

CHAUCER'S DENIAL OF RESPONSE FOR RAPE VICTIMS

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Literature
May 2020

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2020

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks goes to Dr. Leah Schwebel. Thank you for continuing to support me through all of those drafts over the past two years. Thank you for your academic, professional, and personal advice. You are brilliant, and I want to be you when I grow up.

Thank you to Dr. Susan Morrison and Dr. Cecily Parks for being incredibly patient committee members. I took the long route, and I thank you for not jumping ship. I aspire to be as informed and knowledgeable as you.

Lastly, thanks to my family and to Emily for listening to me talk and stress about this degree and this thesis. You have been my rock throughout this experience, and I cannot thank you enough.

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ABSTRACT

Chaucer's female characters have consistently been a particular point of interest. This thesis argues that Chaucer's portrayal of female characters was informed by his personal relationships with women. First, this thesis gives an account of the rape laws which were in place during Chaucer's lifetime in an effort to show that these laws affected how Chaucer wrote his rape victims and how the medieval justice system helped or hindered rape victims. This thesis employs the scholarship surrounding Chaucer's portrayals and relationships, particularly his relationship with Cecily Chaumpaigne who leveled rape allegations against Chaucer but then released Chaucer of those accusations. In addition to medieval rape laws and Chaumpaigne's release, this paper analyzes Chaucer's portrayal of rape victims in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, *The Reeve's Tale*, *The Legend of Lucrece*, and *The Legend of Philomela*.

I. CHAUCER AND MEDIEVAL LAWS

“..For women practicing feminist studies, readings of literary texts that focus on the metaphorization of women, readings that take no account of the existence of historical women in the Middle Ages, readings that distance the object of study—women—from the female observer/listener all tend to meet resistance, admittedly to varying degrees, in the body of the woman critic... While theorizing the body, we also have to live with it.” (Burns 248-249)

Nearly two decades ago, Christine Rose, taking into account the rape charges leveled against Chaucer by Cecily Chaucampaigne during his own lifetime, suggested that the “proliferation of rapes in Chaucerian narratives” cannot be dismissed as a mere “cornucopia of coincidence” (Rose 34). Rather, we must read his tales with this accusation in mind. Indeed, Chaucer employs rape as a narrative theme throughout his works. In *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, the rape victim is reduced to a plot device, her assault serving as the tale’s inciting incident. She is neither given a name, nor is she permitted a response to the assault. For all intents and purposes, she is sacrificed at the altar of the knight’s edification. In *The Reeve’s Tale*, the mother and daughter are denied the opportunity to condemn their assaulters or mourn their situations. In *Legend of Good Women*, Lucrece has more agency in the sense that she is allowed to respond to her assault at the hands of Tarquin, yet she does so with suicide, which is a form of self-silencing. Another figure in *Legend*, Philomela, is physically silenced when Tereus cuts out her tongue. These women are all victims of assault, yet they are stifled by Chaucer—prevented from responding to their attackers in either word or action, with the exception of Philomela who weaves her tale into a tapestry.

Chaucer even goes so far as to remove violent responses to rape that he found in his sources. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Philomela kills Tereus's children after having her tongue removed. She also weaves a tapestry explaining the rape to her sister, speaking through her art if not with her tongue. In Chaucer's account, however, she takes no vengeance, but simply weaves her story and mourns her fate. Similarly, in Livy's *History*, which Chaucer points to as one of his sources, Lucretia is given a long and impassioned speech explaining why she must take her own life to save her honor. Her suicide is presented as the purest testament of her virtue--an act that sparks the end of Roman tyranny and the dawn of the republic. In *Legend*, by contrast, Chaucer removes this political framework. His Lucrece can barely speak the name of her attacker before taking her own life.

This thesis will attempt to answer the question of why Chaucer appears invested in suppressing his characters' responses to rape. I will do so by connecting accounts of assault in his poetry to his status and probable experience as an accused rapist. I will also confirm his investment by offering close readings. Many scholars, such as Derek Pearsall, T.F.T. Plucknett, John Gardner, and Evelyn Birge Vitz, have argued for Chaucer's innocence, or, at the very least, for the plausibility of Chaucer's innocence. Looking especially at Cecily's own phrasing in her release of Chaucer from all charges, scholars have used the multiple meanings of *raptus* as proof of Chaucer's vindication—that Chaumpaigne withdrew her accusations because they were untrue. Pearsall, for example, writes, “The charge referred to in the document of release is indeed one of rape. Beyond that, all is speculation” (137). Gardner agrees that “[m]ost Chaucerians, on the general principle that a man is innocent until proven guilty... have inclined to think

Chaucer is more or less innocent” (252). Vitz takes issue with the ways in which scholars read rape in medieval literature, and she argues that “this scholarly trend is... plagued by a tendency toward naïve, anachronistic, and inappropriate readings of literary words, high levels of indignation and self-pity, and a pervasive hostility to men” (1).

Christopher Cannon and Susan Morrison maintain that we cannot avoid the connection between literary and historical violence against women. Like Pearsall, Morrison examines Cecily Chaumpaigne’s phrasing in her release of Chaucer. However, whereas Pearsall sees in her language evidence of Chaucer’s possible innocence, Morrison attempts to find Chaumpaigne’s voice amid the historical records: “[W]e can read the poetry, not as a veiled point of access to Cecily’s subjectivity, but as a structure paralleling the construction of Cecily undertaken by critics from the legal documents” (80). Cannon’s article is often cited as proof that Chaucer did rape Cecily Chaumpaigne. Even still, however, Cannon writes, “We will never know with certainty why the Chaumpaigne release was drafted” (93). He continues that we do know that the noun *raptus* was removed in the second record of this release which “shows us that it was so bold that three days later, whether by coercion, persuasion, or some more complicated manipulation in the court of the king, this strong word... had to be quietly, but emphatically, retracted” (94).

Other scholars, such as Christine M. Rose and Carissa Harris, do not directly address the question of Chaumpaigne’s allegations, but rather consider the rapes in Chaucer’s narratives in relation to his writings. Rose, for example, argues, “Our task remains to continue to explore the use of rape in Chaucer’s art, and to call it by its name” (52). Harris draws a parallel between Chaucer’s depictions of rape and modern rape

cases: “The use of obscenity between men to authorize sexual violence and downplay its damages, prominent in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*... is not relegated to the premodern past but persists to this day” (228). Still others like Caroline Dunn and Jill Mann have argued that Chaucer’s approach to the women in these tales is sympathetic—i.e., that his removal of the more violent aspects of the assaults paints a fairer picture of the victims.

In contrast to the scholars listed above, I will argue that the changes Chaucer made to his sources remove the more grotesque deeds of the rapists rather than offer a more sympathetic reading of the victims. Using court documents while building on the scholarship of previous critics, I will examine Chaucer’s works in a new way: under the working assumption that he *did* rape Cecily Chaumpaigne, and, moreover, that his experience as an accused rapist motivated his portrayals of rape and rape victims across his poetry.

An examination of Chaucer’s stories of rape must include some historical context. The outcome of my research into contemporary court documents helps to shed light on the academic disagreement about Chaucer’s guilt or innocence. Dunn (*Stolen Women in Medieval England*) offers a wealth of information concerning laws regarding rape, abduction, and violence, laws that were, in many cases, ambiguous and short-lived. These laws cover rape, abduction, and violence due to the fact that many of the laws used the term *raptus* to mean multiple forms of assault. The ambiguity of the assaults in Chaucer’s tales mirrors that of the laws in some cases. Sebastian Sobecki’s 2019 article “Wards and Widows: *Troilus and Criseyde* and New Documents on Chaucer’s Life,” offers the “possibility that [Chaumpain’s] legal challenge may have been prompted by Chaucer’s attempt to arrange a suitable marriage for his ward Edmund. After all, the term *raptus* is

very common in wardship disputes, where it almost always denotes abduction” (Sobecki 413). Here is yet another example of this Latin term’s ambiguity creating conflicting theories. Even an abduction that would have led to a so-called marriage may have eventually involved the rape of Cecily in some form (i.e. marital rape) although there was no medieval legal equivalent of marital rape.

Much of the ambiguity in medieval rape laws and cases surrounded the Latin word *raptus* for which the Oxford English Dictionary provides the following etymology: “A borrowing from Latin. <classical Latin *raptus* action of tearing or carrying away, robbery, abduction, in post-classical Latin also cramp (5th cent.), rape (9th cent.), rapture, ecstasy (a709, frequently from c1200 in British sources) <*rapere* to seize + *-tus*, suffix forming verbal nouns.” Interestingly, this definition does not include forced coitus which is what “rape” most often refers to in the 21st century. It does, however, name abduction. Dunn’s *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500* offers a wealth of information concerning the rape laws of medieval England. Dunn writes, “The word that some twentieth-century scholars translated as *rape* actually denoted three modern-day offenses: sexual assault, abduction, and theft” (19).

Table 1. Classification of ravishment cases

| | Abduction | Rape | Ambiguous | Both |
|---|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Thirteenth century | 48 | 28 | 107 | 15 |
| Fourteenth century | 407 | 47 | 318 | 4 |
| Fifteenth century | 96 | 30 | 88 | 3 |
| Other ^a | 5 | 3 | 14 | 0 |
| Totals | 556 | 108 | 527 | 22 |
| (Percentage of ravishment cases) | (46) | (9) | (43) | (2) |

^a Date unknown or dated to outside 1200-1500 parameters.

Source: Dunn, Caroline. *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500*. Cambridge University Press, 2013, Table I.I, p. 22.

Dunn's study of medieval legal documents concerning rape informs the table above. She writes, "The tendency of legal documents to refrain from using only *rapuit* makes it possible to categorize the majority of cases as either sexual assault or abduction, or in some cases both" (22). A significant number of the cases remain ambiguous because they used no clarifying phrases (Dunn 23). As Cannon points out, Chaumpaigne's release included the phrase "de raptu meo" could be interpreted in different ways.

