial roles in the biopolitical exchanges by stripping themselves of the inherent societal performativity and using the overbearing tropes to gain leverage. The act of stripping one's identity through taking up a new form aided in a rebirth of the stylistic approach, which added depth to the typical female characterizations within Medievalism; the rebirth and transformation of these women into their self-serving heroes helped to reframe the act of chivalry within this medieval fantasy.

Similarly, imagination and language are called upon to emphasize the texts' societal pressures in other ways, such as religion and governance. When chivalry is the main card at play, religion or religious-based movements are often the primary causalities

behind events, such as the crusades and dominance over the earth and women. In writing, Martin describes the biopolitical nature of dominion over female counterparts, as well as uses religious-based organizations to aid in the progression of how men dominated ranks and stayed in power.

Religion and governance play a crucial role in the power dynamics of law that can contribute to fatalities and discourses throughout the books and series of *Game of Thrones*. For example, many occurrences of the "Old Gods and the New" are a matter of discourse among many sects within the game. The concept of "Old Gods and New" within *Game of Thrones* lore is a contrast to the old ways of keeping order versus the newer standards and rules for societal formalities centered around the concept of gods aging and not adapting to time. (Martin) The characters often play into these dynamics by allowing the various religions to dictate their outcomes and beliefs. For instance, prophetic visions are used to show the characters their future and things that could come to pass if they proceed cautiously; most notable is Cersei, whose future is one of wealth and then destruction. Due to the prophecy, Cersei is often harsh and cruel to other females who come into play for the throne, such as Sansa Stark and Margaery Tyrell, because the prophecy foretold her being usurped by another who is "younger and more beautiful" (Martin 529). Religion and prophecies are not too kind for Cersei like many women who sought recognition and power during this period in time; Martin composes a walk of shame led by a high priestess for her transgressions in *GOT: A Dance of Dragons*. The walk of shame tells of the stripping of Cersei and what she worked hard to achieve and how the governance of her body is still not entirely her own, especially in her position of power and not acting in accordance with her expected societal norms.

In comparison to Cersei's experience with religion and governance, Arya's character undergoes a different relationship with religion. In the later books and series, Arya begins to only believe in one God, the God of Death, whom she trains under and follows, in an almost cult like structure. The relationship between Arya and Death is fascinating because, in a sense, Arya kills her old self, the one her father tried to raise into a lady, in order to take up her chosen role within this game, the role of a future faceless assassin. The faceless assassin, aka No One, is a term given to a warrior who supersedes all others and devotes their lives and those who they have killed to the God of Death. (Martin) Having Arya undergo this character arc allows her to completely transform into the person Martin intended, a woman not held to the restrictions of societal governance over what she should do as a highborn lady.

Vico's concept of the heroic mind can be used as a tool in many ways to make oneself, or a specific entity, a hero in their own right. George R. R. Martin is a brilliant writer who used this heroic mind to create a world that envisioned women's roles as more than just a side narrative to help boost men's character or narrative arc. The portrayal of women and their various power dynamics aided in lending the role of self-hero to many of the characters by providing them a way to be expressed more in-depth. The exploration of women and their role within the series of exchanges is archaic. Still, Martin highlights how this exploitation of their bodies can be an asset or distraction from the hidden wit, strength, resilience, and chivalry women portray behind the scenes, expanding the canon of contemporary literature that incorporates elements of medieval literature.

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TALES OF QUEENS AND GOOD WOMEN: RELIGION AND SOCIETAL-BASED TRAUMA

Tales of queens and "godly women" are taught extensively to women from a young age for most contemporary religious based societies and in the Middle Ages due to performative expectations to be seen and not heard. The ideology of what it means to be a good woman is deeply rooted in a misogynistic way of life for most women in present day due to the governance of women's bodies. The idea behind being a "good woman" is an interesting construct with harsh and outlandish standards and rules to abide by. Young girls are often taught at a young age to be good and ladylike, while boys are not held to the same standards. The expectations seen in present religious based societies differ little from certain societal expectations and man's perspective toward women within the Middle Ages. A close examination of Chaucer's portrayals and biblical adaptations of a good woman can be traumatic to the psyche due to the need to achieve this perfect figure, similar to how society visualizes unattainable beauty standards. The subservient idealistic qualities are found in historical religious figures, such as Queen Esther from the Bible, where misogynistic societal-based formalities are equipped to create a "good woman." Chaucer portrays the psychological makeup of some of the female characters from the *Legend of Good Women* will be analyzed, along with how narratives can be misrepresented depending on who is retelling the story, such as Cleopatra. An analysis of these characters are important due to similar ideas and fantasies being help in contemporary society which perpetuates the psychological trauma caused by religious societal expectations. Chaucer's narrative highlights of some of his narratives highlight how men in religious based organizations use unrealistic standards to create their vision of a good woman.

