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THE ENDURING TRADITION OF TOXIC MASCULINITY IN FRENCH LITERATURE

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of the Master of Arts
in French Literature with the Department of Modern Languages
The University of Mississippi

By

HAILEY KAIM

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ABSTRACT

Toxic masculinity, the modern definition has given a concise explanation to what French literature has been relaying to audiences for centuries. This thesis will explore how toxic masculinity is seen in French literature through five time periods: the Medieval era, 17th, 18th, 20th, and 21st century. Introducing toxic masculinity is provided by a modern definition, biological evidence, and evaluation with society's definition of masculinity. The Medieval era will investigate two short stories of courtly love that provide readers with classical examples of toxic masculinity that both men and women displayed. Venturing into the 17th and 18th centuries, plays brought the written word to life. It unknowingly exposes audience members to the dangerous and deadly characteristics associated with toxic masculinity which they confronted in their everyday lives. Entering the modern age, we have a more philosophical and biographical approach to the concept of toxic masculinity that has sewn itself into the fabric of every page. While this is a vast topic, further research in French literature and other cultural facets need to be explored.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

From the very beginning of the creation of humankind, people have worked to create and discover things that will advance people into the future. Evolution through time has allowed for ideas and mentalities to form, some living through times, and others have not been as lucky. One thing that has remained through time is toxic masculinity. What is it? Is it a noun? Is it a way of being? Is it a virus? Is it contagious? How can one avoid falling ill and contracting said virus? Is there a cultural vaccine for the ultimate cure or is there an ointment that needs to be constantly reapplied to this so-called rash? As a society, people are quick to resort to illogical and childish behaviors instead of working together to nurture the characteristics that make us individuals. Unfortunately, people are often scared or confused, resulting in acts of violence, intolerance, and pain. Although this reality is steadfastly continuous within the current world where the rust wheels of change are not fully oiled to change and movement. Change will not occur overnight, but it starts with recognition and a conversation. Until people start to work together then toxic masculinity will continue to be that gnat flying around the heads of those outside on a summer day. The problem with toxic masculinity is it does more harm than good, the 'good' being from the viewpoint of the ones that embody this problem. No good comes from toxic masculinity, but as Simon de Beauvoir once eloquently said, "The most mediocre of males feels himself a demigod as compared with women" (de Beauvoir, 104).

Toxic masculinity has intertwined itself in this fabric of the day-to-day lives of everyone on this earth, some worse than others. However, where can we find it? That's simple, it's

everywhere. One way to walk hand-in-hand with this unfortunate phenomenon is in the world of literature. Literature has this amazing ability to transport readers to different dimensions and worlds, but it also can connect readers through decades and provide different perspectives. Readers can pick up a book from the Medieval era from the *Lais* of Marie de France or feel connected to the pain and anger felt by writers of the 20th century like Annie Ernaux. Some pieces of French literature will openly state their message, others will cause readers to search for the message. The 20th century allows for official terminology and specialists to study masculinity, and its relation to toxic masculinity, and provide various definitions to it. Specialists can do this because toxic masculinity has been intertwined with literature from its earliest works allowing a provided forum to draw attention to the behavior of toxic masculinity and its consequences. A wide range of people have written about the subject including feminists, activists, and those wanting to share their personal experiences with toxic masculinity. French literature has expressed toxic masculinity in its personal form through storytelling about the abortion of Annie Ernaux or suffered ability to be seen as equal or enough in a “man’s world” like Gisèle Halimi. The open and raw telling's of toxic masculinity allow others to find an answer to the confusing and at times damaging, actions and words of others. This allows connections and understanding through thousands of years thanks to the words written in books. Even though the characters in the various forms of literature can be fictional, it does not mean that their actions and words are any less in line with toxic masculinity compared to those who are written in a biographical format. French literature is one of the important forms and formats of culture that allows for the examination of toxic masculinity that permeates human society.

Definition

The phenomenon known as toxic masculinity has been around for over a millennium, but oftentimes defining, acknowledging, and grappling with it has been difficult. Even though the term has had an immortal presence, definitions have been very rare. As this equality vampire has traveled through time and space preying on many unexpected victims, people have screamed for an answer to what was lurking in the shadows. Many have tried but until recently an accurate answer has been missing. A modern researcher defined this problem in *The Journal of Clinical Psychology* by stating, “Toxic masculinity is the constellation of the socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence” (Kupers, p 714). What Kupers astutely does is apply four key characteristics to toxic masculinity, allowing for the larger identifiers to be detectable. Although there are many other completely valid and prominent definitions of the term “toxic masculinity”, Kupers’ definition with the four branches makes the term more comprehensible to the modern reader. The minimal number also allows for a broad enough spectrum where other traits can be listed under one or more of the four umbrella branches of the definition. Even though the four traits are not too broad, this further allows solidity to the definition. Just as previously stated, there are many other things in this world meaning toxic masculinity is not limited to these four traits, but it is likely that if someone is exhibiting toxic masculinity at least one of these traits will be present. This definition of toxic masculinity is like a cocktail, treating the parts like fostering domination as a type of liquor, devaluation of women as a type of syrup, and so on. Once mixed they make it for a drink that some might like to have to keep in the system but can lead to serious damage. Although there are various cocktails, there are various forms of toxic masculinity, and therefore various other ingredients or traits can be added to the primary toxic masculinity cocktail. The

good news is that even though toxic masculinity may always be around, there are ways to sober oneself of its harmful side effects.

Stepping away from this analogy, as Kupers' definition is being used as the primary definition for the focus of toxic masculinity, it provides context and key points that can be applied to various situations. Individuals who demonstrate these behaviors and characteristics listed in Kupers' definition make it a great deal harder to move past the eons of centuries of repression. Limiting room for change and social progression nurtures and nourishes this fast-growing weed. Throughout time progressive change has been made to promote equality to all no matter the gender, race, sexual orientation, and so on. Even though the world is far from perfect and total equality has yet to be achieved, modern society is much closer to it than previous generations. Socially regressive males foster toxic masculinity, according to Kupers' because instead of working to go with the sign of the times, they fall back into comfortable and outdated ideologies. Modern equality and conversation around the problematic treatment of others can be very uncomfortable for many so for them, it is easier to confirm the older forms of inequality. As Kupers' definition has astutely provided, remaining in the mentality and traits of socially regressive males adds to the problem and solidifies the argument towards toxic masculinity.

Fostering domination over others, no matter the gender, promotes an uneven and unjust scale of equality in society. Devaluation of women occurs alongside the attempt for dominance, but it also works to suppress any sort of available equality for women. Homophobia occurs when one is prejudiced against those a part of the LGBTQIA community. People who identify outside of the lines of heterosexuality, similar to women as a whole, are limited in their possibilities for growth and success in fighting a war that for centuries has been seen as almost impossible to

win. Wanton violence is unsolicited and unprovoked violence against others. Those who opt for violence as an answer to their questions and insecurities instead of taking a mature approach of calm questioning and understanding adopt toxic masculinity into their roster of problematic traits. Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity is a tangible definition of comprehension.

Biology

Biology explains many things, one being humans and how the human bodies work. As biology is constantly researched and explored more is discovered to explain the constant questions that arise based on the unknown of human nature. Biology should not be an excuse for any version of hostile inequality toward others. The problem, historically speaking, is that people have continuously used biology as an excuse to promote toxic masculinity persistently through thousands of years of human existence. Women have been on the short end of the biology-based stick throughout history due to men's endless attempts on holding the dominant biological position. There is no clear data that can fully back up this believe that one sex is holistically superior to the other, but "...c'est évidemment à cause de l'iniquité hostilité que suscite en lui la femme; il veut trouver dans la biologie une justification de ce sentiment" (de Beauvoir 37).

Simone de Beauvoir takes a scientific approach to compare men and women in terms of their biology in the first chapter of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, "Les données de la biologie". Simone first starts with biology and nature outside of the world of homosapiens by discussing other animals like dogs and tigers. At the beginning of human existence, "il y avait des hommes, des femmes, et des androgynes ; chaque individu possédait une double face, quatre bras, quatre jambes et deux corps accolés" (de Beauvoir 40). People who identify with either masculine, feminine, or both characteristics at the end of the day had similar biological markers. This would include two

arms for each, a face, and so on. What Simone de Beauvoir hopes to achieve in this moment is that humans are humans, the difference between people would be genitalia that cause a distinction between genders. Although this should not promote hatred or distinct degradation of the other. Human biology shows that there should be issues such as toxic masculinity that come into play. Issues such as toxic masculinity and its traits, in regard to Kupers' definition, may seem to be based on biology, but they are based on psychology. There is a background of biological arguments, but there is not much to stand on that front. The excuse of biology is exactly that, an excuse. The psychology behind this is the actual issue because mentally people will strive for things such as superiority or equality, but that is all based on mentality, not biology.

As stated above Simone de Beauvoir explores human biology in the first paragraph of *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Many forms of psychology pull from biology; thus, people will try to explain psychological issues. This can work in some cases but not all. Explaining the reason people are “superior” or “more important” than others is not based on biology, it solely relates to someone's psychological perspective. Instead of searching within oneself about the reasons why someone would believe said things, easily blaming others based on things that cannot be controlled, such as someone's biology, is not the answer. Simone de Beauvoir explains this with many biological facts and statements, one being, “Ce qu'il est important de noter c'est que dans cette rencontre aucun des gamètes n'a de privilège sur l'autre : tous deux sacrifient leur individualité, l'œuf absorbe la totalité de leur substance (de Beauvoir 46). What Simone is explaining is that biology does not choose which is better, it does not have the privilege to do so. Both gametes, in terms of human creation, take their individuality out of the process. Toxic masculinity is not able to occur here because all individuality is not applied. Each gamete, whether male or female, must

physically come together to create a zygote to form a fetus. Other parts of biology are involved to later distinguish between male and female biology, although none of this can be done without the first biological step of unbiased unification.

Philosophers throughout history have believed they have a say in how genetics are incorporated into the human condition. Aristotle, a Greek philosopher of the fourth century BC, has been viewed as one of the most important philosophers and first scientists of all time. Even though it started the wheels towards many important topics that are studied today, his views on biology did not age well in terms of modern biology and feminism. He claimed,

“...une fatalité organique condamnait la femme, dès sa naissance, à une faiblesse ontologique et une déféctuosité naturelle. D’après lui, le sexe féminin était génétiquement inférieur au sexe masculin en raison d’un développement embryonnaire imparfait et inachevé” (Gargam and Lançon 80-1).

These biological opinions have been proven wrong thanks to advancements in scientific research. Statements on biology, such as this one, have stuck in many people’s minds and the general world's sociological views on gender. Even being proven wrong, as what was shown from scientific statements such as the one above from Simone de Beauvoir, it is still a constant fight for women to live as general equals to men in society. Issues like toxic masculinity arise from viewpoints such as this one because of issues of “dominance” and “devaluation of women”. Aristotle tries to claim that biologically men are dominant to women from the very beginning of procreation, so there is no chance for women to be equal to men. Dominance is achieved for men just by being born a man, according to people such as Aristotle. Claiming women are “génétiquement inférieur”, is an attempt to claim any sort of actions or words proving such ideas are valid. When biology is claimed as evidence of an issue such as dominance over others,

problems like toxic masculinity can continue. This genetic inferiority also allows people to believe they can devalue women. The devaluation is already stated there since inferiority is not a synonym for value. Value is held for others when the importance and worth is placed on the people in question. If men are seen as being perfectly developed while women are “développement embryonnaire imparfait et inachevé”, it also allows others to feel women are not and should not be valued as much as men. These issues, therefore, arise based on misconceptions based on biology, allowing people to believe they can engage in toxic masculinity.

Continuing with this mentality, the same philosopher as well as many other people have only placed minimal value on women and their biology. Kupers’ toxic masculinity discusses the devaluation of women as a compartment to toxic masculinity. This view has been stated as viewing women as such, “La femme était donc, dans l’ordre de la nature, une création défectueuse et inférieure que le créateur avait destinée à la propagation de l’espèce” (Gargam and Lançon 80). There is no value placed on women's worth on this earth with this type of mentality. If women are only able to be seen as centers for procreation, it only provides women with one good value while placing all other values of human existence on men. Saying that women are “défectueuse et inférieure” allows for the male gender to be idealized as the superior and worthy sex, rather than viewing both genders as vital in their own right.

Biology is much different than psychology, but people will use this as justification for toxic masculinity’s continued livelihood. Being able to understand biology at a base level permits readers to understand how toxic masculinity was not created alongside other organisms that live on this planet. Toxic masculinity ultimately was created as a tool for human consumption and utilization, just as in French literature. As it has been seen, biology is a crutch for the embodiment of toxic masculinity for others to use since toxic masculinity can be argued as

inessential to human existence. Biology, however, is the reason for current human life and will continue to be maintained for survival. Toxic masculinity does not need to remain in its current position in the universe to promote human livelihood.