Suzanne Edwards argues that "in the medieval legal context most historically proximate to the [Wife of Bath's] Tale, however, rhetorical clarity about rape is often associated with consensual, rather than nonconsensual, relationships" (4). If this argument is to be believed, a fourteenth-century audience would likely have supposed that the clarity used to describe the rape in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* indicates that the union was consensual rather than nonconsensual. To the modern reader this is quite backwards. Extreme clarity describing a rape, especially using words as "maugree hir heed" (ln. 887) which means "despite all she could do" and "[b]y verray force" (ln. 888) which means "by utter force" does not lead the reader to believe that the maiden consented to this union. Edwards continues, "The very clarity of the rape scene itself raises questions about the range of acts it might describe" (4). She concludes that in the fourteenth century, the language used in claims of rape only produced confusion about the true nature of the events, no matter how clear the language might be.

In order to determine Chaucer's intended meaning in these rape scenes, one must examine the historical context in which Chaucer was writing. Daniel M. Klerman states:

The law of rape has protected two distinct interests—husbands', fathers', and other males' interest in controlling women's sexuality, and women's interest in bodily autonomy. At times, the law has favored the former interest; at other times, the latter. Nevertheless, in all periods, the law's effectiveness has been undermined by infrequent prosecution and low conviction rates. (Klerman, "Rape: English Common Law")

Like Klerman, Cannon is interested in these laws. He provides a brief history of laws concerning rape in the centuries prior to Chaucer's writing *The Canterbury Tales*: "In the late twelfth-century (and for some time after) the definition of *raptus* in England was actually narrower than in either Roman or Continental law until the end of the thirteenth-century" (79). Women could make their own claims of rape, and rape was punishable by death or could be settled with a fine (Edwards 6). *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is set around that time, hence, the initial death penalty for the knight's rape in the tale: "That dampned was this knyght for to be deed, / By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his heed" (ln. 891-892). Convicted rapists (of virgins) could be mutilated or executed, but they rarely were (Dunn 78). Bracton, a medieval, legal commentator, justified these punishments in his interpretations of the laws:

There must be member for member, for when a virgin is defiled, she loses her member and therefore let her defiler be punished in the parts in which he offended. Let him thus lose his eyes which gave him sight of the maiden's beauty for which he coveted her. And let him lose as well the testicles which excited his hot lust. (414-415)

Dunn writes that “no legal documents record the enforcement of mutilation... It is not until the early modern period that punishment prescribed significantly aligns with penalties carried out” (79). The beheading or mutilation of a knight would be less likely than that of a middle- or lower-class man which makes Chaucer’s depiction of events highly unrealistic.

In the late thirteenth-century, the statutes Westminster I and Westminster II were passed and blurred the line between forced coitus and abduction. Cannon writes, “Westminster I lumped rape and abduction together for the first time, and Westminster II furthered the ensuing confusion by using language that made no distinction at all between these two categories of wrong” (79). The statutes lumped rape and abduction together because both of these acts could end in marriage, for if a maiden wanted to avoid being “ruined,” she could marry her abductor or rapist. The laws focused on a woman’s consent, particularly, the opportunity for delayed consent. A woman would in essence be giving her delayed consent if she married her rapist. This idea of delayed consent further complicated claims of rape. Dunn’s study of 1285 Second Statute of Westminster raises the question of ambiguity in the laws:

This law states that a man convicted of ravishing a woman – wife, damsel, or other – against her will shall suffer judgment of life and limb. If the woman should consent to the ravishment afterwards, the king shall have suit. But did the authors of the ambiguous 1275 statute and the French portion of Westminster II intend for them to legislate against either rape or abduction, did they intend for *raptus* to cover both offences, and did they perhaps leave the statutes deliberately ambiguous? (31).

These laws concerning rape and employing forms of the term *raptus* ushered in a long period, beginning in the fourteenth century, of ambiguous legal treatment of rape and abduction cases.

In 1380, the same year as Cecily Chaumpaigne's release, Sir Thomas West and his wife Alice sent a petition to John of Gaunt telling the story of their daughter Eleanor's ravishment. An employee of Sir Thomas named Nicholas Clifton rode out with Alice, Eleanor, and others to an ambush where many men were waiting with weapons "with the intention of ravishing the said Eleanor" (Edwards 8). The petition is silent about Eleanor's "nonconsenting" and her injuries, rather, the petition lists Alice's injuries from the episode. Alice's injuries were the foci of the petition because her consent could not be called into question like her daughter Eleanor's could. "The said Alice has taken such illness that it is like to be the cause of her death; for which they pray remedy" (Edwards 8). The Wests might not have mentioned Eleanor's consent or lack thereof because, according to the laws of that time, even if she had not consented in the moment, she could still consent by marrying her attacker. Alice's injuries could not be disputed; thus, the rapist did cause a woman harm even if she was not the main victim. The Wests were extremely clever in their wording of the petition, for even if Eleanor eventually gave delayed consent by marrying her attacker, Alice could not give delayed consent. Therefore, the rapist could never be completely free of blame. Unlike Cecily Chaumpaigne's case, the West's petition did not end in release.

As a result of the West's petition, a new *Statute of Rapes* was passed in 1382. However, this statute was not much of an improvement over Westminster I and II. The 1382 Statute had two important provisions which Suzanne Edwards enumerates in her

article. The first provision declared the rapist's guilt despite a woman's subsequent consent which was a desirable provision for rape victims. Supposedly, the idea of delayed consent no longer freed a rapist from the charges of rape. Unfortunately, two concessions accompanied this provision: it made women liable for their own *raptus* should they consent after the fact, and in such a case, both the rapist and the rape victim would be disinherited. If a woman decided to marry her attacker in order to avoid being seen as ruined, she would then be taking the blame for her own rape, and she would be disinherited (Edwards 11).

Of course, these concessions brought forth legal questions. Namely, when could a woman's liability or innocence be determined? Presumably, the possibility of the woman consenting would remain until her death which would place the woman and her family in a state of limbo. Her family would never know if she was eligible to receive her inheritance. To resolve this problem, the second provision stripped both the rapist *and* the rape victim of their inheritance rights. This provision allowed the families of rape victims to "protect their financial interests against women's ability to choose their own marriages" (10). The courts suspected women of facilitating their own rapes or abductions to marry whomever they chose with or without their father's permission. The first provision suggests that a woman *could* consent after the fact, but the second provision declares that the rape itself proves her consent.

In 1383, the Wests submitted a second petition requesting that the *1382 Statute of Rapes* apply retroactively to their daughter Eleanor's case (Edwards 12). In this petition the Wests no longer had to try to substitute Alice's injuries for Eleanor's. Instead, they insinuate Eleanor's involvement and consent in the attack: "notwithstanding the said

Eleanor be now covert of the said Nicholas” (Edwards 12). They also suggest that Eleanor’s consent is an open-ended possibility: “if she consent at any time” (Edwards 12). The Wests submit this second petition to gain the financial security that would come with disinheriting Eleanor. They request that Nicholas and Eleanor “bear the penalty of the aforesaid statute prompted by themselves... and that her father, or any other of her blood, can have suit to attain him according to the form of the statute” (Edwards 12). If the *1382 Statute of Rapes* applied retroactively to Eleanor’s case, then Sir Thomas and Alice could simply say that Eleanor’s involvement in the transgression is a sign of her consent, and therefore, she will not receive her inheritance.

The *1382 Statute of Rapes* concerned itself more with abduction and consensual elopement rather than rape. One wonders then why the statute made rape its rhetorical frame. The 1382 Statute and the West petitions “frame *ravyse* as a crime of masculine aggression and feminine suffering and use the specter of rape to justify families’ control over women’s marriage choice” (Edwards 12). The choice of a husband for a daughter was so important to fathers that if a woman was raped, it was easier to say that she simply wanted to marry her attacker against her father’s wishes. The victim was then blamed and lost all of her money.

Prosecutions of rape were exceptionally rare in the late fourteenth-century. Klerman’s article “Rape: English Common Law” states that there was only about one [prosecution of rape] per county every five years in the early fourteenth-century (2). “Conviction rates were also very low—about ten percent” (Klerman 2). This would have been towards the end of Westminster II. One particular belief contributed to the low numbers of prosecutions and convictions. At this time, many “doctors believed that

pregnancy could occur only if both man and woman achieved orgasm” (Klerman 2). Dunn reinforces this statement, “Medical authors contributed to misogynistic views by promulgating a doctrine based on ancient medical views of a ‘two-seed’ conception; a woman who became pregnant after being raped must have consented to the sex because otherwise she would not have produced the necessary ‘seed’” (53). Pregnancy was considered proof of consent. Therefore, any rape resulting in pregnancy would not result in a conviction or even brought to trial. The medical community’s ignorance about women’s bodies is mirrored by Chaucer’s willful suppression of women’s voices and autonomy in general in his texts.

In the same decade that the *1382 Statute of Rapes* was passed, not only did Geoffrey Chaucer likely write some of his tales, but he was also accused of raping a woman named Cecily Chaumpaigne. In 1380, “Chaumpaigne brought a deed of release into the Chancery of Richard II and had it enrolled on the close rolls (i.e. copied by a clerk on the back of those sheets of parchment used to record the ‘closed’ or sealed letters sent by the king)” (Cannon 74). Susan S. Morrison’s article “The Use of Biography in Medieval Literary Criticism: The Case of Geoffrey Chaucer and Cecily Chaumpaigne” provides a translation of Cecily’s release:

Let all men know that I Cecily Chaumpaigne, daughter of the late William Chaumpaigne and Agnes his wife, have remitted, released, and quitclaimed in perpetuity entirely for myself and my heirs to Geoffrey Chaucer, esquire, all manner of actions both concerning actions of whatever kind either my rape or any other matter whatsoever that I ever had, do have, or shall be able to have against the said Geoffrey from the beginning of the world until the day of the making of

(these) presents. In testimony of which I have placed my seal on (these) presents.
With these witnesses: Sir William Beauchamp, then chamberlain of the lord king,
Sir John Clanbowe [sic], Sir William Neville, knights, John Philippott and
Richard Morel. Given at London, the first day of May in the third year of the
reign of Richard the second after the Conquest. (Morrison 70)

The phrase *de raptu meo* is the focus of Cannon's article examining this incident.