Some men idealize women, such as the depictions of Ruth and Esther, in the Bible for being submissive and having qualities appeasing to the male-ego, like the depictions found in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. The biased religious based teachings can be used to create ideal attributes that some men find appealing due to the sense of power that they gain from the women around them. The religious trauma-based issues that occur in contemporary society can be traced back to the way men use religious figures like Ruth and Esther to gain leverage over their female counterparts. By cross-examining this narrative to *Legend of Good Women*, the trauma-based issues will help shed light on the psychological ramifications. The analysis will follow Chaucer's depiction of women in *Legend of Good Wome*n and how he visualizes women versus other authors and female narratives. Researching ways a psychological break of trauma and coerced submission of women help create an altered sense of reality to cope with the abuse will aid in providing a better understanding of these texts. The idolization of what it means to be a "good woman" is problematic. It affects the mental stability of contemporary women due to how they are portrayed in works like Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and religious-based narratives like Esther because the lessons are taught in order to maintain a sense of control over the female body. The idealistic attributes through the male gaze cause harm due to a desire to achieve the perfect image to fit into misogynistic societal-based formalities despite the unrealistic standards that have been in place for centuries. Gaslighting is often used as a tool to create subservience and an air of weakness in women to satisfy the male ego for dominance which affects the mental instability of the female subject. Past traumas perpetuate a cycle that creates the foundation for future generations to be suppressed under the same biopolitical rules. Using *Legend of Good Women* and the Bible as a guidebook for good behavior enables social norms of female subservience to be upheld and become an accomplice to the trauma and

eventual psychological break that occurs. A lack of self-confidence interferes with the ability to recognize self-worth outside of what misogynistic society dictates.

The helplessness and overwhelming sense of duty, purity, and virtue within some of the female characters in *Legend of Good Women* are rooted deep into the narratives. Chaucer creates a unique set of works that are different from some of the original narratives found in history and mythology that cater to the notion of virtuous women- sometimes, the result is purely fiction for the male audience and how they wish for women to behave. Chaucer's ability to take various legends and reframe the concepts is beneficial to his patronage if the readers are predominantly male and want to instill principles that perpetuate the dominance of misogyny upon their female counterparts. However, credit must be given; despite his inability to experience the same oppression, Chaucer does his best to create a narrative from the female perspective through a masculine lens. The collection's title alone can come off as condescending and convey more societal pressures upon what it means to be a "good woman."

The material and concept of the figures in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* are very much a one-size-fits-all, with depictions of various women's worth to the story being based on the interactions and contribute to the heroic male's narratives. The women are lovestruck, and the narratives, at times, are fairytales with a realistic ending of anguish. Think, for instance, how many modern fairytales derive from twisted tales that essentially scorn the woman of the tale. These stories hold power that teaches young impressionable minds what is and is not acceptable in society – the same can be said for how Chaucer delivers and titles this group of works *Legend of Good Women* with a critical emphasis on the word "GOOD." What is good? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, good is defined as "behaviour that is morally right or acceptable." (OED) Yet, who or what decides what is morally right?

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Unfortunately, society, more importantly, those who hold power, decides what is acceptable and unacceptable; both beneficial and harmful ideas placed on formalities originate from this male-dominated power. The standards set upon women to act and be a certain way according to society, especially during Chaucer's time, were demeaning. The women were treated as insignificant, as stand-alone characters, unless playing a pivotal role in the life/journey of their male counterparts. Women operated under the societal influence and pressure to be "good" and appeal to the masses by playing a role in what is known as the "theory of exchanges." (Trigg 261 - 263) The theory of exchanges used women as a token or materialistic pawn to further a man's endeavors or gain leverage for men's lives. When a woman rebelled against the expected, she would be demonized and frequently scorned and shamed.