Masculinity v Toxic Masculinity

Toxic masculinity, a very heavy load society has reluctantly carried, may not necessarily be the same as masculinity but it is a subset of it. People do not always actively choose to embody toxic masculinity, unfortunately, it has been sewn into society's quilt for centuries. A problem found among many people is the wall that creates a divide between the two. If the line is blurred and grayed, then it can be easier for people to mix both masculinities as one large entity. It is completely possible alongside hopeful change to identify the problem that is toxic masculinity because once it is identified it can hopefully be removed. French literature such as plays, novels, and short stories are some of the types of French literature that will be evaluated here. It will provide readers and researchers with plenty of forums for the evaluation of toxic masculinity in French literature. Working with a provided definition, such as Kupers', of toxic masculinity helps for identification and distinction to decipher the difference between masculinity and toxic masculinity. While exploring how toxic masculinity has stayed constant throughout time within French literature, inspection allows for such distinctions to be made. Seeing how changes have occurred, open conversations have been had, and storytelling has been recounted throughout history toxic traits can be identified and hopefully eliminated. Seeing how toxic masculinity is not limited to any genre of French literature, it can be understood that toxic masculinity also does not have fenced boundaries outside of the literary world. Some might have a problem understanding what toxic masculinity is, even reading a definition might not allow for

full comprehension. Seeing how toxic masculinity is portrayed in these various forms of French literature through time, can bring understanding where it was not previously available before.

When men can identify that they have contributed to the issue they have opened the door for change, although it is entirely up to them to walk through that door and work hard alongside others to help eliminate the problem. What damage has been done up until this moment cannot be undone, although lessons can be learned, and progression can be made? Lenny Duncan, a LGBTQIA theologian who is an ordained minister a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (Notarianni) explains why this is a problem in “Toxic Masculinity is Killing Us”. Duncan's book explores the problems in the church and how he hopes changes will occur, with ideas that will provide change alongside religion. He states, “If we have learned anything in the last few years, it’s that too many men are using positions of power to harass and abuse women or are complacent when other men do so” (Duncan 3-4). Later, Duncan admits further that he is aware he has contributed to this problem and wants to see change not only within himself and his actions but amongst others as well. Toxic masculinity chips away at the potential for human excellence and the potential equilibrium in society today and in the future since complete change is not possible at this current moment. When men choose to harass and abuse people, they are subconsciously revealing negative traits about themselves rather than the people they are choosing to attack. As Duncan claims that men in positions of power are using these placements not for good but for evil due to their decision to maintain supremacy over others. Using their higher positions to dominate emanates toxic masculinity at the highest level. If someone is trying to maintain a dominant status over women that is a problem within itself, the additional problem lies with the automatic resort to harassing and abusing women to maintain this. Being a man in the LGBTQIA community shows others as well that toxic masculinity is not limited to men.

Anyone can exhibit such behaviors, but it is important when identification and desire for change occurs. The gratification that comes from causing intentional pain and demeaning people in general also contributes highly to the issue that is toxic masculinity. If progression and change do not occur then as Duncan makes clear in his book, toxic masculinity will kill humankind.

One might think that since they do not directly harass and abuse women, they are not the problem, but that is far from reality. There is an obvious problem when people are “complacent when other men do so” (Duncan 4). Allowing other men to keep acting in such a toxic way, adds to the problem. Accepting the position and role of being a bystander adds fuel to the fire. The moment someone decides to stand up and fight the problem helps grease the wheels of change. Women in general, especially when in situations of degradation due to toxic masculinity, are extremely limited in the means and resources to fight back against this unwavering subject. Actions may speak louder than words, but words will help add substance to the actions. This means that conversions about this change need to be paired with the actions for change to see a positive progression in society. Tolerating men who continuously make it their life's mission to personify toxic masculinity proves the person epitomizes toxic masculinity themselves. By not speaking up and working to promote the change in actions of this problematic mentality then toxic masculinity will continue to plague society.

More modern writers and specialists have researched and worked to define masculinity, just as others have done for toxic masculinity. One author, Virginie Despentes, provides in *King Kong Théorie* a page-long list of traits that make a “true man”. To many readers, it is obvious Despentes' definition of masculinity is sarcastic listing traits that would be associated with a more “socially regressive male” as Kupers’ groups with toxic masculinity, compared to more modern definitions of masculinity in line with “socially progressive males”. She starts by stating,

“Qu'est-ce que ça exige, au juste, être un homme, un vrai ? Répression des émotions. Taire sa sensibilité. Avoir honte de sa délicatesse, de sa vulnérabilité” (Despentes 28), and further continues listing various qualities that men have either willingly or unwillingly claimed with masculinity. Qualities such as emotional suppression, sensitivity silencing, and shame in vulnerability and delicacy have not normally been associated with masculinity throughout time. Instead, they are closer to Kupers’ definition of toxic masculinity. This is because of many social stereotypes, one being binary gender differentiation. Women in society are normally associated with characteristics such as being emotional, sensitive, vulnerable, and delicate. If men embody said characteristics, they are closer to femininity rather than masculinity, thus blurring the line separating feminine and masculine traits.

If men can control and suppress these feminine qualities they will be seen as more “manly” to others, enforcing the gender distinction as well. The attempt to steer clear of feminine traits promotes the devaluation of women because it means there is no worth being placed behind feminine traits which are paired with women. Women are known to be emotional and sensitive which are the first two points that Despentes states as things men should suppress to be considered more of a man. Women are also told to be delicate and dainty, making women more vulnerable. These are things that men cannot be. All these traits normally are associated with women, meaning that men should not embody such traits to maintain the type of masculinity that is held as a valued part of male standing. Running from feminine traits because they are thought to hurt potential masculinity allows for a devalued perspective of women, a key part of Kupers’ toxic masculinity.

The characteristics listed and further traits from Despentes line up with Kupers’ other trait, homophobia, concerning toxic masculinity. Some stereotypes reach every sort of thing that

is on this planet earth, one being stereotypes in association with people who identify as homosexual. The issue with stereotypes is that they can apply to some people, but they should not be generalized because grouping people into a certain box without proper evidence of individual personality traits. Just as this paper will do, it is not meant to group a general group of people together but in many cases, men, exemplify traits related to toxic masculinity. Those who do walk hand-in-hand with toxic masculinity can be claimed into the grouping when exhibiting such behaviors. In relation to homosexual males in particular, many people claim various characteristics in association with the general group of people. Some of these stereotypes have been cited in the book *Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890–1940*. The author, George Chauncey Jr., a professor at Columbia University and a director at the university's Research Institute on the Global History of Sexualities (Tucker), quotes a government agent from the 1930s stating how he identified gay men at a bar. The agent stated, “The most striking feature [of homosexuals] would be the fact that although they represent and are dressed as one sex they act and impersonate the opposite sex...in general [they] impersonate all the other characteristics of a female that they can possibly assume” (Chauncey 26). Although it is known that not all gay men identify with feminine traits, many people find it easier to group gay men with them anyway. When gay men are associated with being “feminine” and other men believe true masculinity lies when men, “Être coupé de sa féminité” and “Craindre son homosexualité car un homme, un vrai, ne doit pas être pénétrée” (Despentes 29) as according to Virginie Despentes list of traits to “what makes a real man”. If masculinity means men must be cut from femininity, when this trait is associated with the stereotype of gay men and fear of homosexuality, they in turn are blatantly being homophobic. These homophobic ideals and fears

towards homosexual men are due to the unknown and unwillingness to accept others outside the outdated binary gender rules, which in turn promote toxic masculinity.

According to three psychologists, men who personify the idea of “toxic masculinity” are more likely to be aggressive with their words and actions to be used as weapons to obtain and dominate things and others around themselves. William Seymour, Ramel L. Smith, and Hector Torres are all members of the American Psychology Association’s Division 51 (a society where men and masculinity are psychologically studied). They have all recounted their concerns with the current definition of masculinity because it “leads to aggressive, emotionally stunted males who harm not just themselves but their children, partners, and entire communities” (Clay). The men identify, along with many others, that there is a problem that has been unfortunately written into the fabric of society's gender roles. The issue with aggressive and emotionally stunted males is they have no remorse when other people are affected by the toxicity exuding from their persona. It is an issue that needs to be solved, which psychologists are also trying to do. Hector Torres said he hoped he and his colleagues would be able to,

“Expand the notion of maleness. They want to retain such traditionally male, positive traits as bravery and protectiveness while creating a new definition that also includes the full range of human emotions. The new definition would be flexible rather than dichotomous; it would no longer separate traits into rigidly defined categories of what is "male" and what is not " (Clay).

This hopeful rewrite of masculinity is a treacherous mountain to climb, with many obstacles in the way, but if it is even achieved for a small group of people that is a fantastic change. Many things have been stated as norms in society. The issue is that when these rules are put in place and are negatively affecting people, there needs to be a change. As of right now, there is not

enough evidence and research to state a distinct difference between masculinity and toxic masculinity. As researchers as the three psychologists above work to further try and incorporate a more positive change into modern society future generations will not suffer as previous generations have.

People such as playwrights, directors, authors, and more can show and relay to audiences and readers subjects such as toxic masculinity from a different perspective, making it more understandable and relatable to their audiences. Modern progression of masculinity and femininity is more fluid than the rigid ideals of the past. Although many people might identify with traits that line with Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity or Virginie Despentes' list of traits for masculinity, not every single person identifies with them. It can be assumed many people throughout history have not always agreed with rigid rules of masculinity and femininity, but more modern times allow for fluidity and acceptance. As has been seen, there is no clear distinction between masculinity and toxic masculinity. Exploration of French literature will show how these two ideologies have continued to stay blended and hopefully work can be done to create a healthier divide between each mentality.

Literature Review

Medieval Era

Starting with exploring the medieval era with the short stories of courtly love from Marie de France, perspective is provided to allow for a timeline to set in. The medieval era, starting from 500 AD and spanning almost 2,000 years afterward, gives a starting point here for when toxic masculinity started to be discussed in French literature. Marie de France wrote three books in French during the second half of the twelfth century, one being les *Lais*. Writing in another

literary work, des *Fables*, Marie ends by stating, “*Marie ai num, si sui de France* (« mon nom est Marie, et je suis de France »). This allowed readers to know her name, she was from France even though she was living in England which was identifiable from certain features of her writing (Poirion). Marie de France’s *les Lais*, some being analyzed further for toxic masculinity, are written as stories of courtly love. Jane Burns introduces her journal “Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition” by providing a feminist perspective on the idea of courtly love. She states,

“Feminist readers have often dismissed the concept of courtly love as a problematic precursor of the highly misogynistic system of modern, Western romantic love. Staging vexed heterosexual liaisons between aristocratic couples within an idealized public sphere of refined court life in the High Middle Ages, courtly love has often appeared to focus on men at the expense of women...” (Burns 2).

Courtly love is important when analyzing toxic masculinity because it is not linear to modern, Western ideology for romantic love. The problematic relations and the prominent “focus on men at the expense of women” already bridge the gap between the stories of courtly love and Kupers’ definition of toxic masculinity. The final sentence of the citation above alludes that the stories of courtly love promote male-dominating situations which can be assumed to be closely related to Kupers’ association between the dominance of others and toxic masculinity. It also shows the lack of value for women in these stories, therefore lining up with another listed trait from Kupers’ definition of toxic masculinity.

Reviewing some of Marie de France’s *les Lais* at the expense of analyzing how toxic masculinity travels through time in French literature is necessary for understanding and examination. Marie de France’s *Lais* show many aspects of Kupers’ toxic masculinity not only

through men but through women as well. The two short stories that will be discussed show all forms of Kupers' toxic masculinity. Various characters of both stories foster dominance over others, exhibit traits of homophobia, emit wanton violence and devalue women. All of these are hidden under the stories of courtly love, as the message that love can win in the end tries to shine through. Despite this, toxic masculinity truly shines through, blinding readers during the stories of courtly love.

17th/18th Centuries

This section will branch into an entirely different realm of literature, plays, and their scripts. As one play from each century will be explored, it will be seen that many similarities follow from one century to the next. Both plays were written by famous and timeless playwrights whose plays are still studied and maintained as an important topic of conversation in French literature today. Both plays are comedy plays performed at La Comedie-Francaise. This theater is "a French cultural institution founded in 1680" ("Comedy"), the time of Molière, the first playwright that will be explored in the later chapter. Comedy plays usually have a happy ending. Any sort of trouble that seems to be presented throughout the play usually solves itself by the end, similar to a typical "American ending" for movies.

The first play that is being analyzed for toxic masculinity is *Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur*. The playwright for *Le Tartuffe* was Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, but he changed his name to Molière in 1644 when he became the director of the troupe of actors he was with at the time. After writing the three-act play in 1664, *Le Tartuffe* did not receive entirely positive feedback. When it was seen as an attack on religion many people pushed Louis XIV to ban the play. He answered to the pressure of outsiders and "Louis XIV se voit dans l'obligation d'interdire pendant cinq ans" (Poquelin). Later the play was no longer banned, and Molière changed the name from *Le Tartuffe*

ou l'imposteur. Moliere is known by many as “le « patron » de la Comédie-Française, il en est toujours l'auteur le plus joué” (Poquelin). This seventeenth-century playwright worked in various occupations but was not short of creating a name for himself. Although he had and still has people who are against his work, he worked hard to bring truths to the forefront of reality. This is vital for many reasons, one concerning this paper. There will always be people who have a wide variety of opinions on what others do with their lives. Even though this play has received many complaints, especially those towards the idea that this play attacks religion, Molière still pushed to present his work. Others' opinions and did not let anyone else keep him from sharing what he felt was right.

In terms of this paper, many people might not agree with the argument that toxic masculinity is still ever present within modern society and in French literature. The importance of this is to bring the problem right in front of others' faces to show that the problem needs to be solved. As Molière did, problems in society should be presented and French literature is a great outlet to do so. The play does not intentionally strive to explore toxic masculinity within French literature, but it is not short of that. The one character analyzed during the chapter about 17th-century literature, Tartuffe is nothing short of a man who embodies Kupers' toxic masculinity. He is this way because he uses Orgon's family to be able to climb the social ladder. He fosters dominance over others and devalues women to do this, solidifying the case against him.