Scholars, like the people of the fourteenth century, cannot agree about the meaning of this phrase.

As discussed above, the laws regarding rape in the fourteenth century left a lot of room for interpretation in claims of rape. Cecily's claim of *raptus* could have meant forced coitus, abduction, or both. Cannon writes that this phrase "cannot be found in any other document in these rolls during any of these eight years (the first eight years of the reign of Richard II (June 22,1377-June 21, 1385))" (Cannon 77). The use of the word *raptu* is so rare in the rolls that, according to Cannon, it must mean forced coitus:

There are in fact only two other records in the close rolls in this period that use some form of the verb *rapere*... and only one other record in these rolls that actually uses the noun *raptus* itself. The bulk of the releases during these eight years are so vague in fact that their contents are described in the *Calendar of the Close Rolls* as 'general.' These releases do not specify any claim or wrong in their terms of release at all. Where the Chaumpaigne release names *raptus* specifically, these other records only refer in broad terms to 'all manner of actions, charges, quarrels, suits, and personal claims.' (Cannon 77)

Cannon claims that the wording of Chaumpaigne's release ensures that the phrase *de*

raptu meo stands out, for it is not lost among a list of other charges.

Chaumpaigne released Chaucer in 1380, during which time, Westminster II was still in effect. This statute would have furthered the confusion of Chaumpaigne's meaning because it lumped together "all types of ravishment of women under one simplistic chapter" (Cannon 79). For this reason, it was almost impossible to distinguish cases of rape from cases of abduction. Under Westminster II, abduction was a trespass, "in effect a wrong committed against those who had a material interest in the marriage of a particular ward" (Cannon 80). The punishment for such a trespass would be financial compensation for the monetary loss resultant from the abduction (Cannon 80). Rape was considered a felony, a violent crime against a person for which an appeal "sought punishment of the accused by way of compensation for the injury suffered" (Cannon 80). Despite the different classifications of the offenses, court records of the time show that cases of both abductions and rapes were tried using the same procedures. Therefore, even if Chaumpaigne had not released Chaucer, he most likely would only have been required to pay a fine for raping Chaumpaigne.

The lack of adequate punishment in rape cases could certainly have contributed to Chaumpaigne's decision to release her petition. Perhaps Cecily did not think that a simple fine would be a just punishment for her rape. Additionally, Chaucer was a cherished entertainer at court, and he had many friends in high places. It is plausible that Chaucer and his connections coerced Chaumpaigne into issuing the release. In fact, a second release involving Chaucer was issued merely days after Chaumpaigne's. This second release was similar, though not identical, and released Chaucer "from certain actions, including 'felonies, trespasses, accounts, debts and any other actions.' ...significantly

rape, or *raptus*, is left out. This emendation of wording leads [one] to suggest the possibility that Chaucer and his powerful friends at court somehow strong-armed Cecily Champaigne to take back her accusations or that she reconsidered her legal claims” (Morrison 71). If Champaigne’s rape had occurred after the implementation of the 1382 *Statute of Rapes*, she might have issued the release of her own free will rather than lose her inheritance and legal agency. We will never know for sure why she decided to release the petition.

Morrison explores the Cecily Champaigne case in several biographies of Chaucer such as George Williams’s *A New View of Chaucer*, Paul F. Baum’s *Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation*, and John Gardner’s *The Life and Times of Chaucer*. Morrison searches these biographies for even a mention of the Champaigne case. While these biographers do touch on Chaucer’s relationship with Champaigne, they do not focus at all on Cecily Champaigne as a person. Their eyes are only for Chaucer, and they do not readily believe that Chaucer could actually have raped a woman. Of course, the ambiguity of her release makes it easier for scholars to argue that Chaucer did not actually rape Champaigne.

Each of the biographers Williams read went to great lengths to assure their readers of Chaucer’s innocence or, at least, the frivolity of the incident with Champaigne. Williams does mention Champaigne’s release. However, Morrison believes that he does this only because of the list of witnesses with whom John of Gaunt would have been familiar. Baum does say that *raptus* meant rape, but he clearly has doubts. Baum states, “Most of the legal tangles would be less tangled if Chaucer had seduced the lady, if she then lost her temper and threatened suit for rape and then under

pressure compromised by releasing him for certain considerations” (42). He reads the *raptus* as innocent fun rather than violation. Baum believes that Chaumpaigne and Chaucer’s liaison was consensual and that Chaumpaigne’s accusation was simply the act of a scorned woman because “knowledge of the Cecily incident would have provided greater amusement for Chaucer’s listeners than if this information had been kept from them” (Morrison 72).

Gardner’s critical approach stands upon the belief that Chaucer was a medieval playboy. He writes, “Most Chaucerians, on the general principle that a man is innocent until proven guilty... have inclined to think Chaucer was more or less innocent, that is, that at worst he was somehow involved in an attempted abduction of some young person, perhaps to make an advantageous marriage” (Gardner 252). Gardner seems to be of the mind that abducting a young girl was completely acceptable so long as an advantageous marriage was the goal. Gardner’s framework is similar to Andreas Capellanus’ *De Amore Rusticorum* in which Capellanus “advises against any love affairs with peasant girls but suggests that if a young man is overcome by attraction, he had best be brutally abrupt and where persuasion fails have recourse to rape” (Huppé 379-380). That these biographers wrote these opinions in the twentieth century is appalling. Biographers of Chaucer, like Chaucer himself, do not appear to have any sympathy for (potential) victims of rape. Even the twentieth century’s popular discourse about sexual assault did not frame rape as something humorous or acceptable, nevertheless, Chaucer’s biographers did, and in so doing, emulated Chaucer himself.

Dunn writes that the aristocracy who would have been familiar with Chaucer’s works “considered rape a serious crime, at least in theory” (54). It is not clear, however,

that the aristocracy considered all rape to be a serious crime. They did, at least, seek harsher punishments for rapists of virgins. “Sexual violence done to a virgin was easier to verify, and this also helped the raped virgin achieve a resolution in the legal system” (Dunn 56). Virginity was an advantageous condition for most young women seeking marriage. A woman whose maidenhood had been stolen would have had much to gain from legal action:

Medieval legal commentators and scribes depicted the alleged loss of virginity in various terms. The predominant terminology conveys loss, rather than bodily harm. Often the offender was accused of stealing the victim’s virginity... Other scribes used the verb deflowered to depict the act, which at first glance might look more like a wounding crime than a stealing crime, but, as conveyed in Gower’s phrase ‘the flour of womanhede’, *deflorauit* is another verb depicting loss. (Dunn 57)

Putting a rape into the context of thievery would have given it more weight in legal proceedings. Dunn, however, does not stipulate whether this was seen as the virginity being stolen from a woman or from a daughter. Seemingly, a woman’s maidenhood was more important to her father than it would have been to her, and the courts were less concerned with the harm done to a woman’s body than with her social value.

Table 2. Proportion of rape cases alleging loss of virginity by including the following terms:

| | <i>virginitate</i> | Percentage | <i>deflorauit</i> | Percentage | <i>sanguine</i> | Percentage | Total | Percentage |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Thirteenth century | 18 | 41.9% | 7 | 16.3% | 4 | 9.3% | 29 | 67.4% |
| Fourteenth century | 6 | 11.8% | 8 | 15.7% | 4 | 7.8% | 18 | 35.3% |
| Fifteenth century | 1 | 3.0% | 3 | 9.1% | 0 | 0.0% | 4 | 12.1% |
| Totals | 25 | | 18 | | 8 | | 51 | |

^a One thirteenth-century case includes both *virginitate* and *sanguine*, and one combines *sanguine* with *deflorauit*.

Source: Dunn, Caroline. *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500*. Cambridge University Press, 2013, Table 2.I, p. 59.

Unfortunately, Chaumpaigne’s release does not use such specific language, so scholars interpret Chaucer’s actions to match their opinions of the author. Chaucer, however, does use the term “rafte,” meaning “take,” in line 888 of *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*. This description of the assault would have had little room for interpretation in court. The rapes in *The Reeve’s Tale*, *The Legend of Lucrece*, and *The Legend of Philomela* describe the assaults with more explicit language.

Several genres of medieval literature “use sexual violence as a common, and often acceptable, trope” (Dunn 53). Dunn claims that the “so-called *droit de seigneur* is a myth, [but that it likely] has its origins in the inability of female peasants to resist unwanted sexual advances made by lords, or to prosecute them successfully after the fact” (53). This could well be the case in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, *The Legend of Lucrece*, and *The Legend of Philomela*. Of course, the ambiguous medieval rape laws would not have helped these victims.