Take, for instance, the "Legend of Cleopatra" and how Chaucer describes her versus other writers and historians. The different adaptations of Cleopatra vary depending on the writer and how they view a woman holding power which highlights the author's insecurities of being less influential than their female counterpart. Chaucer's adaptation is a little different compared to these historians and paints her as a good woman who would do anything for love. Cleopatra was a brilliant ruler in Egypt who used strategic planning to gain leverage within a man's world. When people hear the name of Cleopatra, the idea of a seductress ruler, a power-hungry queen, comes to mind - a woman who was cunning and used her beauty to seduce the likes of Julius Caesar and Marc Antony. Chaucer's adaptation of this important figure differs from those of other historians and writers. In the "Legend of Cleopatra," Chaucer's recount of Cleopatra's death is full of angst and woe, stating:

> ...Ye nere out of myn hertes remembraunce,
> For wel or wo, for carole or for daunce;
> And in myself this covenant made I tho,
> That ryght switch as ye felten, wel or wo,

As fer forth as it in my power lay,
Unreporvable unto my wyfhod ay,
The same worlde I fele, lyf or deth –
And thilke covenant whil me lasteth breth
I wo fulfille; and that shal ben wel sene,
Was nevere unto hire love a trewer quene."
And with that word, naked, with ful good herte,
Among the serpents in the pit she sterte,
And there she ches to have hire buryinge,
And she hire deth receyveth with good cheere
For love of Antony that was hire so dere. (Lines 686 - 701)

Chaucer's adaptation of Cleopatra highlights her willingness to die if love is no longer present. The recount of her being a lovestruck maiden who will do anything for love essentially reduces her role to a sound bite for a princess narrative or a saint's life which appeals more to a man's perspective. Cleopatra throwing herself into the pit of snakes is similar to what is seen in hagiography with the exception of her being a martyr to love and not God. The male ego would find this version of the powerful Queen within suitable standards as opposed to the sultry, seductive way in which Cleopatra is portrayed due to the willingness to please the male ego and affection. Having Cleopatra's motives driven by love allows for men to rationalize that she functions solely through emotion rather than using intellect and wit.

Regardless, one should remember and note that Chaucer tends to poke fun at his work -- the same could be said about the context and writings of these legends. The satire surrounding the *Legend of Good Women* and the intention behind writing the poetic dream visions are due to whether Chaucer wrote the anthology as satire toward men or what it means to be a "good woman" (Goddard 96). By framing the "Legend of Cleopatra" in a hagiographic structure, Chaucer may be making a statement as to how ludicrous the idea of being a "good woman" actually is in retrospect to real-life or using it as a base to create a saint's life tale out of Cleopatra to be acceptable toward male authority. Despite the idea of these works being satire,

they should still be analyzed with a specific lens of how the narratives' portrayal affects

ideologies of specific perspectives that cause damage due to others' pushing expectations onto

societal norms. Referring back to the lines of Cleopatra throwing herself into the pit of vipers

(lines 696 - 700), Chaucer uses this idea to poke fun at how women are sometimes expected to

behave after the loss of the masculine head or as an act of defiance against those who opposed

their religious teachings, such as the period of mourning and the saint's lives.

The idea of a saint's life[5] and what it means to be a "good woman" based on Christianity

is no different than the reworking of Cleopatra. Cleopatra's narrative reduction to a fanfare saint

life narrative resembles many women of the Bible who gave up their life for the Lord; the only

difference is Cleopatra's act of defiance was for love and not God. Take the tale of *Esther*.

Esther became a mighty queen but is written in a different context to Cleopatra to appease the

male gaze. Though Esther is not a saint's life tale, she does hold many qualities attributed to the

genre, including a willingness to die for her God which is seen in chapter five when she

approaches the King on the behalf of her people. The book of Esther states:

> And on the third day Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court
> of the king's house, over against the king's hall: now he sat upon his throne in the
> hall of the palace, over against the door of the house. And when he saw Esther the
> queen standing, she pleased his eyes, and he held out toward her the golden
> sceptre, which he held in his hand: and she drew near, and kissed the top of his
> sceptre. (Esther 5)

The type of courage shown by Esther is praised due to acting on the will of her God and uncle.

Yet, a performative aspect is key to being received by the court and king because it was

necessary to adhere to societal expectations to gain approval. Had Esther not followed the

societal expectations of the court and adhered to the performative aspects of beauty, she could

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[5] See *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*. By Millet for examples on Saint's Lives within a religious context.

have lost her life upon entering the court without being called upon. The teachings of Esther to young women are one of subservient attitude; in the article "Esther: Subverting the Capable Wife" by David Zucker, Zucker compiles works from various scholars on why Esther is highly regarded within Christianity, quoting:

> "Woman of Substance" [the Capable Wife] … embodies not one woman but the desired aspects of many. The idealized portrait assumes, among other things, that the woman is heterosexual, married, and a mother. It is no wonder, then, that while some women say they know a "woman of substance," far more consider her a "superwoman"—another unrealistic and dehumanizing depiction of women created to entice and promote the values of men (Zucker 172).