The 18th century was also a time when plays, again for la Comédie-Française, were extremely detrimental to French culture. This paper will explore the second play in the Figaro series. *Le Mariage de Figaro* follows the first play of the series, *Le Barbier de Séville*, where some background information will be provided in the chapter regarding this play. The writer of

the play Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais was a man of many trades: inventor, publisher, watchmaker, musician, playwright, and more. He climbed his way from his watchmaker family to the court of Louis XV. He is well-known for many things, especially his written plays, the Figaro trilogy (“Beaumarchais, Pierre Augustin Caron de, 1732-1798”). Some people have such positive feelings about Beaumarchais work claiming, “Beaumarchais mérite bien d’être élu, deux siècles après, membre d’honneur de la Société d’Histoire littéraire de la France” (Menant 1176).

As Beaumarchais also wrote plays similar to Molière's plays, it is just as vital to explore his plays to see how toxic masculinity is involved within his plays. The Count will be evaluated for his continuous contributions to the play related to Kupers’ toxic masculinity. The pushes to assert his dominance over himself and others, devalues women, and exhibits homophobic traits. Like Tartuffe from the previous century’s play, both characters will be evaluated for similarities due to their linear literary backgrounds, and comedy plays. Each play also allows readers to view toxic masculinity in a different light to what other literature might not be able to do. As these plays are based on adding a lighter comical value, it is interesting to evaluate these plays for a topic that is heavier to carry.

20th/21st Centuries

The more modern eras such as the 20th and 21st century bring a sense of relatability and connection to many modern readers. This era also permits writers, especially female authors, more liberty to express problems firsthand. In earlier periods that will be analyzed, toxic masculinity is present, but it is not likely to be outright stated on the pages. This concluding chapter will explore more biographical works, which again is a completely different form of literature compared to the other literary works that are explored in this paper. As all the women

still must fight alongside others from previous generations, they had to all combat plenty of negative feedback to their brutally honest views on topics like toxic masculinity.

The first writer to be studied from the 20th century is Simone de Beauvoir. She is on the list for being one of the most, if not the most influential French feminist writers of the 20th century. Simone de Beauvoir was an essential participant in the second wave of feminism in France. Her literary works contributed highly to many cultural movements which still are highly discussed today (“Research Guides: Feminism & French Women in History: A Resource Guide: Simone de Beauvoir”). Her book *Le Deuxième Sexe* will be explored and utilized throughout this paper for biological reference as well as personal recounts and opinions that will help explore how toxic masculinity is written in modern philosophical views on the treatment of women. Simone is seen later explaining her takes on feminism and its issues in society. This will relate to toxic masculinity because these statements show how toxic masculinity can be seen through theoretical pieces of literature. Kupers’ toxic masculinity is referenced because dominance over others, wanton violence, and devaluation of women can be evaluated through her works.

Afterward, Annie Ernaux's book *L'événement* is evaluated for toxic masculinity being littered throughout the whole book. This book is a recount of Annie’s illegal abortion she received when she was younger. Ernaux has won plenty of awards for all her published works that she has written both during her time as a teacher and afterward. Most recently Annie Ernaux won the Nobel prize in literature for *L'événement* “pour le courage et l’acuité clinique avec lesquels elle révèle les racines, les éloignements et les contraintes collectives de la mémoire personnelle” (de Beauvoir). This Nobel Prize-winning book is an amazingly brave recount of a personal history that many people in France, as well as all over the world, can, unfortunately,

connect with. According to Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity: wanton violence, devaluation of women, and fostered dominance from various characters in the book.

Finally, Gisèle Halimi is evaluated using her book *La Cause des Femmes*. Halimi is a Tunisian-born lawyer who was a feminist activist in France. Halimi was an active participant in the second wave of feminism in France alongside Simone de Beauvoir. She is also a founder of *Choisir*, a group that provided legal protection for the women who came forward to state they received an abortion in France while it was illegal. This document they signed was called le Manifeste de 343. The group *Choisir* was crucial in the backing of the *Loi Veil* which helped legalize abortion in France (“Research Guides: Feminism & French Women in History: A Resource Guide: Gisèle Halimi”). Her book, *La Cause des Femmes*, is used to discuss how toxic masculinity was experienced from all outside sources such as society and close ties like Gisele's mother. Devaluation of women and dominance from men and women is discussed to see how toxic masculinity was experienced in Gisèle Halimi's life.

As all other periods and forms of literature will be seen immediately following, toxic masculinity is ever present in French literature. These three forms of 20th-century French literature evaluate Kupers' toxic masculinity in a much more personal and relatable sense compared to those from previous periods. These three pieces of literature pull from individual opinions and experiences that allow for direct connections to toxic masculinity. The other periods show toxic masculinity from an alternative perspective since it is not as direct and personal as the pieces of literature from the 20th century. According to Kupers' toxic masculinity, devaluation of women, and dominance over others are shown through the three different books. As this is seen it can be assumed that the 20th century does not have a limit of toxic masculinity written in its literature.

CHAPTER 2: CHIVALRY OR CHAUVINISM

Introduction

Traveling back to the era where French literature is predicted to have started, there are plenty of reasons for its essential nature in starting the train of exploration of how toxic masculinity has wormed its way into French literature. Although the definition and analysis of the term are relatively new, that does not limit French Medieval literature to having an abundance of toxic masculinity according to Kupers' definition of the term. Given the general history known thanks to historians and specialists, it can be expected that toxic masculinity was rampant throughout this period. Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity lists toxic masculinity as, "socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (Kupers 714) even though the modern definition refers to socially regressive male traits, it does not limit anyone from personifying "male traits". Regressing in time can only mean that there will be some, if not all these traits present at some point during this time. This review of Medieval French literature will show how each of the *Lais* personifies all of Kupers' traits of toxic masculinity.

"Lanval"

"Lanval", one of the most if not the most famous short stories of courtly love from Marie de France's *les Lais*, is also one of the most analyzed amongst others evaluating various aspects of French literature. This will not fall short of that expectation since here "Lanval" will be dissected in the attempt to find characteristics connecting this short story to Kupers' definition of

toxic masculinity. Lanval is a lord of high standing in the famous court of King Arthur. When out in the country for some peace and quiet Lanval encounters two women who then lead him to a fairy who he deems as the most beautiful girl he has ever seen.

“Ami, fet ele, or vus chasti, / Si vus comant e si vus pri : / Ne vus descovrez a nul humme. / De ceo vus dirai ja la summe : / A tuz jurs m’avrïez perdue, / Si ceste amur esteit seüe ; / Jamés nem purrïez veeir / Ne de num cors seisine avoir” (Marie 152).¹

Throughout this citation, the Fairy Queen “orders” and “prays” that Lanval must not utter a single word of their relationship to anyone. If he does speak of their relationship, it would mean the consequence of “losing” the fairy “forever”. He would no longer be allowed to see or have the fairy as a lover. The fairy here puts limits on Lanval for the potential to see if their future is possible or not. By placing an ultimatum on Lanval the Fairy Queen asserts her dominance onto Lanval, thus shockingly proving not only that toxic masculinity is present but women can express such behaviors as well. A loving and happy relationship between two people should not have limitations such as keeping their relationship a secret, although the fairy starts their relationship with one-sided rules and guidelines. Many relationships do have certain limits to make each other comfortable, but these should usually come with compromise from both parties. Here the fairy takes it upon herself to dominate and create the rules according to her wants and needs rather than the wants and needs of both her and Lanval as a couple. Lanval does not have the freedom and liberty to insert his opinion on the matter. Lanval is not seen as an equal in this relationship with the fairy because if he was, he would have been considered in the decision made by the fairy in terms of their relationship and its rules. This unequal nature shows readers

¹ “Ami, fait-elle, maintenant je vous avertis, c’est une prière et un ordre que je vous adresse : ne confiez votre secret à personne. Je vais vous en dire les conséquences : vous me perdriez pour toujours, si notre amour était connu ; vous ne me verriez plus jamais et ne me posséderiez plus comme un amant” (Micha 153) - This is the modern translation of the Medieval text.

that the dominant position in this relationship is held by the fairy, although this was decided completely by her too. Dominance is fostered, established, and maintained by the fairy, therefore proving to readers that toxic masculinity was alive and present in French literature during the medieval period, and it was not limited to just male characters.

Further into “Lanval” another woman shows her ability to exude toxic masculinity like the fairy at the beginning of the story. As this story continues, Lanval follows the rules of the Fairy Queen and does not share their relationship with anyone else. Lanval’s dedication to the fairy shows readers his love and respect for the fairy, although other characters are unaware of this fact. The Queen takes it upon herself to chip away at Lanval because she is in the place of power to do so and Lanval’s direct focus on his love for the fairy does not allow him to administer any compliments or affection to the Queen. Lanval does not see the Queen as the compliments that are thrown at her by all others in her surrounding social circle. This is an instant red flag for the Queen, causing her to feel instantly threatened and as though she is stabbed in the heart. The Queen’s decision to focus her attention for retaliation on Lanval is based solely on the fact that she is being denied ultimate adoration by anyone who encounters her.

The verbal degradation from the Queen directed at Lanval does not come out of nowhere, it is expected given the context that all others bow down to appease the Queen. The Queen directed the unsolicited verbal attack at Lanval by stating, “Vallez avez bien afeitiez...” (Marie 158).² As was seen before, toxic masculinity is not only restricted to men, but women are also completely capable of exhibiting such behaviors. Queen Guinevere has obviously never been denied anything up to that point in her marriage with King Arthur. Her childish behavior is a

² “Vous, vous préférez les garçons élégants...” (Micha 159) - This is the modern translation of the Medieval text.

result of finally being denied total adoration by anyone who crosses her path. Queen Guinevere genuinely believes due to her high status that it is her right to receive anything she wants such as compliments to state that she is the most beautiful woman of them all, but beauty truly is in the eye of the beholder. When Lanval decides not to be another sheep to Queen Guinevere in King Arthur's court it proves his loyalty to his fairy love rather than King Arthur. Queen Guinevere could have been extremely beautiful, her true beauty and personality shine through with how she reacts to this situation. The Queen uses verbal wanton violence because a comment such as the one was irrelevant to the situation and comes out of nowhere. The Queen used this comment intending to try and make Lanval feel small and embarrassed around the others of King Arthur's court. The verbal attack was intentional by the Queen to cause harm to Lanval, so at this moment, she exemplifies the wanton violence trait of Kupers' toxic masculinity definition.

Queen Guinevere, even though a woman is still a Queen and holds a higher status to Lanval due to her marriage with King Arthur. This differentiation of power and dominance is explored in Tovi Bibring's journal article about Marie de France and her *Lai*, "Lanval". While analyzing women in the chapter "Le chevalier à travers ses femmes : Apparences, appartenances et tendances sexuelles dans Lanval de Marie de France", Bibring explores the power dynamics and gender roles between Lanval and Queen Guinevere. Bibring states, "Certes, la reine n'est pas l'épouse de Lanval, mais elle est sa supérieure du rang...En refusant de l'aimer, il ressemble à une femme qui se refuse à son mari... La reine le provoque alors avec la seule violence à sa disposition, l'insulte" (Bibring 9). The situation at hand primarily states that Lanval and the Queen have switched traditional gender roles for a moment because as Lanval refuses the Queen it is parallel to a woman refusing her husband. Although this does not last long because the Queen, even though she is of higher status in comparison to Lanval, she is still a woman at the

end of the day. Tovi Bibring explains precisely the dilemma that Queen Guinivere is faced with at this moment in the story. She is not able to use violence like the other men in court, like her husband the king. The next best weapon in her arsenal is not physical, but verbal, which can cut deeper than any physical weapon can do. The Queen cannot use physical violence, although that does not limit her from providing violence, so she can use wanton violence at this point of the story. The wanton violence described here is a weapon for the Queen to deliberately harm Lanval. Lanval does not provide any sort of need for a reversal of violence on his part, the only thing he has done is deny the Queen the affection and love she believes she deserves since Lanval's heart is with another. The Queen could have easily accepted the situation for what it was, harmless, and embraced all the other compliments and love she received from other subjects and her husband but that was not enough for her. She needed validation for everyone that crosses her path and if that is not granted to her then unwarranted and unjustified verbal attacks were the only possible solution in her eyes. These words have no merit given the situation so therefore are in line with the wanton violence that is a limb to the entity that is toxic masculinity.

This short and hurtful comment does not limit the Queen to express only one characteristic of Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity. The intention of the comment is meant to cause harm and embarrassment to Lanval, but it is also meant with the intention of the Queen to foster dominance over Lanval. Lanval's refusal to adhere to the Queen's desire for worship is not an attack on the Queen, it is instead loyalty to his true love. If he is going to be the one person to not speak to the Queen's narcissistic views and opinions, then the Queen is going to do what she can to tear Lanval down to push him to become another sheep in her herd. Those parts of the herd are quick to constantly shower her with compliments at every possible moment. The Queen deems it was her time to assert her dominance, to prove to herself and others that she is

the most important person in this given circumstance, and she will get what she wants no matter what. The dominance that is bolstered by the Queen allows her to adopt another trait according to Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity.