Social statuses of victims were rarely noted in legal records of rape cases. Dunn

writes, “So few cases reveal both alleged victim’s and alleged rapist’s social status that it is impossible to draw statistically significant conclusions, but those that do provide information for both parties reinforce the historical truth behind Capellanus’ literary boasting and support Ruth Karras’ assertion that ‘rape was a class privilege’ during the Middle Ages” (61). In Chaucer’s tales, we do know the social status of both the rapist and the victim. In *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, we can assume that the maiden is of a lower social status than that of the knight because she is walking alone. A noblewoman would have had an escort of some kind. Dunn continues: “Sometimes rapist and victim shared social status... Yet, if the parties involved in the rape allegation were of disparate status, the case was more likely to involve a higher-status rapist ravishing a lower-status victim (62). There are multiple examples of medieval rape victims being stifled in a way that we see reflected in Chaucer’s accounts of rape. One such example is Rose Savage, who “was taken from her croft by Jon de Clifford, brought to his house, and imprisoned in his solar for two years” (Dunn 62). Clifford hired a good lawyer who “was able to plead that complaints needed to name the specific day, year, and place where the rape took place. Because Rose Savage did not do this, she was committed to jail for having made a false appeal, even though a local jury condemned the rape” (Dunn 62). In light of this case, Chaucer’s release following the initial charge of Cecily Chaumpaigne is suspect, for Chaucer certainly had friends in high places and the means to make the case end in his favor. Chaucer was a well-educated man who would have been aware of these laws, especially taking into account that he stifled the victims of his tales exactly as medieval victims were stifled. Dunn concludes:

Lower-status women enjoyed less protection and were thus more accessible to

would-be rapists. In addition, perhaps men chose to rape women of reduced means because such women would be more likely to keep quiet or have greater difficulty in successfully prosecuting their rapists and gaining retribution. (Dunn 62)

This is certainly evidenced in Chaucer's tales. The only noble rape victims in Chaucer's tales are Lucrece who is believed by her father and husband, and Philomela who is believed by her sister. Tereus quite literally takes away Philomela's voice by cutting out her tongue, and Lucrece kills herself. Evidence suggests that lower-class victims have a harder time in court against their assaulters. The knight in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* does go to court, but he does not really end up being punished at all. The rapists in *The Reeve's Tale* escape with the help of their victims.

Interestingly, the noblewomen who are raped in Chaucer's tales are the ones who suffer further bodily harm subsequent to their rapes. This additional physical harm induces even more sympathy from readers of the tales. One might sympathize with the victims in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale*, but Lucrece and Philomela seem to endure more than the other victims. Perhaps the lower-class victims would have seemed too pitiful or their rapists too evil if they were maimed or killed in addition to being raped.

I have used my introduction to review the medieval rape laws and cases and scholarly readings of these laws and cases in relation to Cecily's charges against Chaucer to consider a new impetus for his denying his characters a vocal response after being raped. This thesis is organized by the individual tales: *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, *The Reeve's Tale*, *The Legend of Lucrece*, and *The Legend of Philomela*. The content of each

tale contextualized by historical laws and case studies will help confirm that Chaucer used rape as a way to stifle his female characters. He was not the only medieval author to disempower his female characters using rape, but his stifling is, I will argue, a personal one, given what we know from the Champaigne release.

I will further argue that the *MeToo* movement has fundamentally altered the way feminists read and talk about assault not only in our own time but also in literature. Namely, reading Chaucer's works now forces us to read resistance through silence, protest in delayed consent, and indeed, even a guilty conscience in the revocation of charges against powerful men, surrounded by a network of other powerful men. Since the turn of the 21st century, challenges to rape culture have become more prevalent with more and more victims coming forward with their stories, and the cultural MeToo movement that first gained considerable steam in 2017 has given even previously silent victims a space in which to speak and be heard. Whereas several scholars of the past century sought to defend Chaucer due to the ambiguity of *raptus* and consent, we modern readers cannot take such a sympathetic approach. We can no longer excuse the actions of alleged rapists because the accusation was ambiguous, or because there is a question of retroactive consent, or with the age-old excuse of honoring "male genius." Nor can we put the onus on the victims to prove assault, because, as Chaucer himself implies in his poetry, assault is so often unpunished. While studying Chaucer's literature, therefore, we should bear in mind that he was accused of rape and that this experience inevitably influenced his portrayal of rape and rape victims.

II. CHAUCER'S SYMPATHY

As discussed in the previous chapter and bearing in mind the ambiguity and confusion surrounding language of rape cases and claims in the fourteenth century, Chaucer's language leaves little room for doubt in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. Considering Chaucer's personal experience with the technicalities of rape claims with Cecily Champaigne, he would have been sensitive to the linguistic nuances and used crystal clear language to describe this fictitious rape: "Of which mayde anon, maugree hir heed, / By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhood" (ln. 887-888). Perhaps the obscurity surrounding the word "raptus" caused Chaucer to employ other, more specific language in the description of the maiden's rape. Chaucer avoids the term "raptus" and uses instead "he rafte hire maydenhed" (ln. 888). "Rafte" is a form of the verb "reave" meaning "to rob a person or place of something" (OED reave, v.1). While robbing a woman of her maidenhood is certainly rape, it puts the focus on the maiden's virginity rather than on her as a person. The victim's experience as a victim is brushed aside.

The laws and attitudes concerning rape now reflect those of the Middle Ages. Harris offers the McDonald and Evans Case of 2012 and Evans's retrial of 2016 as contemporary evidence (26-29). McDonald (a six-foot-six professional soccer player) and his friend see an incredibly intoxicated nineteen-year-old woman stumbling in a fast food restaurant. When she leaves, McDonald joins her in the cab and tells the driver to take them to a budget hotel. McDonalds rapes the woman while his teammate Evans watches and then joins. Evans's younger brother and another male friend watch from outside the window and use their phones to record the rape. The waitress, naked and bruised, wakes up in the hotel room the next morning with no memory of anything after holding a pizza

box the night before. In the 2012 trial that followed the rape, McDonald is acquitted “because his interactions with her in the taxi and hotel lobby are interpreted as sufficient evidence of her consent despite her extreme intoxication” (28). During that same trial, Evans was convicted of rape, and his supporters attacked the victim with such ferocity that “she [was] forced to change her name twice and move five times in the first three years after the trial” (28). Evans is granted a retrial in 2016 “after his friends and family advertise a £50,000 reward for information that would lead to his exoneration” (28). Conveniently, his legal team produces two new witnesses who claim that they had sex with the same woman within weeks of Evans, and the defense attorney declares, “Drunken consent is still consent” (28). The jury, “swayed by the inclusion of the woman’s sexual history,” unanimously votes that Evans is not guilty (28-29). The idea of consent should not be this hard to understand. The jury was presented with so much evidence that this woman was raped, yet her sexual history was seen as evidence of her consent. Even today, a virgin would be more likely believed about her rape than a woman who had been sexually active.

Chaucer would have been aware of the laws concerning rape at the time that he wrote *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, especially considering he was accused of raping Cecily Champaigne. The reader ought to take this information into account when considering the rape case in the tale. As discussed in the introduction, the language used in rape cases and claims of rape in the fourteenth century was ambiguous. Not only did Chaucer use seemingly straight-forward language to describe the maiden’s rape, but he even mentions rape laws. “By cours of lawe” (ln. 892). Both medieval and modern rape cases always include the question of whether or not the rape actually happened. In *The Wife of Bath’s*

Tale, the rape is unmistakable:

And happed that, allone as he was born,
He saugh a mayde walkynge hym biforn,
Of which mayde anon, maugree hir heed,
By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed;
For which oppressioun was swich clamour
And swich pursute unto the kyng Arthour
That dampned was this knyght for to be deed,
By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his / heed.
Paraventure swich was the statut tho –
But that the queene and other ladyes mo
So longe preyeden the kyng of grace. (ln. 885-895)

The knight takes her maidenhood by force. Much of the debate surrounding the Wife concerns only the Wife herself and occasionally the knight. Critics have begun to take a closer look at the rape victim and all of the factors contributing to the telling of the rape in the tale. Study of the laws concerning rape in the fourteenth century (Westminster I and II and The 1382 Statute of Rapes) reveals that the punishments for rape were inconsistent and greatly favored the fathers or guardians of those who were raped especially if the victim was an unmarried virgin. “Legal commentaries and resolution rates both suggest that sexual assault against maidens was deemed a more heinous crime than the rape of non-virgins” (Dunn 56).

The language used to describe a rape or to prosecute a rape was often ambiguous, a precedent which has continued into the 21st century. Even still, as Harris illustrates,

supposedly “open and shut” rape case can be overturned incredibly easily. The case of Rose Savage is one such case. She was taken “by John de Clifford, brought to his house, and imprisoned... for two years” (Dunn 62). Even though Rose had clearly been abducted and raped, she was jailed “for having made a false appeal” since she did not “name the specific day, year, and place where the rape took place.” (62).

If Chaucer did mean to write that the maiden in the tale was actually raped (i.e. forced into coitus) by the knight, the rest of the tale does not quite fit with the reality of medieval rape cases. Chaucer would have his readers believe that during the time in which the tale is supposed to take place, a rapist would receive the death penalty no matter what, yet as the previous chapter stated and using Dunn’s evidence, this was rarely the case. Chaucer allowed the laws concerning rape in his lifetime to affect the way the rape was handled in the tale so that the punishment was downplayed. The Queen in the tale apparently offers the knight a stay of execution with the task of discovering the answer to the Queen’s question:

“I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me
What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren.
Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iren!
And if thou kanst nat tellen it anon,
Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
A twelf-month and a day, to seche and leere
An answeere suffisant in this mateere;
And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,
Thy body for to yelden in this place.” (ln. 904-912)

The knight had one year to discover what it is that women want most. If he could tell the Queen, then she would not execute him. There is the specter of possible justice raised; then, when the queen tasks the knight with finding what it is that women most desire, the knight ends up married to a beautiful enchantress. The rape victim is never mentioned again. She does not get her justice. In Edwards' chapter "Outrage Against Rape and the Battle Over Survival in Fourteenth-century Legal Discourse and the *Wife of Bath's Tale*," she writes, "The motivation for the Queen's mercy toward the knight and the logic of the marital reward the rapist ultimately receives engage a legal context in which the language of rape elided feminine autonomy under the guise of justice" (83). The maiden in the tale, just like Eleanor and Cecily, disappears from her rape story, but many believe that the rapist was indeed punished and the victim did receive her justice through the task that the Queen enforces upon the rapist. Yet there is the obvious problem of the so-called justice having absolutely no effect on the actual victim's life.