When examining various parts of the Bible, especially in the "Old Testament," women are framed as secondary characters to a predominantly male narrative. Similar to the Bible, women of medieval texts are usually placed into specific categories that either appeal to or are despised by the male gaze. The idea of Esther is taught extensively to women within Christianity due to her beauty and obedience because it limits agency in becoming anything other than an object. Esther listens solely to her guardian cousin when making decisions, and even though she displays bravery in the face of danger, Esther is acting upon the wishes of her male guardian and not on her own accord.

The idolization of women from the Bible tends to stem from the psychological need for control. When it comes to daily life, control is a concept that many people desire in order to maintain peace of mind and a certain level of functionality within their domain. If the need for control is not satisfied, authoritarian ideas and practices tend to take hold in places that feel safe and secure to the person of interest. The safe spaces tend to be areas that bring a sense of comfort, such as a home and, at times, a person. For example, people are more prone to lashing out toward family members, close friends, spouses, or even siblings rather than a stranger on the street. The human brain has a certain level of perception to recognize areas deemed as a safe

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space to unleash turmoil that has been locked away from the public eye in order to maintain a sense of order and pleasantness.

Yet, control is not always given, and when a person feels that their authority is being taken away, they tend to lash out or do irrational things. Chaucer's "Legend of Thisbe" highlights the loss of control with Thisbe's body being subjugated to her father's will of who she can and cannot love. In lines 729 – 731 of the "Legend of Thisbe," Chaucer writes:

> There myghte have ben bytwixe hem maryage,
> But that here fadres nolde it nat assente;
> And bothe in love ylyke sore they brente (lines 729 – 731)

The idea of consent is not a new notion, but for some reason it is not always present, especially in relationships with an unequal power dynamic. Thisbe's need for a father's consent is comical but unfortunately still necessary for some even present day. Though Thisbe's legend turns satirical, the idea of needing consent and hiding from her father to gain independence should still be addressed. Thisbe has an unequal dynamic with the men in her life and, even in her own tale, becomes sidelined at the end. She can be taken as a rebellious teen who goes against her father's wishes because he only wants what is best for her due to the world being a dangerous place. Thus, the need for control is what men like Thisbe's father grasp to dictate their daughter's lives despite possible psychological repercussions. In Thisbe's case, her tale is one of naivety for not listening to her father and dying because of her implied stupidity due to not heeding his warning.

Within traditional denominational Christian beliefs, the father figure being head of the household is no different from the relationship dynamic between Thisbe and her father. In some

denominations, the bond between father and daughter goes as far as having Purity Balls[6] which

create this idea of shame towards the female body and sexuality. Purity Balls are designed for

young women to attend with their father where they pledge their virginity till marriage, thus,

bringing an outdated formality of asking the father's permission to have his daughter's virginity

into the present, at a time when adult American women do not need the consent of a father to

marry. According to Dr. Poulter, a shame factor arises between the child and father in order to

please authority because the child's ability to feel adequate and confident about self and career

stems from that relationship (Poulter 293).

The pressure for daughters to meet their father's standards and expectations within the

purity culture[7] is exceedingly high and causes psychological damage to self-confidence. With the

factor of shame, self-confidence plummets drastically making the person feel inadequate and

unworthy for not meeting societal expectations for being pure. If they do not adhere to these

purity standards, they are disgraced by their family and peers who believe in these practices

which makes them feel isolated and unloved. Within Chaucerian texts, shame is presented in

different ways. Chaucer's "Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea" is about two women who are

treated shamefully due to a cruel man's motives. The women are left feeling abandoned and

inadequate due to being scorned by a man who used them for his ego. The shame and trauma that

Medea felt caused backlash within the narrative, similar to a psychological break where she

becomes murderous and lashes out in order to get back at Jason, her ex-lover. Though this break-

in rationality was used to kill the children and many others, the need to inflict pain upon the

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[6] See the article, "Daddy's Little Girls: On the Perils of Chastity Clubs, Purity Balls, and
Ritualized Abstinence." *Frontiers* by Breanna Fahs for more information on Purity Balls, 116 –
142.
[7]See the article, "The Relationship between Purity Culture and Rape Myth Acceptance."
by Bretlyn C. Owens for more information on purity culture, 407 - 408.

person who wronged her is not uncommon; her need for revenge and control over some aspect of her life was a way of coping even though the method was horrific. In a study on social rejection, Kristen Weir explains how shame and trauma cause poor impulse control within a subject, making them seek approval or validation (Weir 50). Medea's need for validation was self-driven due to her need to gain control, leading to her murdering others.