This quote also demonstrates another trait associated with toxic masculinity outside of fostered dominance over Lanval. Queen Guinevere's attempt to assert her dominance through unsolicited, violent comments comes at the price of being homophobic. One trait of toxic masculinity according to Kupers' definition is to be homophobic to others to attempt to tear down someone's masculinity in general. For many, especially those during the medieval era, being gay does not stand in line with a stereotypical idea of masculinity. The Queen takes the time to attack Lanval to boost her dominance and degrade him, so her intentional attack had to be something that would provoke Lanval. Her comment, "Vallez avez bien afeitiez..." (Marie 159)³ is meant to try and strip Lanval of his masculinity because many being homosexual is associated with being more feminine rather than masculine (Chauncey 26). The goal to strike a nerve with Lanval is achieved but at the cost of wanting to cause harm by making a comment that attacks Lanval and the LGBTQIA community. Thus, this attempt to tear Lanval down and take down his masculinity makes the situation worse because it is homophobic. Through the Queen's association with toxic masculinity through fostering dominance and wanton violence, she further promotes homophobia, digging her deeper into the toxic masculinity hole.

Up until this point in the short stories of Marie de France, it has been shown that there is a great possibility for women to pursue the toxic masculinity route just as much as a man. Although it would not be a true exploration of toxic masculinity without a discussion about how men enforce this mentality as well since Kupers describes toxic masculinity concerning "socially

³ "Vous, vous préférez les garçons élégants..." (Micha 159) - This is the modern translation of the Medieval text

regressive male traits” (Kupers 714). In this story, although Lanval ended up on the short end of the toxic masculinity stick, he used toxic masculinity in the story too. After Queen Guinevere’s attack on Lanval, Lanval does not take the highroad, instead he takes his anger and quickly tries to prove “... Ne me sai jeo nient aidier. / Mes jo aim e si sui amis / Cele ki deit aver le pris / Sur tutes celes que jeo sai. / E une chose vus dirai, / Bien le sachez a descovert” (Maire 158).⁴ Queen Guinevere's quick attack on Lanval lacks empathy for others but is tactical on her part. This attack quickly angers Lanval, making the truth fall out of his mouth before any logic and reason can stop him. Lanval lacks all potential frontal lobe reasoning at this moment, thus placing him at the same maturity level as Queen Guinevere in this situation. Even though the fairy exudes toxic masculinity by nurturing dominance over Lanval in their relationship by creating the rule that he cannot share with anyone, when his masculinity is up for question everything is thrown out the window. What occurs here is primarily the devaluation of women. This is because Lanval places the defense of his masculinity over the value and importance of what the fairy asked of him. Lanval notably was very respectful and loyal to the fairy up until this point, although develops a hothead after one attack towards his masculinity. The lack of value towards women occurs because Lanval is not able to turn away when others stoop below the level of basic maturity. Lanval views how others view him as more important than what was demanded of him by the woman he loves. Lanval does not place any worth on the fairy here, therefore showing he devalues women according to Kupers’ toxic masculinity.

As the Queen promoted homophobia with her attack on Lanval’s masculinity, he also is homophobic at this moment due to his quick, panicked response. As was stated above and in the

⁴ “...mais j’aime et je suis l’ami de celle qui doit avoir le prix sur toutes celles que je connais ; et je vais vous le dire sans détours”(Maire 159) - This is the modern translation of the Medieval text.

introduction, homosexual men are generally boxed into a group of feminine men (Chauncey 26). In contrast to this, historically speaking, masculinity is associated with stripping oneself of their feminine traits and being fearful of homosexual men because their sexual preference is “not normal”. This ideology is stated by many people, one being Virginie Despentes in *King Kong Théorie*. Since homosexual men and masculinity are not paired together here, homophobia is a result. Lanval immediately is blinded by the threat that Queen Guinevere questions his masculinity so his quick attempt to save his masculinity was put on the line by the Queen. Lanval feels embarrassed to be associated with homosexuality, instead in his eyes revealing his promise of a secret relationship is better than having his masculinity in question. Notably, when he was accused of being attracted to men instead of women, everything that was promised was null and void from that point on moving forward. Here Lanval exhibits traits of homophobia due to a woman of such high class, questioning his masculinity and thus, resulting in Lanval becoming petty and hyper-focused on the "traditional masculine" characteristics he now believes are the only key to her heart. Embracing homophobia to save face allows Lanval to prove to the readers he is just as capable of showing toxic masculinity as the fairy and Queen Guinevere.

Lanval also tried to take back dominance over the situation between him and the Queen. He does this by admitting to the relationship between him and the fairy Queen even though he promised he would never do so. When Lanval blurts out the truth of his relationship, he is attempting to turn the situation around to prove the Queen wrong and protect his masculinity. The fact that someone dared to speak their truth to the Queen when so many others refused to do so is very brave. Lanval takes it upon himself to try and fight the attempt from Queen Guinevere to assert her dominance over Lanval and his situation. He does this by stating,

“Dame, dist il, de cel mestier / Ne me sai jeo nient aidier. / Mes jo aim e si sui amis / Cele ki deit aver le pris / Sur tutes celes que jeo sai. / E une chose vus dirai, / Bien le sachez a descovert : / Une de celes ki la sert, / Tute la plus povre meschine, / Vaut mieuz de vus, dame reine, / De cors, de vis e de beauté, / D’enseignement e de bunté!”(Maire 158-60).⁵

What he could have done was take the high road and kept his promise to the fairy Queen, but he did the opposite instead. He betrays the trust and value of the fairy Queen and her request by breaking the promise he made just to prove the Queen wrong. At that moment Lanval wanted control over what everyone was saying about him, so he let his anger fog his brain and take control of his mouth. Lanval went directly at what the Queen desired most, compliments, but instead of giving them to her Lanval provided them to the fairy. This attack back at the Queen, Lanval knew it would hit her ridiculously hard, being one of the reasons why he did it. When he tries to take back the dominance of the situation, does so in a way that was intended to knock the Queen off her high horse and down to her knees. By turning tables on the Queen, he wants to shift the dominance in his favor, rather than letting the Queen maintain the dominance she holds in that moment. Therefore, promoting toxic masculinity over the situation.

“Laüstic”

Following other short stories of courtly love, another woman falls victim to the reality that is a tragic love story in the courtly love saga that is known as Marie de France’s *Lais*. This lai presents two different knights, one who is married and one who might be considered a

⁵ “Dame, dit-il, je n’entends rien à ces pratiques, mais j’aime et je suis l’ami de celle qui doit avoir le prix sur toutes celles que je connais ; et je vais vous le dire sans détours : de celles qui sont à son service la plus humble l’emporte sur vous, reine, ma dame, pour la beauté du corps et du visage, pour l’éducation et la bonté” (Maire 159-61) - This is the modern translation of the Medieval text.

modern-day bachelor. Due to the lackluster marriage the wife has with her husband, persistence of the other knight, and proximity the wife's gaze has shifted to outside her home and her marriage. This lust takes hold of the lady, causing her to leave her bed every night, but also leaves her husband suspicious and resentful. With malicious attempts to lure his wife back to their bed but also to their marriage, the knight plans to trap and kill the nightingale. Although anger overcomes the knight, the reality of his wife's feelings become known when the token of her external relationship is taken from her grasp. During this exchange of events tension and feelings shift drastically, "A sun seignur l'ad demandé, / E il l'ocist par engresté: / Le col li rumpt a ses deus meins. / De ceo fist il ke trop vileins. / Sur la dame le cors geta, / Si que sun chainse ensanglanta / Un poi desur le piz devant" (Marie 228)⁶. It can be quick and easy to point fingers at the wife, she should have been more upfront with her husband about her melancholy and subpar feelings about their relationship. Instead, it can be stated no relationship is perfect and there can always be justifications to one's actions and validity to someone's emotions. Albeit, one must first consider the time, a woman could never leave her marriage during this time as a man might have been able to. During this time, a man could easily enter multiple external relationships outside of a marriage while a woman did not have the same liberty. She might have felt that her only possibility for escape and happiness was attending the window each night to connect with her neighbor through the gifts, conversations, and songs of the nightingale. That said, that does not justify entering a relationship outside of one's matrimonial promise, but did her husband need to go to the extremes he did to end his wife's happiness? Such extremes that swim alongside those that are toxic masculinity. To end one's happiness and joy is taking something extremely special and important from them. The process of taking something, whether

⁶ "Elle demande l'oiseau a son mari qui le tue avec cruauté en lui tordant le cou de ses deux mains, en vrai rustre qu'il est/ il jette le cadavre sur la dame, en ensanglantant sa robe..." (Marie 229)

it be physical or emotional, away from someone is to assert their dominance over them. Even if it is a minuscule transaction, there is a power shift that occurs. The husband here grasps strongly at the power that he wants to maintain over his marriage. It is unacceptable in the eyes of the husband that any joy can be provided to his wife other than him, so the threat needs to be neutralized to reestablish the original power imbalance that was their marriage.

Dominance is not only established when the husband takes away the inanimate possessions that are his wife's joyous emotions from her, but also when the physical interaction of the murder of the nightingale establishes dominance between the two. This quick event is littered with various pungent bits of toxic masculinity, but primarily dominance is reestablished here. This occurs when he not only takes the bird's life, thus stating that he can take the nightingale's life, but he can quickly take hers too. The knight's drastic decision to take the life of the nightingale sends the gruesome message to everyone involved who is the true person in power of the whole dynamic and situation at hand. To top it all off, the husband discards the nightingale's body with a simple throw at his wife's dress. The act, so simple and minute compared to the killing of the bird, yet at the same time so crucial. Again, this institutes the power dynamic and dominant role for the two, but what is left behind is telling as well. Once the body of the nightingale touches the dress of the wife, it leaves a bloody mark thus instilling in that moment that if there was any question as to who was superior in their marriage it has now been answered. By killing the bird and then proceeding to throw the bloody corpse on his wife's dress he tries to assert his dominance through the bloody death and markings of the nightingale on his wife.

The husband also takes it upon himself to kill the nightingale in such a gruesome manner. The unsolicited violence on the helpless bird provides readers with his true intentions and his

quick resort to unwelcome violence. The action of not only killing the nightingale right in front of his wife but disposing of the body in such a careless and demeaning way shows his utter lack of feeling for his wife and her feelings. His satisfaction came from killing a helpless animal and making his wife feel smaller than the poor nightingale. It is unnecessary to take away the life of a living being, but for the husband his anger had justified it in his eyes. It is stated frequently and, at this moment, stands true, violence is and was not the answer. The choice of wanton violence occurs over multiple beings at this moment. It is evident that the greatest form of unforced violence occurs from the husband to the nightingale, when its life is taken, but violence occurs among the others there as well. For one, the wife experiences this violence even if no physical action is taken and placed against her. Cruelty occurred by making sure the traumatic event occurs right in front of the knight's wife. The action of taking away her happiness to assert dominance over her cause's extreme emotional violence. Therefore, the physical and emotional unsolicited, wanton violence that occurs at the hands of the husband's toxic masculinity.

The knight has proudly embraced the dominance and wanton violence end of toxic masculinity, although to no surprise he is not quite done ticking the boxes that go along with toxic masculinity. While making effortless gains to embrace the dominance and unsolicited violence over others he also devalues women in the process, mainly his wife. Devaluation of the knight's wife occurs through the limited respect, worth, and value placed on her as a being. The lady is seen as less than her husband and is treated as though she is nothing better than a carcass thrown to the side. If the knight held any value and importance to his relationship with his wife or her as a human being the actions he took would never have occurred. The husband's actions of asserting dominance over his wife in all manners being physical and emotional, wanton violence

on an innocent creature, and devaluation of his wife paints a perfect picture of a man demonstrating Kupers' toxic masculinity in Marie de France's "Laüstic".

Marie de France worked diligently to write many tales of courtly love during the medieval era. Courtly love, and of love in general, places most of its attention towards happier thoughts even if the bumpy ride ends with happy and light feelings. When writing anything, just as in life, there is no limit to the lessons that can be taught, learned, and told. When exploring older works such as those from the medieval period it is extremely important to read in between the lines to see what the words are saying from behind the scenes. A way to discover the truths and lives of those lived during periods outside of the current one, literature is the place to explore. Toxic masculinity ran rampant throughout this time, both for men and women. Marie de France had shown in the two *Lais*, "Lanval" and "Laustic", that Kupers' toxic masculinity was demonstrated in all forms.

CHAPTER 3: PLAYING WITH TOXIC MASCULINITY IN 17TH AND 18TH CENTURY FRENCH LITERATURE

Introduction

During the 17th and 18th centuries, plays were an important form of literary work that branched outside of the typical pen-to-paper route. Plays permit literature to become three-dimensional, by leaving the paper and visually telling the story, ungluing one's eyes from the words on a page to the words being acted out right in front of them. By analyzing plays from previous centuries to today, people can see how similar certain behaviors such as toxic masculinity have remained consistent. Within the 17th and 18th centuries, two men exemplified toxic masculinity to its core by personifying Kupers' regressive male traits of toxic masculinity to obtain personal gratification and gain. Two literary characters who exemplify Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity are the Count in *Le Mariage de Figaro* and Tartuffe in *Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur*. Continuously these two characters maintained characteristics of toxicity even if they are in different circumstances and periods. Tartuffe and the Count have the reluctance to take responsibility for their actions, therefore being quick to mistreat others, attempt to exert dominance, and devalue everyone around them to attempt to maintain their delusional placements at the top of their plays' social hierarchy. Both Tartuffe and the Count use those close to them to attempt to gain power and women as if they were both pieces of property. Through the characters' continued use of others, they are encouraging and justifying the destruction and violence of others as means of personal game. Through their actions, these characters provide audiences with critical characteristics associated with toxic masculinity.

Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur

Tartuffe is a character who is power-starved, but due to his social class, he lacks opportunities to morally gain money because of this. In scene five of Act 1, it is shown that Orgon first was introduced to Tartuffe at church. Orgon believed that his soul was saved by Tartuffe, who gave him money, and then allowed him to live with his family since he was not in the same financial stability as Orgon and his family. Tartuffe did not have the means to support himself, instead, he had the means to manipulate Orgon to allow a 'holy, clergyman' to live with him and his family. Tartuffe is a liar because he is not a clergyman; it was all a lie to take advantage of the first person not clarifying what Tartuffe is saying. Being a 'religious man' did not allow Tartuffe to climb the social or economic ladder without help from others. Throughout the play, the audience must painstakingly follow Tartuffe in his attempts to gain power. While a plan is not explicitly stated by Tartuffe himself, it is noticeably clear what his intentions are, so much so that his family frequently cries for help from Orgon, even though he is blinded by Tartuffe. Tartuffe's attraction for power means that he can show audiences how he was able to illustrate toxic masculinity according to Kupers' definition.

One of the plans that Tartuffe sticks closely to is one that although it is blatant backstabbing to the person who helps Tartuffe the most, is not what one would think is in line with the ideology of a clergyman. The audience sees in the play, *Tartuffe ou l'imposteur*, that Tartuffe has his eyes on many things, one appalling one is attempting to steal Orgon's wife. He tried this by making his "true feelings" known in the third scene of act two and stating,

"Mais, Madame, après tout, je ne suis pas un ange ; / Et si vous condamnez l'aveu que je vous fais, / vous devez vous en prendre à vos charmants attraits... / Força la résistance ou

s'obstinait mon cœur... / S'il faut que vos bontés veuillent me consoler / Et jusqu'à mon néant daignent se ravalier, / J'aurai toujours pour vous, ô suave merveille, / Une dévotion à nulle autre pareille. / Votre honneur avec moi ne court point de hasard, / Et n'a nulle disgrâce à craindre de ma part" (Molière 80).

Tartuffe uses and exploits his religion as justification for his actions and declarations. Although connecting his words and actions with his religion, he does not stand by the ideas that would be associated with it. Primarily stating that he is "no angel" adds padding to any action or statement that was or will be made by Tartuffe towards Elmire. Tartuffe wants the possessions and relationships of others to gain more power. Tartuffe is more aggressive with his actions and words because he honestly believes his actions towards Elmire are acceptable. Instead of accepting his desires for what they truly are and being respectful to Elmire, Orgon, and their family, he pushes all his feelings onto the other characters of the play. This misplacement and childish behavior allows Tartuffe more room to convince himself that his distasteful actions are justified.

All of this can be categorized to fit into any of the aspects of toxic masculinity, although it primarily asserts Tartuffe's attempted dominance over the situation. The desire for power is evident because Tartuffe's attempt to assure Elmire is misguided, it is just to try and gain control over the situation. There is no real sentiment behind his wording, just hopes that if he can turn Elmire's head with sweet nothings then he can take over. The main goal for Tartuffe in this context is to alter his wording so Elmire might think she can reciprocate Tartuffe's sentiments since it is "God's plan". By creating new rules for her benefit, he communicates with others that his new rules follow God and the church. Tartuffe does not think that he will have any consequences for his actions if he explains and agrees with God. This is not the case because his

mentality and spirit in turn hurts all those around him. By deciding to place all his actions and words onto Elmire and God he shows he tries to be dominant over the situation and Orgon's family. All his words lack sentiment and have the underlying meaning of dominance, therefore portraying toxic masculinity.

In the citation above Tartuffe works to gaslight Elmire into thinking that his actions and diverted responsibility are her fault. By not respecting and placing value on Elmire and trying to dominate all aspects and others around him Tartuffe truly shows that he has characteristics of toxic masculinity. By spinning responsibility onto Elmire stating her “charming attractions, forced resistance or stubbornness” is the driving force behind Tartuffe’s actions. There is no respect or validation for Elmire as a human being, lacking any mental holding that he has for women in general. By doing this Tartuffe aligns with Kupers’ point about toxic masculinity about the devaluation of women. He actively tries to knock down any leg she must stand on in this battle that Tartuffe has created to win Elmire’s heart, desires, social standing, money, and more. Instead of claiming responsibility for his actions and the ramifications, Tartuffe believes that there is no feasible way a man of his diluted standing could be responsible for these desires. Tartuffe views himself as the most worthy of everything: power, money, social standing, etc. Although, for him, he does not view Elmire as completely worthless, but only as a pawn in his game. Tartuffe holds exceptionally low value on Elmire, promoting toxic masculinity by devaluating women in his games.

At the end of *Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur* Tartuffe reveals his true intentions to the other characters. At this time, the previous conversations about Tartuffe's motives are confirmed amongst those who had been adamant that Tartuffe was not with Orgon’s family for genuine reasons. Orgon, for the first time, finally can verify all the continuous lies and deception Tartuffe

laid out throughout the play, revealing most of his family members' concerns were valid from the very beginning. Instead of maturely accepting responsibility for his actions and words, Tartuffe decides to berate Orgon and his family. After the truth is finally revealed to everyone, Orgon proceeds to take back everything he has given to Tartuffe which was originally meant for his family. Following this form of “betrayal” in Tartuffe's eyes, he proceeds to state,

“La maison m’appartient, je le ferai / Et vous montrerai bien qu’en vain on a recours, / Pour me chercher querelle, à ces lâches détours ; / Qu’on n’est pas ou l’on pense en me faisant injure, / que j’ai de quoi confondre et punir l’imposture, / Venger le Ciel qu’on blesse, et faire repentir / Ceux qui parlent ici de me faire sortir” (Molière 118).

Tartuffe is explaining that what was gifted to him by Orgon will remain his and if that is to change, he will seek revenge and promote the realization to the viewers, yet again, that Tartuffe refuses to take responsibility for his actions or words. He knows that the house, up until this point in the play, was his. Yet he decides to proceed to lie and disrespect the man who put everything, including his family, aside to help Tartuffe. The continuous disrespect led Tartuffe to become defensive and show the public, both in and outside of the world of the play, his childish emotions, and actions.

Tartuffe’s response to the stopping moment on his road to ultimate success allows for his toxic masculinity to Orgon’s family to shine through. The attempt for Tartuffe to be hurtful and assert his dominance physically, emotionally, and verbally on Orgon and his family promotes the toxic masculinity he continuously radiates. Not only did Tartuffe affect Orgon and Elmire but also all those who helped, causing all those involved to be extremely traumatized. Tartuffe’s mentality of not immediately apologizing for what he did throughout this play shows that he has narcissistic tendencies and only acts for his personal gain. Tartuffe honestly believes at this

moment that nothing is his fault, and he will remain the most dominant person in the family because he is meant to gain all the possessions and people in his general vicinity. His words are no more than an obvious attempt to claw at anyone who wants to take over the “head” of the house, which is Tartuffe’s ultimate goal. This idea proves to everyone in and outside the world of this play that Tartuffe personifies the dominant characteristic that is described in Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity.

Following this characterization of dominance that Tartuffe shows in the previous citation, he also expresses wanton violence. This occurs not physically but verbally. Tartuffe makes it known to the others that he will do everything he can to take everything that was provided to him and more from Orgon and his family. The verbal attack and threat on Orgon and are evident in his words stating, “...Qu’on n’est pas ou l’on pense en me faisant injure, / que j’ai de quoi confondre et punir l’imposture, / Venger le Ciel qu’on blesse, et faire repentir ...” (Molière 118). Tartuffe here states that he has it in him to punish and throw off the imposture, which in this case would be Orgon’s son, Damis. He is threatening his religion to Orgon’s family to make them feel like they will regret their actions. Just as he was seen gaslighting Elmire previously, he proves he can do that again but with the whole family now. Tartuffe tries to find any reason to justify his actions while claiming that Orgon’s family’s frustrations are not. He is spinning the situation around to state, threatening the family with verbal action. Being a family who withhold religious values, threatening their religion against them is a blatant attack to attempt to entrap Orgon’s family. If they believe that God and their religion will be against them through the threats that Tartuffe is stating, they will have to keep Tartuffe as the head of their household. These flagrant attacks and threats are unwarranted, making them attacks of verbal wanton violence. This wanton violence stands true to Kuper’s branch of toxic masculinity.

Throughout the play *Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur*, Tartuffe both sneakily and overtly works to undermine Orgon and his family to gain everything from them. Tartuffe devalues women by not placing any importance on Elmire except for using her as a pawn in his plan of attack for power and status. He shows his attempts to maintain dominance when he blames everyone else for his childish and inappropriate actions and words toward Elmire. When Tartuffe also candidly states that he will do anything to maintain what was previously promised to him for Orgon, he is asserting his dominance as well. Both moments and frankly many others throughout the play show Tartuffe's grasp of supremacy and control over one person in the family or the whole family. Tartuffe also verbally expounds wanton violence in the intense argument over possessions and standing in Orgon's family. He threatens Orgon's family through himself and through God. All these characteristics, "wanton violence, devaluation of women, and dominance" (Kupers 714) show Tartuffe represents and maintains toxic masculinity according to Kupers' definition.

Le Mariage de Figaro

Le Mariage de Figaro is the second play in the Figaro trilogy. During the first play, the Count gets married to the countess, but it is not smooth sailing for long. The second play, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, is a continuation of the story that occurs in the first play. This play reveals the Counts lingering eye and lapse of respect for the Countess. Suzanne, the woman who helps the countess and who is in love with Figaro (the friend and valet of the Count), is the new target for the Count. As the play progresses various characteristics are revealed that provide the audience with people who exemplify toxic masculinity. The Count is the primary antagonist who embodies many of the traits that Kupers lists in his definition of the term.

The Count, being known for his lingering eye and lack of focused attention on his wife and marriage is the personified version of ‘the grass is always greener on the other side’. The Count must look for the shinier, newer thing or relationship because he cannot work and be content with what he has. Even though the love and connection between Suzanne and Figaro are very evident, the Count believes he can be the one person to break this connection. When the Count's intentions become known by the other characters in the play, the women concoct a plan to reveal the Count's true colors. The Count explains to “Suzanne”, who is the countess disguised as Suzanne, why he is unfaithful to his wife. During the fifth act in the seventh scene, the Count explains further,

“...Je ne sais, moins d'uniformité peut-être ; plus de piquant dans les manières ; un je ne sais quoi qui fait la chambre ; quelquefois un refus, que sais-je ? Nos femmes croient tout accomplir en nous aimant : cela dit une fois elles nous aiment, nous aiment ! (Quand elles nous aiment.) Et sont si complaisant, et si constamment obligeantes, et toujours, et sans relâche, qu'on est tous surpris un beau soir, de trouver la satiété ou l'on recherchait le bonheur” (Beaumarchais 315).

Here one can easily see that the Count is relentless in his advances to have personal relations with Suzanne even though he already has a wife. He believes because he is being honest about his feelings and intentions with “Suzanne” that she will respect the Count more and eventually start an affair with him. Thus, his justifications are that women are not the only problem, but human nature itself. Women in the Count's eyes are meant to be desired and he believes it is in his right to have relationships with many women, even if that means going outside of his marriage and being unfaithful because he is a man. The Count has the delusional misconception

that he is allowed to have as many frivolous relationships with as many women as possible as a reward for being a male, a reward that women are not equally granted. If having external relationships from his marriage is parallel with his human nature and reward for being a man, it justifies all the Count's actions so there is no potential for feeling guilt. The Count states to "Suzanne" that his wife is at fault for his diverted attraction and attention. The Count is shared with her as well; he is seeking "...moins d'uniformité peut-être ; plus de piquant dans les manières..." (Beaumarchais 315), therefore claiming any sort of excitement that was in the marriage is no longer there. When the Count declares the fun and thrill of the unknown has vanished there is no acceptance of responsibility. Instead, the Count is blaming his wife for being "si constamment obligeantes" causing the Count to look outside of their marriage "de trouver la satiété ou l'on recherchait le bonheur" (Beaumarchais 315). The blaming and misplacement of responsibility that occurs during this declaration and confession lack all respect for the countess. By blaming the countess for the Count's undesired and ill-advised actions, he sucks all potential value from her. He minimizes and degrades her as a wife and woman to try and justify his actions. The Count might think this is all warranted, but he instead warrants the title of toxic masculinity by devaluing his wife.

Simone de Beauvoir, a 20th-century author, wrote many works including *Le Deuxième Sexe* detailed gender disparity that can be recalled in former works. She viewed this problem and shared her opinion on the matter by saying, "Le mâle a une vie sexuelle qui est normalement intégrée à son existence individuelle : dans le désir, dans le coït, son dépassement vers l'espèce se confond avec le moment subjonctif de sa transcendance : il est son corps" (de Beauvoir 63). Men who intrinsically and extrinsically participate in toxic masculinity are motivated by their desires and the hopes of having power over others. This observation from Simone de Beauvoir can be

applied to the Count's actions and his view that his gender allows justification for his actions. As the Count views himself as his body and his desires, he finds validation in his pursuit of Suzanne. Men are allowed to display unfair injustice because they have been told: “il est son corps” (de Beauvoir 63). It can be assumed that the Count would agree with this statement because he believes he is like the mentality that he is his body. If a man can view that it is human nature to objectify and use others because they are their bodies, it devalues women in the process because they are not able to do the same. The attempt to justify an undesired pursuit should not be legitimized based on someone's gender.