There are those, however, who do not believe that *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is so straight-forward. Bernard F. Huppé explores the reasoning behind the Queen's actions in the tale. He first argues that the raped woman was most likely a peasant because she is referred to as a "mayde" who is walking alone, and a great "clamour" and "pursute" is made. "This is not a description of a nobleman's protest over the rape of his daughter, but the angry outcry of outraged villagers" (Huppé 379). He argues that the woman's station makes it acceptable for the Queen to care more about the fate of the knight than that of the woman. According to Huppé, if the raped woman had been a lady of court, the Queen would simply have let the knight be executed (379). Perhaps Given that (presumably) the knight is of higher rank than the rape victim, the Queen seeks to protect him by bringing

him into her “Court of Love” (Huppé 379). “In the law of the Courts of Love he had committed at the most an indiscretion” (Huppé 379). The Queen in essence gives the knight a slap on the wrist and a way to avoid execution by sending him on a year-long quest to discover what it is women most desire. This argument illustrates the idea that money and station can go a long way toward an acquittal, as we find in the Rose Savage, McDonald, and Evans Cases.

Brian S. Lee disagrees, giving a contradictory reading of the rape in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*. Lee explains why the tale focuses on the knight rather than the raped woman. He argues that the knight is temporarily banished by the Queen, which is a fate worse than death. For the knight to be removed from his society yet still be living is a sort of torture.

The girl is not a member, or not a full member, of this society, and can be ignored until her body is wanted again, or until it again becomes a sign of deviant or acceptable behavior on the part of one of the members, male of course, of this society. And this is, indeed, what it does become before the tale is over, her disappearance being as symbolic as her ‘reappearance’ in the persons of the hag and the transformed wife. (Lee 8-9)

Lee’s argument is that the rape victim is reincarnated as the loathly lady and then as the beautiful enchantress at the end of the tale. If this is true, then the rape victim does get her justice by the knight marrying her and giving her a morsel of sovereignty (allowing her to choose whether she will be old and faithful or young and unfaithful). In Lee’s interpretation, the tale is wrapped up in a pretty bow in which the rape victim gains sovereignty of her body, and she also gives her delayed consent to the rape by marrying

the knight as the loathly lady. “*The Wife of Bath’s Tale* is not about death, or self-indulgence, but about rehabilitation” (Lee 12). The knight is rehabilitated because he has finally learned that women deserve sovereignty, and he has righted his initial wrong of raping the maiden by offering her reincarnated self a sliver of autonomy.

There is no evidence in the tale that the maiden comes back as the loathly lady. Perhaps the loathly lady is supposed to represent all women, but that still does nothing for the raped woman. Lee concluded that it was indeed forced coitus, but also that the rapist in the tale deserved redemption. He is saying the focus of the tale is the knight because the knight deserves the chance to marry the woman at the end. Lee is participating in the erasure of the victim from the story of her assault just as Chaucer did.

Thomas A. Van's “False Texts and Disappearing Women in the ‘Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale.’” Van states that “the Tale takes us behind the eyes of one stranger, by way of showing him and us why he raped” (180). Van attempts to take us through the thought process (or lack thereof) of the young man, believing that *why* the knight forced a woman to have sex with him is relevant—as if any reason for raping another human is justifiable. Van argues that the knight saw the maiden as prey: “The act was unthinking, if not automatic, and the public outrage brought on a punishment by law which was equally automatic” (Van 185). In essence, men are slaves to their sexual desires and cannot help but rape pretty girls, according to Van. He asserts that the Queen and the ladies of court in the tale sought to change the knight’s perceptions of women, and the fact that he did not simply jump bail and run makes him admirable. The knight’s allowing the loathly lady to choose her appearance shows that his perceptions are changed, and he respects women.

While Lee's and Van's interpretations of the Wife's tale are misogynistic, they are not the only readers who side with the rapist rather than with the rape victim. Edwards admits that "readers most often understood the rape as an elision of female desire that the knight's quest to uncover what women most desire either redeems or reproduces" (83). People who sympathize with the rapist are not to blame, for Chaucer wrote this as the tale of a rapist's survival of his crime's punishment rather than the victim's survival of the rapist's violence. Keeping Chaucer's rape of Cecily Chaumpaigne in mind, we can easily see why he chose to focus on the rapist instead of the victim. I suggest that he relates to the rapist in the story, even if the wife relates to the victim.

Like Chaucer himself, many scholars gloss over and silence the rape victim in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. Although one of the most powerful feminist critics of Chaucer, Carolyn Dinshaw nevertheless pays little attention to the silenced rape victim in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* in her chapter on this work. Instead, and rather ironically, she gives a succinct argument regarding the glossing of the Wife in her Tale, seemingly unaware that she herself would appear to be glossing over the silenced woman. "Gloss' comes from the Greek *glossa* ('tongue, language')... Greek grammarians used the term to refer to words of Greek texts that required some exposition; later, the term came to refer to the explanation itself" (Dinshaw 121). Glossing continued and grew in its importance. Glosses became so elaborate that they crowded the text off the page. Dinshaw writes, "[Glosses] are written in as large and as careful a hand as the actual text, which is placed off-centre to make room for the glosses each of which begins with an illuminated capital in the same colours as those of the text itself" (121-122). The commentaries on texts

became more important than the primary text, Dinshaw writes, reading the prologue and tale as a textual allegory. Again, however, the literal demands attention: the rape victim requires a voice, yet she is barely mentioned in Dinshaw's article. Instead, Dinshaw is concerned with the Wife of Bath, who is so concerned with not being glossed over by the patriarchy that she glosses over another woman's life in her story.

Over six hundred years later, Chaucer's meaning in the rape scene is still considered unclear by many. However, studying the laws, the language, and the personal experiences in the previous chapter strongly suggests that the attack on the maiden by the knight was, in fact, rape (forced coitus rather than abduction). In reference to the rape, Edwards writes, "If time divides consent from the event, then it divides the ravished woman from herself" (9). Chaucer, his contemporaries, and even academics today all participate in this dividing of the woman from herself. The rape brings into question Chaucer's reasoning for the Queen's actions, the knight's actions, and the loathly lady's actions. One cannot dismiss the rape victim even though she, like so many others, has been removed from the story of her own rape. Readers of Chaucer ought to keep all of this in mind when reading *The Wife of Bath's Tale* because it would be easy to follow his narrative emphasis and miss the victim herself. Not only has the Queen done an injustice, we do too if we read the passage quickly and allow his emphasis to control our imagining.

III. CHAUCER'S FELLOWS

In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer uses a group of eight male pilgrims from the mercantile-artisan classes to illuminate the workings of a type of masculinity, which I call 'felawe masculinity,' that is centered on men teaching their peers to perpetuate rape culture, much like the brand of masculinity espoused by Evans, McDonald, and their crew. By 'teaching to perpetuate rape culture,' I mean that Chaucer's pilgrim faction actively espouses 'a complex of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women.' (Harris 29-30)

The account of the rapes in *The Reeve's Tale* seem more problematic than that of assault in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. While the rapes in this tale are also employed as a plot device, the rape victims are not as obviously stifled as the victim in the Wife's Tale. Instead, as I suggest, Chaucer denies the victims the opportunity to condemn their assaulters and reduces their worth to that of a sack of grain. John and Aleyn, clerks at Cambridge, come to the miller Symkyn's home to have some grain milled. Symkyn employs his daughter Malyne in cheating the students out of their grain, and he sets their horses free. Pretending to sympathize with the clerks, Symkyn offers to let them eat and stay at his house that night. John and Aleyn know that they were cheated and decide that they will rape Symkyn's wife and daughter. The following morning, the clerks quickly leave before Symkyn can find out what they have done. Malyne tearfully tells Aleyn where the cake made with their stolen grain can be found. Chaucer's language in this tale makes the classification of these rapes more problematic than that of the rape in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. *The Reeve's Tale* is, I suggest, a prime example of the ludicrous theory of delayed consent which was employed in some medieval court cases as discussed in the

previous chapter. By minimizing the rapes in this story, Chaucer is perpetuating his own minimizing of rape in real life.

“For, John, ther is a lawe that says thus: / That gif a man in a point be agreved, / That in another he sal be releved” (ln. 4179-4181). John and Aleyn decide that raping the wife (who is given no name) and daughter (Malyne) of the miller is fair retaliation for being cheated out of some grain. John says, “If that I may, yon wenche wil I swyve” (4178). Douglas Gray’s footnote defines “swyve” as “copulate with,” but Harris points out that this word has much more obscene connotations: “‘Swyve’ was the most explicit sexual verb in Middle English, and its illicit status is attested by scribes and readers of the *Canterbury Tales*, who substitute, alter, omit, or erase it in numerous fifteenth-century manuscripts” (37). Not only was this the most explicit sexual verb in Middle English, but it was also “restricted to male authors and speakers in all the surviving Middle English examples except a fifteenth-century version of the ‘Wife of Bath’s Prologue’ in which Alisoun articulates ‘swyve,’ and it was frequently used to tell explicit sexual narratives in all-male contexts” (37). Chaucer’s use of this verb eroticizes the rapes of the miller’s wife and daughter, as I will argue, perpetuating the rape culture in which he lived.