Psychological breaks are occurrences that may be described by the body and brain's inability to compute the situation appropriately. The inability to rationalize the problem creates a lack of confidence in one's abilities. Think, for instance, about gaslighting and how it weighs on the subject's psyche. When questioned about one's interpretation of reality, the subject questions what is known and unknown. If enough pressure is applied, tensions will eventually rise and cause a break. For example, when a rubber band is stretched to its limits, the band will either bounce back, often misshapen or break under the tension. The same goes for people and their overall mental capacity. Everyone has limits on what can and cannot be endured under psychological stress.

Chaucer's use of shame for Hypsipyle and Medea is different from how shame is often portrayed within similar texts. Frequently, when the topic of good women arises, most people tend to cringe at the idea or assumption of the way women are to function within society, taking the way women are often portrayed or told to act throughout history or even in religious texts. Most of the time, the idea of being seen but not heard comes to mind. Chaucer's "Legend of Lucretia" and "Legend of Philomela" highlight that shame and purity are used to create a feeling of self-loathing and pain for atrocities committed upon a person. The idea of shame and loss of purity go hand-in-hand, so young women are taught at a young age to save themselves for future

husbands. In *Pure*, Linda Kay Klein explains how women in her church were taught about purity and how to view themselves. Klein states:

> …we'd learned together that there were two types of girls – those who were pure and those who were impure, those who were marriage material and those who were lucky if any good Christian man ever loved them…[because] an "impure" girl or woman isn't just seen as damaged; she's considered *dangerous*. (2-4)

Klein's depiction of how girls who are not deemed pure become damaged weighs on the psyche and influences mental health. She explains how the decline in mental health creates an identity for the female, an identity deeply rooted in shame for what she has done and who she is because no one could possibly love her. The effects behind going from pure to impure are almost like a tarnished good which creates the illusion of not being worth more than a mere piece of masticated food or broken object.

In "Legend of Lucretia," Lucretia was described as a pure, noble, innocence woman, the material for a good wife. Chaucer painted her as a martyr because she was bound by a sense of purity and duty toward her husband and family. By building Lucretia's entire reputation upon the standards of being "good wife material" and pure, her tale is being set up for failure due to the need to meet societal expectations. The narrative of her suicide because she was raped was deemed noble due to preserving the respect and dignity of her husband. Ruth Everhart explains that the "paradigm that men are superior to women serves no one"; placing men on a different standard to women even in the atrocities of rape is detrimental to self-confidence and ability to overcome the trauma inflicted (Everhart 123).

Lucretia's act of death is symbolic of being a martyr to the principles of chastity within the eyes of society because she had done what was right by her husband. Lucretia essentially had a psychotic break before her death due to the guilt and self-loathing for not being chaste; she

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blamed herself due to "shame of damaged good and unlovable" (Poulter 41). The pressure to be a good wife, a pure wife, far outweighed her value as a person because of the burden society placed upon her to fit into a perfect mold. The need to fit in and be accepted is not uncommon and has been known to cause many people to break down and be unable to function mentally. In Lucretia's case, having her purity essentially ripped from her was enough to have a crack in the facade of perceived "sainthood."

When societal pressures weigh on the consciousness of a fragile mind, a crack in the facade causes the mind to essentially break and begin to rationalize a way to fix or even solve the problem. In Lucretia's circumstance, her mind rationalized that the best alternative to the horrific problem was to commit suicide for the perceived transgressions, even if the problem was not necessarily in the subject's control. Given the circumstance, Lucretia found that her value was better suited as dead due to losing that which made her significant in the eyes of society. A break in the psyche stems from traumatic occurrences inflicted upon the subject, and traumatic experiences are sometimes too complex for the brain to rationalize and understand the entire ramification of the incident, which causes an array of emotions to come at once. After being overwhelmed by the experience, fight or flight instinct begins to set in, causing the body to respond in various forms. (Brown xix)