While branching out of his marriage for attention and adding Suzanne to his “roster” of women who he could collect like prizes to be won. Like many others who have been written about, even in this analysis alone, the Count works diligently to assert his dominance over others to make sure that he is deemed worthy of being the alpha in his surrounding circles. The Count makes it his mission, hand in hand with his significant lack of respect and minimal value of women, to assert his dominance over others. The Count's efforts to steal Suzanne from her relationship with Figaro show what lengths he will go to control all around him. It is obvious that the Count wants to affirm his control over Suzanne, by having an affair with her. By having an affair with Suzanne, the Count would also be able to assume dominance over Figaro because he can “steal” Suzanne from Figaro. With these efforts, the Count worked just as hard to maintain control over his wife as well. The Count lacks any love and esteem for his wife, although he does hold love and esteem for his dominant position in their marriage. The Count works extremely hard to maintain power and supremacy in his marriage, not batting an eye at his attempts at indiscretion. The Count's desire to control everyone around him proves he is the dominant and primary character to embody toxic masculinity.

The Count works diligently to eliminate other characters in the play who may be in the way for him to have his cake and eat it too. This ties back to Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity because dominance over others is a branch of his definition of toxic masculinity. The Count's main desire appears to be his hunger to collect everything and everyone possible for his gain whilst leaving everyone else with nothing. Thus, leaving the Count as the supreme character compared to everyone else. Chérubin is another character in *Le Mariage de Figaro* who the Count would love to eliminate because he views Chérubin as a menace to what the Count stands for. Chérubin maintains a masculinity that strays from the norm for men during this time. This can be seen when he is found hiding under a dress and being "blotti dedans" or "snuggled in" during scenes 8 and 9 of Act 1 of *Le Mariage de Figaro*. Chérubin also is outwardly emotional when the ribbon of the countess is taken from him after going back and forth with the countess for the ribbon throughout scenes 5-9 in Act 2. Chérubin also loudly expresses feelings for the Count's wife by singing her a song of love in scene 4 of Act 2. The Count views masculinity like what Virginie Despentes lists in her book *King Kong Théorie*. Characteristics such as "Répression des émotions. Taire sa sensibilité. Avoir honte de sa délicatesse, de sa vulnérabilité...Être coupé de sa féminité" (Despentes 28-9). By being around more feminine deemed objects such as a ribbon or dress in the manner he was, loudly expressing his emotions to the countess through a love song, and openly expressing further options to an object that connects him to someone he cares for push Chérubin towards the toxic opinion that Chérubin embodies femininity rather than masculinity. Chérubin is not ashamed of his emotions, vulnerability, expressing sensitivity, or being cut from his femininity. By proudly embracing these characteristics, he weakens the Count's opinions on masculinity, therefore being a threat to his own.

Chérubin, therefore, is the perfect target for the Count to pick on and attempt to clean from his path to “success” due to his view that he is getting rid of someone who threatens masculinity. Elizabeth J. Macarthur wrote an analysis of *Le Mariage de Figaro* called “Embodying the Public Sphere: Censorship and the Reading Subject in Beaumarchais's *Mariage De Figaro*”. In her analysis, she was able to dissect various parts of the play and stated the meanings behind them. In her article she stated, “The male characters in the play, especially the Count, want nothing better than to eliminate the danger Chérubin represents to their social world by inserting him securely into a masculine role as a soldier...” (Macarthur 61-2). For many during this time and even continuing up to today the “femininity” Chérubin personifies chips away at the idea of a “manly man”. The Count actively works to place Chérubin into a more manly role that is known to “Devoir être courageux, même si on n'en a aucune envie” and “Faire preuve d'agressivité” (Despentes 29). By being in a position where it is known to be courageous when it might not be desired or being more aggressive, the Count can mold and shape him into the man the Count believes he should be. By doing this the Count exerts control and dominance over Chérubin. This is done because Chérubin does not necessarily have a say over entering the army or not in *Le Barbier de Séville*, he is placed there by the Count and that is what he needs to do. The Count takes control over his life and makes the decisions for him, therefore stripping away any liberty and independence Chérubin might have had. The Count is also playing a dominant role in Chérubin’s life because he is placing him in a more “manly” profession. The Count does this to form him into the type of man that does not teeter on the line separating masculinity and femininity. Being able to manipulate Chérubin in this way, the Count can eliminate any gray area and place him in the masculine box of his society. Chérubin represents a threat to his desires, his power, and his confidence in his own masculinity. The Count’s control of

Chérubin and his idea of masculinity permits him to play the dominant role of toxic masculinity in line with Kupers' definition.

The dominance over the ability to control how masculine Chérubin is according to the Count also shows the readers another aspect of toxic masculinity according to Kupers' definition, homophobia. It is evident in the two previous paragraphs that the Count's idea of masculinity is in line with Virginie Despentès' sarcastic definition and list of traits from *King Kong Théorie*. In order to be masculine, as the introduction states, a man should “Être coupé de sa féminité” and “Craindre son homosexualité car un homme, un vrai, ne doit pas être pénétrée” (Despentès 29). It can be believed that the Count identifies with these traits as well because Despentès' albeit sarcastic definition of and list is from the 21st century, so to the modern reader these ideals might be outdated. These would not be ruled out given the period in which the play *Le Mariage de Figaro* is based. As was previously stated in the introduction chapter of this paper, according to the book *Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890–1940*, gay men have been associated with more “feminine” qualities (Chauncey 26). Even though both citations are from more modern forms of French literature, it can be assumed as one regresses through time in French literature so would the more modern view on gender and sexual stereotypes. Furthermore, the threat Chérubin makes against the Count and masculinity as a whole in the Count's eyes is because of his fear of more “traditional” gender and sexual stereotypes. Since Chérubin is associated with more feminine qualities, he would be seen as a homosexual man rather than a straight man. Based on the stereotypical traits of gay men being more in tune with their femininity, and the Count's harsh actions towards Chérubin who proudly displays these characteristics, it would appear the Count is rather homophobic. His fear of feminine and homosexual men joins together to create a character, in this case, Chérubin, who the Count

believes he can be violent towards. The Count's attempts to steer Chérubin toward more masculine roles prove that this underlying expression of homophobia allows the Count to embody another characteristic of Kupers' toxic masculinity definition.

Macarthur further analyzes the Count later in her paper "Embodying the Public Sphere: Censorship and the Reading Subject in Beaumarchais's *Mariage De Figaro* ", identifying other problems that arise from the Count and an explanation for his actions. She observes the Count's original plan for domination must be changed because it is not working as he first believed. She claims, "The Count learns that he must exercise his mastery not over his subjects' sexuality, but over his own" (Macarthur 59). It may seem that the Count is discovering that he must act better towards others, but this is not necessarily the case. He is trying to find a better way to slither around and hide his errors from others to avoid getting caught and in trouble for his behavior. An example of this is seen during a previous citation when the Count is talking to "Suzanne" blaming his turned head on his wife and inability to add "spice" to their marriage (Beaumarchais p. 315). The Count's altered control of his desires continues to intentionally hurt others, who are close to him both in general proximity and personally, thus reinforcing his toxic masculinity. The Count also has poor intentions when he lacks control over his own body and desires, but later in his attempt to do so does something that he had no intention or knowledge of doing. The Count inadvertently promotes toxic masculinity to himself. His failed attempt to dominate others' sexuality pushes him to attempt to dominate his own. Where dominance plays into Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity is from the ultimate intention of controlling and dominating others. The Count believes if he can show that he has control over his sexuality then he can potentially gain sympathy and mastery over others. The malicious intent that hides behind the

dominance over his sexuality demonstrates the Count's unintentional toxic masculinity over himself.

The play is a constant battle between all the other characters and the Count and his problematic actions. This is important because the audience has the chance to see one of the weaknesses in the play, toxic masculinity. The Count's entanglement with toxic masculinity according to Kupers' definition continuously provides obstacles and drama to the play. The Count's weaknesses are tunnel visioned towards dominance of others, devaluation of women, and homophobia, therefore checking three of the four boxes of the definition of toxic masculinity used in this paper. Although his narrowed perspective is essential because the Count provides continuous evidence to the audience and the other characters in the play *Le Mariage de Figaro*, revealing his true personality. If the Count were confident and unperturbed in the fluidity of masculinity rather than binary gender norms, he would have never sent Chérubin to the army to dominate his life and eliminate any association with homosexual stereotypes. Instead, the Count exemplified characteristics of homophobia and dominance towards Chérubin in the play. The Count also actively devalued his wife because he would not accept that his actions and external marital desires were breaking up their marriage and not any excuse he could blame on his wife. After failed attempts to control others' sexuality, the Count unintentionally places misplaced dominance over his own. The Count works tirelessly throughout *Le Mariage de Figaro* to personify three of the four listed characteristics associated with toxic masculinity, effectively hurting all those around him including himself.

Comparison

The citations above refer to the Count in *Le Mariage de Figaro*, but this also directly correlates to Tartuffe in *Tartuffe ou l'imposteur*. Tartuffe, later in the play, attempts to control and assert dominance over his desires toward Elmire. The control he gives to his desires is not achieved, but he wanted it because he wanted to be able to control Elmire as a result of controlling his desires. Tartuffe, like the count, had ulterior motives instead of those they were trying to persuade others was their truth. If the Count and Tartuffe were able to convince the respective women in their lives that they had control over their desires, then maybe they could keep those women in their lives. For both men, once they realize they cannot quickly control a woman, they will try to “control” and “dominate” themselves so they can later exert control over women in diverse ways. They believe that women such as Elmire and Suzanne will melt and fall to their knees to confess their love for Tartuffe and the Count since they had control over their desires. Instead, both men hurt themselves by repeatedly injuring themselves in their own toxic masculinity cycle.

Both Tartuffe and the Count in both plays have a multitude of opportunities to respect not only the women they encounter but also the other men. Chérubin, the other man in *Le Mariage de Figaro*, and Orgon, the other man in *Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur*, were betrayed by the toxic men in their respective plays. Both the Count and Tartuffe betrayed other men by hoping and achieving to deceive those around them. The idea of toxic masculinity is not just limited to a man who disrespects women, but someone who disrespects all those around them, no matter their chosen gender because they feel their masculinity is under question and being threatened. The use of other characters for personal gain and continuous misconceptions indicates the Count's and Tartuffe's real personality and intentions. Both men work to assert their dominance over the others. Although, ironically, Orgon and Chérubin were not threats to Tartuffe and the Count even

though Tartuffe and the Count put all their energy into believing this intrinsic mental fable. Orgon gave his house and possessions to Tartuffe over his own family and refused to believe their cries about Tartuffe's intentions. Therefore, bending the knee to Tartuffe did not necessarily pose that Orgon was a roadblock in Tartuffe's road to success, instead, he was a filled pothole to make the ride smoother. Chérubin was a child and of lower status, so again not a threat to the Count. During this time status did play heavily into the deciding factor of marriage and relationships between two people, so with Chérubin being in a lower social class compared to the Count he should not have even been considered a threat to the count. Tartuffe and the Count were so self-conscious of these other men they did everything they could to eliminate them from their paths. Instead of taking the energy and effort to respect others, especially the women they had their eyes on, they wasted time and effort on two people who should have never been considered a threat. Asserting their dominance on frivolous things and unnecessary threats was superfluous and pointless. If this is not a textbook example of toxic masculinity and how both men do not embody this term, then they would not have done what they did.

It is relatively simple to list differences between Tartuffe and the Count before listing certain similarities between them. While both men are important characters in their plays and display similar characteristics of toxic masculinity, their differences help elaborate the danger within their toxic mindsets and actions. Tartuffe is different from the Count in profession; Tartuffe holds a lower position in society by pretending to be a clergyman to manipulate Orgon and his family, than the Count who holds a higher position in society. Due to Tartuffe's lower ranking, he has fewer opportunities to hold power and must work much harder to gain it and climb the social ladder. When Tartuffe is introduced to everyone in *Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur* the audience can observe the lengths he must go to gain things such as power and dominance over

others. The Count does not have to go to such lengths due to his heightened dominance in society being a Count. The Count, at the beginning of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, has more power in general and over others alongside him in comparison to Tartuffe. Although their differing social classes and professions may consider them as quite different in circumstances, that does not mean they are at two opposite ends of the spectrum. Both the Count and Tartuffe use other characters in their respective plays to their advantage and personal gain. The two men promote their similar capabilities of embodying toxic masculinity from their differing places in society in a remarkably analogous manner.

The Count's ravenous hunger for women over power is extremely like Tartuffe's. Both men have an extensive list of goals, one of which is to win the attention of an unavailable woman. It does not matter who this woman might be because the chase and rush of the potential for gaining the affection of an unattainable woman keep both men in the race, even though there is no race to be had. As the spectators can see, Tartuffe has more to gain and to lose compared to the situation of the count. For the count, his potential failure allows for a cushioned and potentially avoidable fall while Tartuffe does not have this kind of luck. Due to the Count's lofty position in society, he can exert more energy into his imagined and desired relationship with Suzanne. Tartuffe must split his energies with Elmire, Orgon, their family, and their possessions. Although both men do not have the same opportunities and energy levels to be devoted to the respective women of their plays, they still push their primary energy onto these unavailable women. The objective of gaining the affection of these women who are in relationships with other men, especially men whom they know themselves, proves they have zero respect or regard for anyone but themselves. Tartuffe and the Count maintain constant attention on these unattainable women, pushing any other desire or goal to the backburner. The aim and purpose of

manipulating the people around them with the hopes for continuous personal gain encourages repetitive toxic masculinity throughout both plays.