Harris defines rape culture as

the social, cultural, and structural discourses and practices in which sexual violence is tolerated, accepted, eroticized, minimized, and trivialized. In a rape culture, violence against women is eroticized in literary, cinematic, and media representations; victims are routinely disbelieved or blamed for their own victimization; and perpetrators are rarely held accountable or their behaviours are seen as excusable or understandable. (Harris 30)

Chaucer, of course, lived in a rape culture, and created the rape cultures in which his characters lived. His perpetration of the rape culture is evident even in his introduction of characters. Chaucer describes the wife's upbringing more than her physical appearance. He writes that her father was a parson and that she grew up in a nunnery. He writes that she was "as haughty as ditch-water (OED: 'stinking with pride')" (Gray 79). I suggest that Chaucer gives this description of the wife to add to the intended humor when she is later raped. Malyne is introduced as: "This wenche thikke and wel ygrowen was, / With kamus nose and eyen greye as glas, / With buttocks brode and brestes rounde and hye" (ln. 3973-3975). This description leaves little doubt as to what Malyne's purpose in this tale will be. She is described only physically and will be used only physically. This description foreshadows the clerks' physical use of the women.

Chaucer uses less direct language to describe Aleyn's rape of Malyne than he did for that of the maiden in the Wife's Tale:

And up he rist, and by the wenche he crepte,
This wenche lay upright and faste slepte,
Til he so ny was, er she myghte espie,
That it had been to late for to crie,
And shortly for to seyn, they were aton.
Now pley, Aleyn... (ln. 4193-4198)

There are multiple ways in which this is clearly a rape, but the most important, as always, is that Malyne did not give any sort of consent to Aleyn. The language used in this description, however, might lead some people to believe that this is not actually a rape. Chaucer used the social status of his victim and perpetrator to obfuscate the severity of

the encounter. As Harris explains, “The Reeve’s naming of Malyne as ‘this wenche’ establishes a pattern that persists throughout the tale, as Aleyn later calls her ‘yon wenche’ when he declares his intention to assault her. In total, the term is used five times to name her” (49). Harris points out the connotations surrounding the term “wenche,” writing, “. . .its underlying connotations of youth, femininity, lower-class status, servitude, and sexual transgression, invokes multiple grounds of disadvantage” (34). While the Middle English Dictionary notes that “wenche” can also be a term of endearment, such as “sweetheart” or “one’s beloved,” it does seem to have negative connotations in *The Reeve’s Tale*. Chaucer’s word choice here puts Malyne at a social disadvantage to Aleyn. “The appellation ‘wenche’ represents the faction’s view of women as subordinate and useful only for conquest, their voluptuous flesh inescapably feminine and transgressive” (49). Like the knight and the maiden in the Wife’s Tale, Aleyn is more socially powerful than Malyne which might have made this rape excusable to Chaucer’s audience.

Additionally, Chaucer uses the phrase, “they were aton” to describe the rape, a phrase which means “at one, together” (ln. 4197). Writing that they were as one or together makes this act seem much kinder and more romantic than it actually is. The King James Version of the Bible states, “Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Here is a clear example of eroticizing, romanticizing, and excusing sexual violence. This word choice is reminiscent of a marriage ceremony in which two become one rather than what it is: a man forcing a sleeping woman to have sex with him. After describing Aleyn’s rape of Malyne, the narrator tells Aleyn to “pley” while he tells of John (ln. 4198). Chaucer equates sexual violence with amusement or entertainment, and Harris

argues that Chaucer's description of rape as entertainment authorizes the violence (48). In fact, Chaucer's willingness to side with the rapist is an attempt to legitimize the "pleye," while simultaneously dehumanizing the victims of the assaults. "This description of the clerks as perpetually seeking 'pleye' implicitly authorizes sexual violence by attributing it to youthful headstrongness and elides any harm that such acts of 'myrthe' might cause to those who are not in on the joke" (Harris 48). The idea of young men seeking sexual violence as a game is present in any rape culture. Medieval literature proves that this was prevalent in Chaucer's life, and contemporary entertainment proves that its prevalence continues in the twenty-first century.

This line of thought continues with John who calls the situation a "wikked jape" (ln. 4201). This is a trick. This is a joke. He is both jealous of Aleyn and worried about what his friends will say to and about him: "And when this jape is talk another day, / I sal been halde a daf, a cokenay!" (ln. 4207-4208). Chaucer is, through John's words, instructing his audience to view rape as humorous. Harris points out that this was also the case in the Evans and McDonald cases, for Evans's younger brother and friend watched from outside the window and laughed (51). "Part of 'felawe masculinity' is refusing to take rape seriously or to acknowledge its harms, and instead enacting further violence by rendering it both comic and trivial, nothing more than a funny story with which to entertain one's friends and bring 'the boys' closer together" (Harris 51). John believes that he will be considered a fool and a weakling by his friends for not also raping someone. This is an excellent example of what Harris calls "felawe masculinity."

Chaucer frames the perpetrators' decision-making process to suggest that John and Aleyn commit rape not simply as an act of economic retribution against the

thieving miller but primarily to avoid humiliation by their 'felawes alle'. He explicitly figures John's assault as an answer to Aleyne's attack and to their perers' imagined derision 'whan this jape is tald another day.' Chaucer alters his source material to introduce rape where there previously was none, as the encounter between the Malayne and Aleyne characters in his Old French sources is portrayed as entirely consensual. (Harris 47)

Because Chaucer lived in a rape culture, and benefited from its acquiescence, he perpetrated that culture in his writing, including in this instance by adding rape into a preexisting story. Harris explains that:

"...obscene sexual storytelling is an integral part of rape culture: it fosters masculine community and functions as a means for asserting one's gendered identity within the group; it presents sexual violence as entertaining for men and nontraumatic for women, thus authorizing it and minimizing its harms; and it serves as a social weapon to settle conflicts and establish hierarchies among men." (46)

As the tale continues, John tricks the miller's wife into coming to his bed rather than her husband's by moving her baby's cradle to the foot of his bed. The dialogue that Chaucer gives the wife when she is mistaken makes her seem like a stereotypical foolish woman who can be easily tricked. "'Allas!' quod she, 'I hadde almost mysگون; / I hadde almost goon to the clerkes bed. / Ey, benedicite Thanne hadde I foule ysped!'" (ln. 4218-4220). We are supposed to believe that this poor, stupid woman does not know the layout of her own house which would have been hilarious to some members of the male audience of the tale. When the miller's wife does lay down to sleep,

“Withinne a while this John the clerk up leep,

And on this goode wyf he leith on soore.

So myrie a fit ne hadde she nat ful yore;

He priketh harde and depe as he were made. (ln. 4228-4231)

Here we have more eroticization of sexual violence. In line 4230, she claims that she has not had such a good time for a long time, and line 4231 uses the verb “priketh” which means stabs or pierces. According to this narrator (and Chaucer), the woman is having a wonderful time while her rapist stabs or pierces her. The Reeve (Chaucer the poet) is congratulating his fellow for his sexual prowess, and proclaiming that it cannot be called rape if the victim’s body reacts in a sexual way. Dunn writes of a “doctrine based on ancient medical views of a ‘two-seed’ conception; a woman who became pregnant after being raped must have consented to the sex because otherwise she would not have produced the necessary ‘seed’” (53). Science Scientific studies of reproduction have since refuted these ideas, but many remain willfully ignorant of the scientific evidence which proves that arousal and orgasms are involuntary reactions of the body. Chaucer would perhaps have believed the theory of “two-seed” conception which would implicate the wife’s consent and incriminate her sin. The presence of the cradle by the bed reminds us of her sin of enjoyment.

John and Aleyn continue “this joly lyf” until near dawn when Aleyn bids Malyne farewell (ln. 4232). Before Aleyn leaves, Malyne tells him,

“Whan that thou wendest homward by the

melle,

Right at the entree of the dore bihynde

Thou shalt a cake of half a busshel fynde
That was ymaked of thyn owene mele,
Which that I heelp my sire for to stele.
And, goode lemman, God thee save and kepe!
And with that word almost she gan to wepe.” (ln. 4240-4248)

Again, the narrator (Chaucer) congratulates his fellow’s sexual prowess by writing that she basically fell in love with him after he raped her. She tells Aleyn where to find a cake made from the grain that the miller stole, and she almost began to weep because he was leaving her. Morrison addresses Malyne’s “dawn song” by pointing out that “we could read her acting kindly and lovingly to Aleyn out of fear, in order to get rid of him and not have him attack her again” (81). Additionally, Morrison points out that Malyne’s use of the word “lemman” is suspect. The Middle English Dictionary defines “lemman” as “a loved one of the opposite sex.” However we read Malyne’s kindness, I suggest *The Reeve’s Tale* is a prime example of the ludicrous theory of delayed consent which was employed in some medieval court cases. Malyne’s helping Aleyn to escape and take the cake is a kind of silencing of this victim’s trauma.

IV. CHAUCER'S BAD LEGENDS OF GOOD WOMEN

Scholars have called Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* bad poetry, they have argued that he was bored of this project, and they have argued that he tried and failed to write good women. In their introduction, Betsy McCormick, Leah Schwebel, and Lynn Shuttters write that the *Legend* has been viewed as "the ugly duckling of the Chaucer canon, a work whose repetitive structure, melodramatic extremes, roster of dead 'good' women, and complex textual history render it a curious but unsatisfying detour in Chaucer's career—one oddly sandwiched between his two masterpieces" (3-4). They argue that the *Legend* should be revisited by scholars and critics. Florence Percival writes that it "is often treated by Chaucer with flippancy, sometimes with sexual double entendre, and finally with a show of boredom" (4). Far from being bored, however, Chaucer, as I will argue, wrote the *Legend* with great attention to detail. Chaucer goes to some lengths to write certain heroines as what he implies are "good women," but, by removing their revenge, misdeeds, and struggles—both mental and physical—he removes a vital part of that woman's narrative arc. Looking specifically at *The Legend of Lucrece* and *The Legend of Philomela*, I argue that Chaucer made significant changes to these traditional tales in order to appeal to what I will term the rape culture in which he lived with little to no regard for his female characters. Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth define a "rape culture" as:

a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality is violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape

culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women *as the norm.*”

(14)

Carissa Harris describes a rape culture as a culture in which “violence against women is eroticized in literary, cinematic, and media representations; victims are routinely disbelieved or blamed...and perpetrators are rarely held accountable or their behaviors are seen as excusable or understandable” (30). This modern term is an apt description of medieval literary representations since they did normalize and eroticize sexual violence. It is this rape culture in which Chaucer lived that provoked him to alter these legends, remove the focus from the heroines, and omit the heroines’ reactions.