Unlike Lucretia, the "Legend of Philomela" is known for the tragedy and injustice caused by her sister's husband. Philomela feels shame for adultery towards her sister in some adaptations but sets her mind to mending the betrayal to herself and her sister. Philomela's trauma is gruesome in many ways, but Chaucer refrains from explicitly depicting the emotional impact of the experience within the narrative. According to an article published by BMC Psychiatry, "the probability of detecting a relationship between trauma exposure and PTSD

depends on the range and variance of traumatic exposure that is present in the population

studied." (Neuner 2) The physical act of Philomela's voice being stripped of her is somewhat

symbolizes how trauma can render a person speechless and even numb to the event. Many

survivors of traumatic events, such as rape, have difficulty speaking even years after the incident

and can have triggers due to the lasting effect on the psyche. The brain cannot always process

extreme experiences and will preserve itself by disconnecting from reality to cope (Brown 28;

241)

The silence imposed upon Philomela is comparable to other survivors from similar

situations. The act of suppressing someone's ability to communicate and gaslighting them into

submission is a tactic used to keep the survivor quiet. By placing a gag on the survivor, the

perpetrator can continue dominance over the subject and function as normal within society

without being demonized (Everhart 38). With the emergence of #MeToo, survivors of real-life

trauma were able to be given a voice and make their stories known. However, discrepancies

arose due to the abuser's ability to gaslight the survivor and society to maintain a sense of power.

Similar to writers coming out and using social platforms to recount their personal traumas,

Philomela works toward gaining a voice by sewing and writing out the events of her rape and

misplaced trust.

Take, for instance, Lavinia in the story of *Titus Andronicus*. The story of Lavinia closely

resembles that of Philomela and even references the shame of Philomela's story. After the

brutalization and rape of Lavinia's body, she was discarded to bewail her suffering with the

absence of her tongue and hands. (Shakespeare) When Lavinia was found, the court did not

perceive her pain as her own but an act against her father – even in the wake of rape and

dismemberment, Lavinia was not seen as an individual but a prized token that had been

damaged. Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, act 3, scene 5 highlights how Lavinia is just a prized token when the discussion of her dignity arises, stating:

> Titus: Was it well done of rash Virginius
> To slay his daughter with his own right hand
> Because she was enforced, stained, and deflowered?
> Saturninus: It was, Andronicus.
> Titus: Your reason, mighty Lord?
> Saturninus: Because the girl should not survive her shame,
> And by her presence still renew his sorrow.
> Titus: A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;
> A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant
> For me, most wretched, to perform the like.
> Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,
> And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die.
> (*Titus Andronicus,* Act 5: Scene 3, Lines 36 – 47)

The final statement, which includes Lavinia's trauma, is not an act on her behalf but more so to preserve the perceived dignity of her father. Her pain does not matter in the face of his pain. Lavinia's brutalization was not her own but viewed as shaming the man in her life – for she had no physical voice and was not to be heard. The retribution for the crimes inflicted upon her was to repay the damage caused to her father's name, not as justice on her behalf. Unlike Lavinia, Philomela voiced her pain to her sister, a person whom she knew would listen to the best of her abilities to act as an agent on her behalf. The stories of Lavinia and Philomela highlight how even if you are deemed a "good woman" in the eyes of society, the turmoil and pain of being a woman are not excluded from those who adhere to societal expectations for purity and your value to men. If perceived as damaged, such as the loss of purity, society shuns the pure woman in the same way that it shunned the woman who rejected the perceived purpose within a misogynistic society.

In many adaptations, Philomela is described as a lamb set for the slaughter by a cunning and manipulative wolf. If society shuns a person for not meeting expectations, society allows for

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those who are seen in higher regard to take from those who are deemed as lesser. The idea of a

lamb and wolf is very biblical because a lamb is considered a helpless and pure creature, whereas

the wolf is a villainous creature who is deceptive and preys on the weak to gain control.

Mlodinow explains how emotions can be heightened to make a person feel and be manipulated

by those around them, stating:

> It influences the development of your emotional experience, providing a connection between emotion and body state…Valence – pleasant and unpleasant, positive and negative, good or bad (or somewhere in between) – corresponds to the message 'everything seems fine' or "something is wrong." (42 – 46)

Men use scare tactics in order to have females submit. The manipulation creates easier targets

for the men to subjugate and control.

In the context of Christianity, the children of God are considered the sheep and Christ is

their shepherd who protects them from the evil of the world, aka the wolves or the devil. By

placing abusers on the same level as the devil, Chaucer shows the vile abuse inflicted upon

women like Philomela. Framing Philomela as a sheep creates this paradigm of equating her to

purity; the concept allows the reader to see Philomela as a helpless being who was brutalized and

stripped of her dignity and speech. Think, for instance, how the audience would have reacted to

the portrayal of Philomela, who was described as beautiful but completely rendered physically

speechless. The embodiment of being seen and not heard comes alive within Philomela's tale by

causing not just physical trauma to the body, but mental trauma due to the anguish felt post-rape.