Spectators may believe that Tartuffe and the Count are dissimilar, although when magnified under a microscope they have almost identical toxic masculinity makeup. These fraternal toxic twins have differences that can be seen by the naked eye which causes people to jump to the quick conclusion that there are more differences than similarities. One differing characteristic, that was discussed briefly above, is the social status of both men. The Count is a rich and higher noble man from the start while Tartuffe must work hard to climb up the social ladder with a lack of riches and resources. Looking past this differing barrier it can be seen and analyzed that both men use their professions as a tactical tool against others in the attempts to gain power and riches. Tartuffe and the Count's social status does not matter because they have used what they are given from others and from their base surroundings to get what they want and abuse those who are on their power hunger crawl for success with them. Both men place responsibility for their actions on other characters in their plays such as nature, God, and women. They are devaluing others and assert their dominance over others because they believe they do not have to be burdened and take accountability for their own mistakes.

A further example of the hidden similarities between both Tartuffe and the Count revolves around the end of each of the plays. At the end of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, the Count is revealed as the conniving and manipulative man he truly is, parallel to Tartuffe at the end of *Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur*. The end of *Le Mariage de Figaro* is described by Macarthur stating, "By the play's final scene, the Count has been humiliated and forced to renounce publicly and officially both his seigneurial rights and his attempt to buy Suzanne through Figaro and Suzanne still pocket the money" (Macarthur 58). When matching up the ending to *Le Tartuffe ou*

l'imposteur, Tartuffe also experiences similar consequences. Both the Count and Tartuffe have the consequences of their actions and true intentions on full display for everyone, in and out of their plays, on full display. One might believe that the finality for both men is different in each of the plays, although they both experience end up finishing their toxic masculinity races with different routes to get there. The Count does not lose any physical thing while Tartuffe does lose money and the potential possessions he could have gained from Orgon and his family if his devious plan had played out perfectly. Moving past the physical possessions that were lost both men lose much more that can have a heavier effect on their future and mentality. Physical objects come and go with a higher chance of being replenished, but the power and trust held prior to their despicable actions is lost forever. Being caught and humiliated in front of others around them allows for the Count and Tartuffe to have the bare minimum amount of respect from others. Although, it would be possible to see any potential change in either of these men after the public humiliation, presumably not. If either of the men had taken into consideration when the plays began as to what could have happened to either of them, they would not have changed their actions due to the thrill they felt during the ride of toxic masculinity rather than the result.

People everywhere in different pieces of art such as theater express themselves in separate ways. Literature, in this context being plays, are forms of expression allowing inspection into the mind of the writers and characters from an unfamiliar perspective and point of view. Toxic masculinity is forever present between Tartuffe and the Count in both plays due to their words, actions, goals, and desires. The Count in *Le Mariage de Figaro* and Tartuffe in *Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur* express traits that remain in line with the definition used here for toxic masculinity. Using and mistreating others because of one's desire to gain power, people, and possessions provide evidence to show others their ability to exemplify such ideologies. Both men

decide to do anything possible to achieve a life where they are the only ones to think they deserve for themselves. The possibility of gaining things such as power can be done respectfully or disrespectfully, although both men in either play chose the latter rather than the former. Both men used every resource at their disposal to declare their dominance over others. They both devalued women within the process as well to further establish their dominance in the respective plays. The Count also pushed hard to add another characteristic to his toxic masculinity cocktail by being homophobic as well. The continuous betrayal and narcissism declared loudly and proudly that the Count and Tartuffe lived their lives bathing in and breathing out toxic masculinity.

CHAPTER 4: NEW AGE TOXIC MASCULINITY

Introduction

Hiking further along the trail that a literary timeline in the 20th and 21st centuries allows continued exploration of toxic masculinity, but more advanced connections to the current, modern reader. Every author, no matter the chosen genre, works effortlessly to connect and present messages about and personal histories with toxic masculinity to their readers. The issue that is toxic masculinity allows for more personal narratives due to the liberation of women to put their experiences from memory or basic storytelling and transfer it to paper. Allowing people such as feminists, activists, authors, and more to be open and raw regarding this subject is more available even if they risk everything to do so because, at the end of the day, women are at limited freedom and possibilities in comparison to men. People, whether in literature or real life, express characteristics that are chain linked to toxic masculinity whether it is intentional or not. Given the time, toxic masculinity is more widely discussed and fought openly compared to previous time periods. Fighting toxic masculinity occurs through discussion in the form of literature. This allows for toxic masculinity to not be displayed by characters in literature, but also through discussion. French literature could do the latter and the former thanks to advancements in equality.

Le Deuxième Sexe

Simone de Beauvoir, a groundbreaking feminist, and champion during France's second wave of feminism, was a pioneer for the current progress for women not only in France but for

women all over the world. Her feminist writing, such as *Le Deuxième Sexe*, promotes the idea of women being seen as “l’autre” or “other” compared to men. The constant theme throughout *Le Deuxième Sexe* follows various comparisons made in history between genders and Simone de Beauvoir’s rejections of outdated views and opinions about women from a biological, economic, and psychological standpoint. This title was not chosen based on Simone de Beauvoir’s firsthand experiences but based on those created by the society that has lived on throughout human existence. She also discussed how women have not had the same opportunities and liberties as men have had. Due to toxic masculinity playing a direct role in inequality. Men who embrace domination over women do not accept that there is a possibility to treat women as equals. Women and men are held to different standards, but men are generally able to get away with more compared to women. Many people have written and discussed the disparities and standards between men and women.

When exploring the problem of women being viewed as secondary to men, Simone states her honest opinion on men claiming, “... l’homme est rongé par le souci de se montrer mâle, important, supérieur ; il joue des comédies afin qu’on lui en joue ; il est lui aussi agressif, inquiet ; il a de l’hostilité pour les femmes parce qu’il a peur d’elles, et il a peur d’elles parce qu’il a peur du personnage avec lequel il se confond” (Beauvoir 648). Simone de Beauvoir explains men and its relation to toxic masculinity in an extremely parallel sense to Kupers’ definition of the word. Simone astutely observes that a man is not a man unless he is proving that he is in fact a man, superior to others, and important. When men are obsessed with maintaining their “superior” placement in society and keeping their “manly” qualities they can go to certain extremes to do so. If a man needs to show their “superiority” to others, then he is making sure he is asserting his dominance to all those that are around him. If men are “le souci de se montre mâle”, concerned

to show himself male, and if this must be associated with superiority then it can only be linear to Kupers' branch of dominance and toxic masculinity.

Furthermore, a man chooses aggressive behaviors because of their fear of losing their placement in society and in the hierarchy they have created for themselves. This fear and preoccupied mindset to attempt to maintain a higher place in society and amongst others allows them to resort to aggressive behaviors, thus leading to behaviors such as wanton violence. The worry of proving oneself "male", "important" and "superior" should not have the direct line and connection to resort to violence. Anyone is welcome to be themselves and prove it to others if they so please, although being "agressif" because they are "inquiet" is not the answer. The choice of violence against others should not be the chosen course of action since it harms others. Wanton, unsolicited violence is associated with this because no one asks a man to prove themselves as the listed traits like "superior" to others. The worry and self-conscious feelings can be expressed kindly and maturely through words rather than being harmful.

Additionally, if a man holds hostility towards a woman because of the absolute dread of being seen outside of the top of the social pyramid, they are working to devalue women in the process. The threat of losing their superiority and dominance promotes hostile behaviors and actions promoting female devaluation. Men choose to have "de l'hostilité pour les femmes parce qu'il a peur d'elles" (de Beauvoir 648). Hostility based on the fear of women is based on the resentment of losing absolute power and control of others. Fear should not allow people to permit female degradation to occur. Simone de Beauvoir describes men in the 20th century in a way that did and will make many people uncomfortable. The generalized truth of men's behaviors for Simone de Beauvoir is an early definition of toxic masculinity without any distinct clarification. It is clear that the citation is linear to how Virginie Despentes has written about

masculinity and Kupers' has defined toxic masculinity. Therefore, correlation to Kupers' defined traits of dominance, wanton violence, and devaluation of women is presented from men who showed toxic masculinity around Simone de Beauvoir.

Simone de Beauvoir continues with the exploration of gender inequality by explaining various unwritten rules that have been ingrained into society for men and women. Society has allowed for the continuation of this disparity since fights against it have been knocked down and brushed under the rug. Luckily in the 20th century, women were able to discuss these problems openly, unlike previous generations. The discrepancies in standards between genders have been discussed by many, one being Simone de Beauvoir. Referring to the citation about male desire about the Count in *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Simone further explained the imbalance by referencing how women are involved in this. She stated, "Le mâle a une vie sexuelle qui est normalement intégrée à son existence individuelle... il est son corps. L'histoire de la femme est beaucoup plus complexe" (de Beauvoir 63). Women's complexity is more complicated because they do not have the same opportunities as men. If women were motivated just by their desires in a comparable way to men, they would be looked down upon in society. Women who do not follow society's rules are seen as less of a woman. If women are considered to be more masculine, again they are seen as less of a woman. There is no right road to take for women because at most twists and turns women lose something and are considered less than a man if they do similar things that men do not get questioned about. Toxic masculinity is displayed here because the inequality of social standards between men and women allows for the devaluation of women to occur. Women are therefore undervalued here because if they believe they can follow the same rules, society will turn on them. So, even though toxic masculinity is not being personified here, it is being discussed by the disparities in standards between men and women.

The higher value men are held to allows them to not worry about the rules of society which women are taught to do.

Virginie Despentes backs this problem well in *King Kong Théorie* when she is explaining why society has turned on her throughout her life. As what was just discussed women are held to different standards in society compared to men. Virginie describes masculinity as being cut from femininity because they have not allowed themselves to be intertwined. The standards are held for women as well since they have not been allowed to be associated with masculinity. Virginie Despentes explained that she has been described and seen as “trop agressive, trop bruyante, trop grosse, trop brutale...ce sont mes qualités viriles qui font de moi autre chose qu’un cas social parmi les autres” (Despentes 11). Given that Despentes embodies more “masculine” characteristics, so many others have taken it upon themselves to strip Virginie of her femininity and value in that. In society, it is okay for men to be “more aggressive, too noisy, too fat, and too brutal”, but women cannot be seen this way without being labeled as overly emotional, unable to work under pressure, unfit, or hostile by those around them. All traits that women are not given the chance to embody are validated in masculine culture as is seen from statements made by Simone de Beauvoir and Virginie Despentes. Women who branch outside of the boxes that society places people based on their gender often experience this mistreatment firsthand. The value of a woman is based solely on how others believe they should act, which does not equate to how men are treated and seen. Simone de Beauvoir explained this inequality while Virginie provided a personal source. The egocentric view that men can do and be anything while women are not valued in being capable in the same light proves traits of toxic masculinity like the devolution of women is ever present in society thanks to written sources in French literature.

Simone de Beauvoir explained through various philosophical, French pieces of literature the struggle of many women from generations before until her present day. What she was able to do was express herself in a hostile, male-dominated environment with facts and information to back her viewpoints. *Le Deuxième Sexe* can be analyzed in a much deeper manner, but even pulling out a few citations it is seen that Simone de Beauvoir can back Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity. Simone de Beauvoir was able to describe viewpoints about men promoting dominance over others, wanton violence, and devaluation of women to support this philosophy.

L'événement

More often than not, and typically unexpectedly, people will come across moments in their lives where their decisions will alter their life tremendously. When these decisions are made, they not only affect one person, but they can equally affect those surrounding them. This is usually the case for women when they become pregnant. This process can be extremely difficult, but at the end of the day, the person who should have the final word is the mother of the child since she is the one carrying the baby in her body for 9 months. Although this is the desired case for many people, there are plenty of people who do not respect this unwritten social rule. Laws and rules have been written into cultures, governments, religions, and so on to control what women do with their bodies. France, as well as many other countries, have and some still have laws saying what women are allowed to do with their bodies concerning pregnancy such as contraception and abortion. In France in the 70s Simone Veil was the minister of health and passed laws to allow more freedom for women and decisions based on their body. The first "loi Veil" was created in 1974 which, "libéralise totalement l'accès aux contraceptifs, y compris pour les mineures" (Wolozyn 18). The second "loi Veil" allows abortion still today in France with rules stating, "Le délai légal est fixé à 14 semaines d'aménorrhée. Les mineures peuvent y avoir

accès sans autorisation parentale mais doivent cependant être accompagnées d'un adulte référent" (Wolozyn 18). These advancements for women are allowed to occur based on many factors although there is help in research provided through "la littérature contemporaine" (Wolozyn 22), like *L'événement*.

L'événement is a story based on Annie Ernaux's real-life experience with her own abortion. Her experience with abortion was tumultuous due to contraception and abortion being illegal in the 1960s when the event took place. At the beginning of the novel, *L'événement*, the readers discover alongside the main character that she is pregnant. When she discovers that she is pregnant, it comes as a complete and utter shock due to the lack of knowledge on her part of how procreation occurs and the prevention of it. She decides what she wants to do moving forward on her own, but she decides to reach out to the man who got her pregnant, P, to see what his feelings are regarding the situation. After informing him of the situation Anne states, "Le seul à ne pas paraître intéressé était celui dont j'étais enceinte qui m'envoyait de Bordeaux des lettres espacées, dans lesquelles il évoquait allusivement les difficultés pour trouver une solution" (Ernaux, 64). For the main character, it is extremely unfortunate because it takes two people to create a baby, but she has been left completely and utterly alone to handle the pregnancy. Thus, for P, he views his relationship with the main character, Anne, as a fun summer fling and is not willing to take on any responsibility that comes along with this. Here P is exhibiting toxic masculinity because he is devaluing women, primarily the main character, from his actions. He views himself as more important and off the hook for any sort of responsibility on his part. P views Anne and her pregnancy as unimportant compared to his life. The pregnancy to him means nothing since he got the benefits that come before the consequence of pregnancy, thus the lack of respect for Anne and the situation that is at hand due to their actions. The only sort of help he

“provided” to Anne was stating it would be difficult to find a solution for her pregnancy. The various letters and lack of aid or advice provided on P’s part show Anne and the readers that he holds no respect or worth for Anne and her pregnancy. If he can have these feelings towards Anne and her pregnancy, it can be assumed P has a diminished view and value-based opinion toward women. P’s actions therefore award him with the devaluation of women in terms of toxic masculinity according to Kupers.