Lucretia, Lucrezia, or Lucrece, depending on which version we read, appears in several texts from antiquity on, including Livy’s *History of Rome*, Ovid’s *Fasti*, Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, Dante’s *Purgatorio*, and Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*. Lucrece’s rape, last confession, and suicide have long been the subject of scholarly works. Scholars have studied, praised, and critiqued Lucrece’s story, with Augustine’s *City of God* often serving as the predominant reason, or justification, for both the critiques and the commentary. Saunders’ discussion of Lucrece as “an emblem of Rome” includes Augustine’s argument that there is “an essential division between purity of body and mind, which rape exemplifies: according to this distinction, only the misdirection of the will, towards pleasure, can cause spiritual corruption” (159). In Book I, Augustine questions Lucrece, whose virtue was celebrated by pagan Romans and even Christian scholars. Augustine asks why “she, who did not commit adultery, is more severely punished [than her rapist]?” (85). He is using the Bible to say that suicide is murder, and he is referring to it as a punishment rather than as the example and proof of innocence

which was Lucrece's intent.

Chaucer's motivation in writing his interpretation of Lucrece had little to do with the portrayal of his victim; as Schwebel argues, he wrote Lucrece with the intent of undermining Augustine's argument. He removes Lucrece from her own story, and she is glossed over. Chaucer makes his response to Augustine clear in his portrayal of Lucrece by writing, "The grete Austyn hath gret compassioun / Of this Lucesse" (1690-1691). Any reader of Augustine would know that this is false. Some scholars suggest that Chaucer was unfamiliar with some of his supposed sources. M. C. E. Shaner and A. S. G. Edwards write, "Though Chaucer refers both to Livy and to Ovid, the narrative closely follows Ovid and makes no apparent use of Livy. Perhaps he cited Livy merely for the authority of his name" (1070). Schwebel argues that Chaucer's obvious misrepresentation of Augustine's argument is an ironic means of drawing attention to Augustine's less than sympathetic take on Lucrece. One of Chaucer's main omissions is his removal of Lucretia's awareness during Tarquinius's rape, writing that she passes out and "...feleth no thyng, neyther foul ne fayr" (1818). Caroline Dunn writes that "Chaucer offers a more sympathetic reading of the Lucretia story than his contemporaries, refusing to condemn her for adultery or for failing to prevent her rape" (54). On the contrary, I believe that this omission does not suggest that Chaucer was taking sympathy on Lucrece's character. Rather, I suspect it is a response to Augustine, for Lucrece could not have enjoyed the rape if she was unconscious. Andrew Galloway writes, "In a complete reversal of Augustine's...positions, Chaucer claims that the Roman ethos in which she is steeped is what produces and shapes Lucrece's moral purity" (227). This would indeed be an intentional misrepresentation of Augustine's position. Schwebel argues that Chaucer's

Lucrece is not just a misrepresentation of Augustine's position but a rejection of his "interpretations of Lucretia's tragedy as negative models for [Chaucer's] *Legend*" (32). I agree that the ways in which Chaucer portrays Lucrece are a response and rejection of Augustine's critique. His portrayal is too precise to be unintentional.

Several scholars have argued that Chaucer's take on virtue in women should be viewed as humorous or lighthearted. In the chapter "Lucrece: Too Good to Be True?" from *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, Florence Percival, for example, writes, "...in the *Prologue* Chaucer praises conventional ideas of female virtue, while in the *Legends* he demonstrates a humorous skepticism, apparently influenced by a contemporary antifeminist tradition" (261). Percival seems to be taking a page out of Fyler's chapter, "Legend of Good Women: Palinode & Procrustean Bed," from *Chaucer and Ovid*. Fyler writes:

The problems arise when Chaucer tries to flesh out this catalogue with the hyperbole of saints' lives, and when rhetoric forces Cupid's saints to compete with Christ's. For the details the narrator has to work with too often resist his efforts to prod them into a hagiographical mold. Cupid's command to tell simply the gist of each life (F570-77) leads to a wonderfully comic exercise in censorship and distorted emphasis. When his sources have anything scurrilous to say about his heroines, the narrator resorts to silence or, more often, to an *occupatio* that comes just a little bit too late. (Fyler 99)

Perhaps, Chaucer's audience would have found these retellings humorous, yet the question of who his audience was is a question that several scholars have attempted to answer. I will discuss these answers in the coming pages. No matter who his audience

was, Chaucer goes to some lengths to write certain heroines as good women, but, in doing so, he removes experiences which are crucial to their development. We cannot compare Chaucer's Lucrece or Philomela to the heroines of the classic tales because Chaucer writes passive, obedient, fragile women in his *Legend* rather than the complex women who do what they can to avoid or take revenge for the horrors done to them.

Chaucer's description of Lucrece's turmoil when Tarquinius first threatens her is the inner monologue of a damsel in distress:

What shal she seyn? Hire wit is al ago.

Ryght as a wolf that fynt a lomb alone,

To whom shal she compleyne or make mone?

What, shal she fyghte with an hardy knyght?

Wel wot men that a woman hath no myght.

What, shal she crye, or how shal she asterte

That hath hire by the throte with swerd at

herte?

She axeth grace, and seyth al that she can. (1797-1804)

Chaucer has this woman comparing herself to a lamb being attacked by a wolf. He has her call her attacker a "hardy knight. While it is worth noting that the Middle English Dictionary defines "hardy" as both "strong in battle" and "presumptuous, rash, [and] foolhardy," I do think that Chaucer uses it here to mean "strong in battle." In the following line, he writes that men know that women have no might, so he is comparing strengths here. This is not a realistic portrayal of such an attack. As in several cases already discussed, Chaucer is perpetuating this rape culture by eroticizing sexual

violence.

Livy's and then Ovid's Lucretia is not granted any sort of escape from her rape. Though she has no voice, she does not consent as Augustine suggests. Livy's Lucretia does not say anything to consent to Tarquinius. After he threatens to ruin her reputation by killing a slave and laying him naked by her side, "her resolute modesty was overcome, as if with force, by his victorious lust; and Tarquinius departed, exulting in his conquest of a woman's honor" (202). Livy's Lucretia is a fine example of a Roman woman who values her reputation and her legacy. Ovid's Lucretia does not yield in any way: "An enemy as a lover, he persists, with prayers and bribery and threats; but neither with prayer nor bribery nor threats does he move her" (38). Not until Tarquinius threatens her reputation and the life of his slave does Ovid's Lucretia yield. Chaucer, however, writes that:

At thilke tyme, and dredde so the shame,
That, what for fer of sclaunder and drede of
deth,
She loste bothe at ones wit and breth,
And in swogh she lay, and wex so ded
Men myghte smyten of hire arm or hed;
She feleth no thyng, neyther foul ne fair. (1815-1818)

As previously stated, omitting the description of the rape can certainly be in response to Augustine, for that was likely Chaucer's goal. Chaucer removes the possibility that she enjoyed the rape, but he also removes Lucrece from the scene. Chaucer's focus is not his heroine, but rather Augustine.

Chaucer's approach to his *Legend of Philomela* is similar to his approach of the *Legend of Lucrece*. Indeed, most critics lump Philomela's story in with the other heroines who are traditionally nowhere near "good," such as Medea and Cleopatra. Fyler, for example, acknowledges that "Tereus offers the nastiest possible example of male villainy," but, he continues, "it is difficult to assign Philomela the role of an entirely passive martyr" (104). Of course, this point of view is in response to the more traditional ending of Philomela's tale, in which she and Procne kill, slice up, and cook Procne's son Itys then serve him to Tereus for dinner (Ovid 149-151). Fyler argues that Chaucer does not want the audience to forget about Philomela's revenge. He suggests that:

The narrator, gripped by his own story, censors it slightly too late to keep us from remembering what happened:

O sely Philomene, wo is thyn herte!

God wreke thee, and sende the thy bone!

Now is it tyme I make an ende sone.

[2339-41]

Once alluded to, the grisly stew the two sisters make of Procne's son Itys is impossible to forget, in part because of the narrator's awkwardness in suppressing the end of the story:

Allas! the wo, the compleynt, and the mone

That Progne upon hire doumbe syster maketh!

In armes everych of hem other taketh,

And thus I late hem in here sorwe dwelle.

The remenaunt is no charge for to telle,

For this is al and som: thus was she served,
That nevere harm agilte ne deserved
Unto this crewel man, that she of wiste.
Ye may be war of men, if that yow liste.