The audience receives a glimpse of a gag placed on Philomela for speaking out on the cruelty

given to her by Tereus. Philomela was essentially restricted in how she could convey her pain

and had to use wit in order to survive the atrocities and allow for her message to be heard.

Eliminating her ability to convey her pain through speech parallels the ways in which women

throughout the Bible and even during Chaucer's time were not allowed to speak out for the injustices meted out to them by men.

Another figure who was told to be silent was Esther and Vashti of the Bible. Esther was described as obedient and submissive yet considered courageous once her cousin Mordecai allowed her to speak on behalf of her people. Esther met the societal standard of being seen and not heard, which appealed to the male ego, similar to Ruth from the Bible. Ruth is often depicted as a humble woman who worked hard to gain recognition in the eyes of Boaz, whom she was told to marry by her mother-in-law. Many Christian organizations praise Ruth's willingness to be subservient by claiming that young women should be more like Ruth and wait for her Boaz. (Klein 1 -4) Ruth's depiction in the Bible is one of male gratification due to her willingness to place herself at the will of Boaz. When trying to gain favor in Boaz's eyes, Ruth's mother-in-law tells her to pick the fields with his maids and lay at his feet, stating:

> After she was returned to her mother in law, Noemi said to her: My daughter, I will seek rest for thee, and will provide that it may be well with thee. This Booz, with whose maids thou wast joined in the field, is our near kinsman, and behold this night he winnoweth barley in the threshingfloor. Wash thyself therefore and anoint thee, and put on thy best garments, and go down to the barnfloor: but let not the man see thee, till he shall have done eating and drinking. And when he shall go to sleep, mark the place wherein he sleepeth: and thou shalt go in, and lift up the clothes wherewith he is covered towards his feet, and shalt lay thyself down there: and he will tell thee what thou must do. She answered: Whatsoever thou shalt command, I will do. And when Booz had eaten, and drunk, and was merry, he went to sleep by the heap of sheaves, and she came softly and uncovering his feet, laid herself down. And behold, when it was now midnight the man was afraid, and troubled: and he saw a woman lying at his feet… (Ruth 3)

By having Ruth lower her status to that of Boaz's maids, she is placing herself below Boaz's authority rather than as an equal. She takes her position as a kinsman and creates this unequal power dynamic within the household before she is even wedded to Boaz. The act of Ruth laying at Boaz's feet is on the same level as an animal used to keep the aristocrats warm at night. With

Noemi dictating Ruth's moves, Noemi becomes an accomplice in perpetuating a misogynistic

societal. Many religious based traumas rely on the story of Ruth as a way to justify the

subservience of females and the unequal dynamics within a household. The valorization of the

story of Ruth nourished the male-ego and rationalizes male control of the female body to do what

he pleases.

The indoctrination of young women's minds to believe they are lesser than their male

counterparts is a form of gaslighting which is used by male-dominated formalities to subjugate

women. The term gaslighting has been thrown around in many ideas regarding older works

regarding women and even religion. However, what specifically has caught the eye of many

readers regarding this psychological term? To answer this question, one must understand a

rudimentary concept of the term; gaslighting is often described as a manipulative tactic to make a

person feel inferior to the manipulator and as if their ideas and opinions are not worthy or sound

of mind. The functionality of gaslighting relies on the skewing of a person's mind to be unable to

rationalize the psychological damage being created. (Sweet 851 - 852) Men use gaslighting and

religion as a way to make the woman feel shame. Shaming and demeaning the female mind to

believe they are lesser or subservient to their male counterpart advances male dominance. (Klein

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Those who oppose male oppression and narrative of shame are often demonized in

society, such as the depictions of Vashti and even most depictions of Cleopatra. Vashti was

exiled from the palace and the king for her disobedience and refusal to be used as an object for

the king and his court's amusement. The book of Esther states:

> To bring in queen Vasthi before the king, with the crown set upon her head, to
> shew her beauty to all the people and the princes: for she was exceeding beautiful.
> But she refused, and would not come at the king's commandment, which he had