[2379-87]

Chaucer's retreat into bland piousness barely covers over the horror of Ovid's account (*Metamorphoses* VI.424-674). (104-105)

Chaucer, I suggest, hardly intended Philomela to be read as a passive martyr, and I disagree that this is a clumsy narration. I disagree that Chaucer was too immersed in the story to stop before reminding his audience of her revenge. Instead, I believe that Chaucer alludes to that "grisly stew" in order to appeal to his audience. This description is particularly compelling if one considers that Chaucer's target audience was likely predominantly male rather than female. Multiple scholars have written about Chaucer's audience: Paul Strohm (1977), Richard Firth Green (1983), and, more recently, Nicola F. McDonald (2000) and Kathy Cawsey (2011), among others. Cawsey offers an in-depth look at how scholars and critics have studied Chaucer's audiences, not just medieval and modern, but also every audience in between. She is less concerned with knowing who Chaucer's audience was, and more interested in scholar's methodology in finding those audiences. She writes that "they can discover the actual, specific readers of texts, and...[how the texts] were compiled, were categorized, and were glossed" (159). Green agrees with Strohm's argument that Chaucer's audience was likely people who were of similar rank to Chaucer, but Green does not agree that women were included in that audience (147). To strengthen his argument, Green cites medieval documents including

an account of Richard II's household which includes very few women. Additionally, Green notes that every time Chaucer directly addresses his audience, we are asked to consider a man rather than a woman (150). McDonald offers an interesting argument about these direct addresses. She uses multiple quotations from the *Legend* to suggest that Chaucer's target audience included many women. In the F Prologue, Chaucer instructed, "And whan this book ys maad, yive it the queen, / On my byhalf, at Eltham or at Sheene" (F496-497). Though this instruction is removed in the G Prologue, Nikola writes that "the impetus for the revision" was the Queen's death in 1394 (23). Again, in *The Legend of Lucrece*, Chaucer addresses a female audience,

For wel I wot that Crist himselve telleth
That in Israel, wyd as is the lond,
That so gret feyth in al that he ne fond
As in a woman; and this is no lye,
And as of men, loke ye which tirannye
They doon alday; assay hem whoso luste,
The trewest ys ful brotel for to triste. (1879-1885)

Chaucer warns the women in his audience not to trust men; he does this multiple times throughout the *Legend*. Even in his warnings to women, Chaucer's focus is men; this is true in both Lucrece's and Philomela's conclusions. Whatever his target audience, Chaucer does a disservice to his heroine by suppressing her revenge narrative from the *Legend*.

Similarly, Chaucer suppressed Cecily Chaumpaigne. John Gardner argues against the idea that Chaucer was merely an accessory in an abduction of Chaumpaigne. He

writes, “As witnesses to Cecily Chaumpaigne’s release, Chaucer called in some of his most powerful friends, busy, enormously important men he would hardly have called in to help with some mere trifle” (252). While Chaucer had multiple, highly important men on his side, Chaumpaigne “brought forward one cutler and one armorer, citizens of London known to court records only for debt suits, small business transactions, and the sale of used arms and artillery...to raise money for the king” (252). As Gardner states, Chaumpaigne “had no real chance” (252). Chaucer rewrote his and Chaumpaigne’s story by silencing the rape victims in his narratives.

Chaucer ends Philomela’s story when Procne finds her and the sisters embrace. He leaves the poor, fragile, good women to their grief, chastises Tereus, and warns other women against men all in the last stanza of his *Legend*. Chaucer removes Philomela’s revenge. Ovid writes that Procne,

Burning, could not restrain her wrath; she scolded
Her sister’s weeping. “This is no time,” she told her,
“For tears, but for the sword, for something stronger
Than sword, if you have any such weapon on you.
I am prepared for any crime, my sister,
To burn the palace, and into the flaming ruin
Hurl Tereus, the author of our evils.
I would cut out his tongue, his eyes, cut off
The parts which brought you to shame, inflict a thousand
Wounds on his guilty soul. I am prepared
For some great act of boldness, but what it is

I do not know, I wish I did. (149)

Chaucer's omission of the sisters' revenge robs them of their anger while Ovid's

Philomela reacts with vengeance and even some savagery. Ovid writes:

...Philomela, with hair all bloody,
Springs at him, and hurls the bloody head of Itys
Full in his father's face. There was no time, ever,
When she would rather have had the use of her tongue.

The power to speak, to express her full rejoicing. (150-151)

Philomela's and Procne's revenge is brutal, yet satisfying. Tereus physically silenced Philomela by cutting out her tongue, keeping her hostage, and raping her. Chaucer's omission of this revenge is another silencing of Philomela. He is perpetuating the act of cutting out her tongue by cutting off her story in a further act of violence and elision.

In her book *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500*, Caroline Dunn gives historic examples of men challenging or attempting to disprove women's accusations of rape. Dunn's primary example is the case of Rose Savage "who was taken from her croft by John de Clifford, brought to his house, and imprisoned in his solar for two years" (62). Clifford's lawyer knew "that complaints needed to name the specific day, year, and place where the rape took place. Because Rose Savage did not do this, she was committed to jail for having made a false appeal even though a local jury condemned the rape" (62). She writes that in her studies of medieval court cases, "lower-status women enjoyed less protection and were thus more accessible to would-be rapists" (62). Rose, like Cecily Chaumpaigne, was raped by a higher-status man and did not stand a chance against his resources in court. Perhaps Lucrece's and

Philomela's legends would have been too unrealistic if they took their accusations to court and their rapists were convicted since that rarely happened in medieval England. In their original tales, the two victims respond to their attacks; they are able to regain some control. Chaucer removes that response and control.

I argue that Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* was written with the intent of undermining the experiences of women and focusing on men whether fictional (the rapists) or real (Augustine). Chaucer the narrator would have his audience believe that he is a champion of women, that he is telling these tales as penance for his portrayal of Criseyde. Chaucer the poet weaves his *Legend* so precisely that the audience might not realize that he is actually silencing his heroines. This silencing is a mirror of the silencing that Cecily Champaigne and many other women suffered in a medieval rape culture.

V. CHAUCER AND THE 21ST CENTURY

Chaucer lived and created his tales in a rape culture. That rape culture has survived in Western cultures to the 21st century. Both fictional and living women have been subjected to sexual violence throughout the centuries and continue to be subjected in the 21st century. An attempted overview of the fictional women who have been subjected to sexual violence in the 21st century would take years to compile, so I will give a select overview of high-profile examples of sexual violence against women.

Carissa Harris points out that rape culture and “felawe masculinity” remains so prevalent that even the current President of the United States has been recorded engaging in this sort of brotherhood. The *Access Hollywood* recording of Donald Trump includes such infamous phrases as “I moved on her” and “Grab ‘em by the pussy.” It is almost as though he is congratulating himself on his power over women, and requiring his fellows to congratulate him as well. “Trump excused his remarks as ‘locker room talk’ a total of five times” in a following presidential debate (231). This “locker room talk” is similar to the conversations which take place among Chaucer’s pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer’s pilgrims, including the Wife of Bath, participate in ribald conversations and tales of sexual violence.

The 21st century has seen multiple examples of people forgiving such “locker room talk” and even engaging in victim blaming. One such case was that of Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearing. When she heard that Judge Kavanaugh was in the running for a seat on the Supreme Court, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford wrote to her congressperson. Dr. Ford disclosed Judge Kavanaugh’s sexual assault which took place when the two of them were still in school. Kavanaugh was confirmed and applauded by

people who heard direct testimony from his victim, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, and chose to sympathize with him—just like Chaucer sympathizes with the men in his texts. In the opening statements of this hearing, the following statistics were given:

In the United States, it's estimated by the Centers for Disease Control one in three women and one in six men will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 60% of sexual assaults go unreported. In addition, when survivors do report their assaults, it's often years later due to the trauma they suffered and fearing their stories will not be believed. (Transcript)

In 2020, the CDC reported that more than one in three women and nearly one in four men will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. The same page reports that the estimated lifetime cost of rape is \$122,461 per victim “including medical costs, lost productivity, criminal justice activities, and other costs.” Additionally, the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) reports that “out of every 1000 sexual assaults, 995 perpetrators will walk free.”

Despite Kavanaugh's eventual confirmation, his accuser, Dr. Ford, was believed by thousands upon thousands of people whose sympathy for her, and for all victims of sexual assault, had been bolstered and encouraged by the MeToo movement. This movement was created to clarify just how many people have been sexually assaulted in some way. It is shining a much-needed light on the state of the United States' rape culture, and it has given victims a platform on which to speak about their experiences.

Since the election of 2016 and Judge Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing, more and more people have spoken out against this “boys will be boys” attitude, against this

“felawe masculinity,” and against the perpetuation of rape culture. Victims of sexual assault have come forward in the #MeToo movement. Victims have relived their traumas in order to prove a point. Other movements, such as the #WhyIKeptQuiet movement, have built on that momentum. In this movement, which was established in 2018, victims of sexual assault submit their stories anonymously and explain why they did not report their assaults. As of February 23, 2020, @WhyIKeptQuiet had posted 1,133 entries on their Instagram page.

Dr. Ford’s testimony is the very antithesis of what Chaucer did to his female characters. Her willingness to speak, and to relive her trauma, was indeed brave and inspiring and also must have been terrifying—while Chaucer’s characters were not allowed the opportunity to speak out against their assaulters. Neither was Cecily. In Chaucer’s time, #MeToo and #WhyIKeptQuiet could have been an important outlet for victims of sexual violence, for these modern movements have made space for sexual violence allegations to be taken more seriously. Because rapes are so often unreported, we have to recognize the stories within the silence. The goal of this thesis is to widen that space and explore those silences, and to consider why Chaucer included them in the first place.

The maiden, Symkyn’s wife and daughter, Lucrece, Philomela, Cecily Champaigne, and other women were assaulted and raped by men and silenced by Chaucer. The assaults of Chaucer’s heroines were eroticized by his predominantly male audience who lived in a rape culture. Critics and scholars have written extensively on Chaucer’s portrayal of rape victims and his own experience with rape accusations. I argue that his portrayal was a result of his experience within a rape culture and that Chaucer

deliberately silenced his fictional rape victims. Chaucer gave the maiden in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* no voice and no name. He erased her from her story. Chaucer objectified Symkyn's wife and daughter and equated them to a sack of grain. They were not portrayed as women or victims of rape but as objects to be taken in retaliation against Symkyn. In order to prove a point against Augustine, Chaucer erased Lucrece from her *Legend*. As stated in the previous chapter, Chaucer's focus was not his character, but rather his supposed sources. Chaucer silenced Philomela by cutting off the end of her story just as Tereus cut out her tongue. Lastly, Chaucer silenced Cecily Chaumpaigne with the help of his "felawes" and the medieval legal system. These silences tell a story of their own. They tell the story of Chaucer writing his stories to parallel the silencing of medieval women.

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