> signified to her by the eunuchs…in the hearing of the king and the princes: Queen Vasthi hath not only injured the king, but also all the people and princes that are in all the provinces of king Assuerus. For this deed of the queen will go abroad to all women, so that they will despise their husbands, and will say: King Assuerus commanded that queen Vasthi should come in to him, and she would not. And by this example all the wives of the princes of the Persians and the Medes will slight the commandments of their husbands: wherefore the king's indignation is just. (Esther 1)

Based on the society that Vashti was Queen, she did not meet expectations like Esther, who showed defiance by going to the king's court unannounced. Vashti's refusal to meet societal expectations was considered an act of treason. Her willingness to disobey orders was considered a slight against the male-ego and demonized with accounts stating that it would perpetuate the notion for women to not adhere to "the commandments of their husbands" (1). The refusal of her husband's wishes is why Vashti and women like her are shunned within a religious-based society. In the book *Pure*, Klein explains that women like Vashti were considered "dangerous" and "impure." (Klein 4) The ideology behind this framework is to promote subservience over the woman's body because if she refused to act accordingly to her male authority figure, she was shunned within the community.

Recounting Shakespeare's tale of Lavinia, she performed all societal expectations but was still shamed due to bringing shame upon her father. Seeing women as an extension of the masculine property in the "Legend of Thisbe" is detrimental because society often bases what is acceptable on who writes the narrative. For example, wars are told from the winner's perspective, which is why so much of history is lost. By allowing men to control the narratives, such as *Legend of Good Women*, the perspectives of what it means to be good is a construct that follows the same idea as Vashti's exile from the court, the central idea of "what is good" is based on the way, society views various attributes and actions. By maintaining a level of superiority over those deemed lesser, society allows for gaslighting to be implemented through

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everyday life and literature to teach younger women to adhere to the rules even if they are not

fair. In the "Legend of Dido," Chaucer writes:

> O sely women, ful of innocence,
> Ful of pite, of trouthe and conscience,
> Wat maketh yow to men to truste so?
> Have ye swch trouthe upon hyre feyned wo,
> And han switch olde ensaumples yow beforn?
> Se ye nat alle how they ben forsworn?
> Where sen ye oon that he ne hath laft his leef,
> Or ben unkynde, or don hire some myscheef,
> Or piled hire, or boosted of his dede?
> Ye may as wel it sen as ye may rede.
> Take hede now of this grete gentil-man,
> This Troyan, that so wel hire plesen can,
> That feyneth hym so trewe and obeysynge
> (lines 1254 - 1266)

Chaucer makes a statement in his work on good women by implying that the hardship faced is

due to mistrust in man's dominion. By playing on the emotions of the female, men have gained

an advantage through manipulative tactics, such as words of love, affirmation, and promises,

which resort to pain and heartache due to it being a ploy to have a sense of power over her.

Giving into the fanciful words and promises only perpetuates the anguish felt because of the

expectations women are meant to meet.

According to Tseti, who contributed to an article for the *European Journal of American*

Studies, the concept of trauma stems from various problems "characterized by a 'knot' tying

together representation [of] the past, the self, the political and suffering." (Tseti 2) Think of

trauma as an entanglement of repressed anguish centered around experiences that cause the brain

to lose control of order and a sense of self. When faced with a lack of self and a lack of

confidence in one's abilities, trauma allows a floodgate to open that is often hard to control at a

standard capacity. The flood gate of emotions is like a suppressed energy due to the pent-up

feelings that meld together from past and present (Mlodinow 42 -44). If left unchecked, the

person's future at the bottom of the emotional floodgates is left defenseless, so to speak, and wary about how to proceed through the struggle of the incoming pressures.

Society and politics factor into the inability to handle pressure due to the human need for approval, at least within the public eye. Even those who are most seemingly unnoticeable within the public sphere create an impact on society and the formalities created to keep the systematic structures in place so that the unit as a whole may survive. Think of the various legends and how the women had to performatively appease the male gaze, like in "Legend of Cleopatra," where she performs a kind of Satis ritual after her lover is killed. It has nothing to do with who Cleopatra was as a real person but what she could provide to the male gaze. Or refer back to the "Legend of Lucretia," who acted upon conflict by committing suicide; she had met the misogynistic standards of being a "good woman" by acting upon her lost purity so as not to bring shame upon her husband. When rebellion or outlier experiences occur, the perception of reality becomes skewed, creating chaos in the standard order of life, which is why the "Legend of Thisbe" held a lesson for young women who did not heed their father's commands. If left unchecked, the brain will lose sight of what is controlled and out of its capacity to control, which creates a response to grasp at anything which causes stability - even if the final act of stability and control means death. (Poulter 31; 39)

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