P also asserts his domination over the situation by making it clear that he will not be involved in the pregnancy or with the child, instead of viewing himself and Anne as equal participants in this situation. By P taking control of the situation and not allowing any sort of communication to work through the issue he lets his true colors shine through, one being his toxic masculinity. If P saw himself as an equal to Anne, the pregnancy, an occurrence that required both P and Anne to partake in, then P might have viewed the pregnancy. Not a problem that only Anne should be dealing with. As was stated above and in the “biology” section of the introduction both male and female gametes need to come together equally to create a baby. P does not behave as if this true, scientific fact is relevant or valid in this situation. Instead, he shows dominance over Anne by effectively deciding on his own that he will not be involved in the pregnancy. He is also viewing himself and more important to Anne because he believes he does not need to uphold responsibility for their equal acts that resulted in Anne becoming pregnant. P’s dominant, singular decisions and opinions about Anne’s pregnancy show he equally fosters dominance to devolution of women to equal characteristics of Kupers’ toxic masculinity.

After Anne realized that P “Il me laisse me débrouiller seule” (p. 63), her pregnancy journey was one in which she had to travel alone. Others were sought for help or provided

involuntary aid throughout the rest of the story, although it is different from having both pregnancy participants involved. The decision to terminate her pregnancy was made, although the obstacles were colossal due to the illegal nature of abortion during this time. As a result, finding a doctor to fulfill the wishes for Anne's pregnancy and future was almost non-existent. While seeing one doctor Anne explained these wishes, but they were unknowingly not granted. Anne was made to believe she was no longer pregnant. This was not the case; she was still pregnant while her doctor stripped Anne of her bodily autonomy; her ability to make decisions for HER body. This comes as a complete and utter shock since Anne discovers how she was taken advantage of entirely on her own long after the doctor's visit. She explains this discovery by stating,

“Il m’a prescrit des ampoules de calcium et des piqûres d’œstradiol... il paraissait soulagé...plus tard, j’apprendrai que le médecin du boulevard de l’Yser m’avait prescrit un médicament utilisé pour empêcher les fausses couches (Ernaux 44-7).

The calcium pills and estradiol injections were prescribed without transparency of their effects. Instead, Anne was led to believe these two products would help terminate the pregnancy rather than strengthen it. The calcium pills were provided to, “empêcher la décalcification maternelle et permettre l’édification de squelette fœtal” (Ravina). Additionally, the estradiol injections are described by a French gynecologist stating, “L’œstradiol joue également un rôle important dans le maintien de la grossesse puisqu’il est sécrété à partir des surrénales du fœtus qui produisent une hormone appelée DHEA. Celle-ci va être métabolisée en oestriol au niveau du placenta” (Giorgetta). Both products described are therefore used to promote fetal health and pregnancy security. Going to see a doctor can be an extremely nerve-wracking event, although people are told to do so to maintain their health. To healthily terminate a pregnancy the best person to see

would be a physician, which is exactly what Anne decided to do and effectively did. Also, sharing such personal, fearful, and illegal desires with someone is a feat of its own, but Anne bravely did this too. Her options were limited, and she was on a timeline. As is all known, a simple decision could have been made. The doctor could have told Anne that he would not take part in her desires, and she would need to seek help elsewhere. Instead, deception was the road that was taken by the doctor to rip Anne's dream and autonomy away from her.

The doctor took Anne's decision about her pregnancy and her body into his own hands. By taking this situation and autonomy into his own hands, he fostered dominance over the situation and Anne. If the doctor was not comfortable with the situation given the laws at the time in France and potentially his personal beliefs, then that should have been made clear with Anne as what was just stated. Instead of having a conversation about the possible ramifications for everyone involved in Anne's desire to terminate her pregnancy, he decided for her. He dominated the situation with deception, with no right or actual connection to the situation. He was a third party and decided for everyone's sake that his actions and opinions were the best and most important at that moment, so lying to the main character was the correct course of action. The doctor does not believe that his opinion can be seen as anything but the only correct one. He does not allow room for external opinion or influence due to his narcissistic view of being the hero. The doctor viewed that his decision to mislead Anne was heroic because one day Anne would regret her decision and be thankful for him. That was not his decision to make, if there is any regret that Anne could potentially have in the future that is on her. She is the only one allowed to feel that way due to her actions. He dominates the situation by placing his opinion over Anne's and taking her life into his hands rather than allowing it to stay with her. By

misleading Anne and assuming dominance over the situation he embraces the domination role of Kupers' toxic masculinity rather than the hero of the story.

The doctor also devalues Anne and a woman's right to choose when being the sole decider of Anne's pregnancy while she is at the doctor's office. The doctor took it into his own hands to decide for Anne for her own body. One might believe that he was trying to help because not only was it against the law, but Anne would potentially be grateful in the future that the doctor saved her pregnancy. The issue here is the doctor did not care for Anne's wants and needs then. The doctor minimizes Anne, and all other women, in the process by not accepting Anne's wants and needs. Instead, he truly felt that her desires were less important than his own. He does not allow room for a woman to decide what can be done regarding her own body. Even though it should be Anne's right to choose what can be done with her own body, the doctor places the value of the decision in his hands, lacking all respect for Anne and her desires. There is no importance placed on a woman's right to choose at this moment. The limited acceptance of opinion and input from Anne over the future for her, her body, and the fetus is left at zero while the doctor's value is at one hundred. The lack of respect and worth the doctor holds for Anne is astronomical since he takes any sort of possible personal autonomy and throws it out the window. If the doctor placed any importance on Anne's right to choose, he would have allowed her to decide what to do regarding her body on her own, whether that was with him as her doctor or not. If there are consequences to follow her decision, that would be her fault and no one else's. The value for Anne's life and future could have come from allowing her to decide on her own and letting her find those who were willing to fight alongside her. The doctor was not willing to do such a thing, rather he viewed himself as the rightful owner of Anne's body and decision. The

diminished value of Anne added to the event that took place because of the doctor's decision solidifies his expression of toxic masculinity.

When searching for help during her pregnancy journey, Anne was left alone due to P not wanting to be involved or take responsibility for the child. During dark and confusing times, it is a ray of light to find those who can help and potentially provide even the smallest bit of support. That is what Anne thought she had when she went to have dinner to seek help from her married friends. Although the night took a quick turn when Jean T, the husband of her friend, took it upon himself to step over the line of support and into the area of blatant and utter disrespect. Anne explained the situation by disclosing the event, “Il m’a prise dans ses bras et dit que nous avions le temps de faire l’amour... Il m’a repris son ton habituel et il a prétendu qu’il avait voulu mesurer ma force morale” (Ernaux 35). During this time of struggle, stress, and sadness all Anne wanted and needed was help and support from friends but Jean T. decided otherwise by making an unwanted advance towards Anne. Instead of supporting Anne and her decision to terminate the pregnancy, Jean T. felt that he could have relations with Anne without any consequences. His thought process was validated in his eyes because he “...assuré en outre de ne pas mettre enceinte puisque je l’étais déjà” (Ernaux 35). The complete and utter lack of knowledge and respect for Anne, and women in general, is so shocking it jumps off the pages like a slap to the face. This depreciated value for Anne and for women places a heavy emphasis on the toxic masculinity that Jean T. embodies in this moment. After being denied he tries to justify his actions and desires by stating he wants to test her “moral strength”. Jean T. takes an immature route and tries to gaslight Anne into fulfilling his sexual desires. Jean T. completely disrespects Anne and her current physical and mental states. Jean T believes that his actions are justified due to the consequences of his desires already being achieved by a previous event in Anne’s life. The only worth Jean T

holds is the worth of his sexual desires. The importance of Anne's pregnancy is only viewed as a beneficial pawn that can be used for Jean T to secretly play games and cheat on his wife.

Anne, unfortunately, is not the only person affected here. Jean T.'s interaction with Anne causes his wife to be greatly devalued as well. Every sort of significance that could have been applied to their marriage is thrown out the window when Jean T decides to try and pursue external relations with their friend. For Jean T, all his actions and words are completely valid in his eyes because the most valued person is himself and his actions. The issue is that outside of his delusional thinking, Jean T exudes toxic masculinity. Instead of having respect for his wife and their relationship, Jean T can only view his needs and depraved ideals as maintaining any weight in this situation. There is a family that is involved, and Jean T is the hammer that shatters the Norman Rockwell family painting into millions of pieces. As what was described above with Anne, Jean T lacks any sympathy towards his wife, and it can be concluded women in general. Unfortunately, Jean T's wife is unaware of the interaction between Anne and her husband. Jean T. places the women in his life at such a low bar that the value they potentially hold in his eyes is close to none. The lack of value and respect proves that toxic masculinity runs in his veins, with little possibility of being cleaned of it anytime soon. Jean T's sexual desires and attempts to push Anne to participate in an affair dominate the circumstances of the situation at hand. Jean T tries to place his dominance over Anne when hugging her while asking her to have sex and when "Jean T. me pressait par-derrière tout en essuyant la vaisselle" (Erneaux 35). Jean T is fostering his dominance over Anne here by invading Anne's personal space. Boundaries are not achieved here, and Jean T believes that by invading Anne's space he will cause her to agree and fulfill Jean T's desires. He does not approach the situation as if he is equal to Anne, he places himself on a higher pedestal. His explanations verify that he views himself as superior compared to the

situation that Anne was seeking help over. By also saying the reason he proposed having sex with Anne was to test her moral strength shows how he fosters dominance in the situation as well. He does not believe that his moral strength is in question or needs to be tested, but by wanting to test Anne's he shows he views himself as superior to her. The toxicity during this situation is oozing while Jean T. genuinely believes that he is the top ruler of the situation and the people involved. The dominance Jean T repeatedly tries to assert over Anne supplements the toxic masculinity he emits according to Kupers' definition.

All the toxic masculinity that is written about is not able to be analyzed entirely in this paper alone because Annie Ernaux's *L'événement* is nothing short of Kupers' toxic masculinity. Characters such as P, the doctor, and Jean T radiate toxic masculinity through the diminished value of women and foster dominance. Due to their actions, many others are affected negatively. *L'événement* was able to express one woman's experience that many others can connect to. The recounting of this story has shown readers how one event can affect people outside of the event in that exact moment and even later in the future. This is like toxic masculinity because it has the ability to impact those who are directly involved and all those around them. The dominance of people and devaluation of women had continuously occurred throughout *L'événement* proving that toxic masculinity was doused all over the story.

La Cause des Femmes

As it has been known to many and seen through sources such as French literature, toxic masculinity has found a way to leech itself to various sources and has traveled effortlessly through time. Gisèle Halimi, a feminine powerhouse, took the time to recount her individual experiences with toxic masculinity in her book *La Cause des Femmes*. Relying on the

information given in the introduction, this book explores how fostered dominance and devaluation of women had occurred firsthand in Gisèle Halimi's life.

In *La Cause des Femmes* Halimi states her struggle for success, alongside many other women, because she has not been taken seriously and considered equal to her male counterparts. Halimi describes this struggle immaculately describing herself in seven simple words, she says she is "une femme dans un monde pour hommes" (Halimi 24). When men do not allow women to have a shared space amongst them, it bolts the door shut that allows for any equality and possibility to shine through for these women. Domination over women in a world, in general, does not aid the end of toxic masculinity, instead, it adds fuel to the fire allowing it to grow. Women fight for their place in society and in the world that has been repeatedly claimed as a man's world because men have been provided with the dominant position in society. When men are provided with the dominant position, this case being the world, it is because toxic masculinity has been ingrained into society. As Gisèle Halimi writes about her experiences with this issue of toxic masculinity, it allows other readers to be able to connect and relate based on their subjective experiences.

As was seen in Marie de France's "Lanval", women are just capable of exuding traits of toxic masculinity as much as men. When women enable aspects of toxic masculinity they promote the issue, making it that much harder to stop the toxic masculinity train. Halimi recounts a time when she experienced toxic masculinity through her mother. She described this experience by saying, "Je crois que ma mère a mis un certain acharnement, peut-être inconscient, à maintenir ce clivage. Comme si, au fond, elle voulait reproduire ce qu'elle avait subi" (Halimi 25). Even though toxic masculinity has been associated and defined with "socially regressive male traits" (Kupers 714). The definitions and associations do not limit toxic masculinity to one

group or gender. Toxic masculinity has no bounds and can be expressed by anyone who embodies the given characteristics provided by Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity. That said, toxic masculinity can be personified whether someone knows their expression of it or not. For Gisèle Halimi, her mother showed her that she exuded toxic masculinity because she wanted her daughter to experience the same pain she has felt at the hands of others. The problem with the "right of passage" is that it allows for toxic masculinity to gain nutrients to live on. This ideal allows for toxic masculinity to shine through because it devalues women. For one, it does not allow women to live in a world where change can be made. Repetitive pain and recurrence through generations do not allow women to show their worth and importance in the world, instead, it allows them to be chipped at not permitting full potential.

Either knowingly or not Gisèle Halimi's mom wanting her to experience similar degradation to hers and many other women's pasts allows more than a devalued view of women, it inadvertently allows men to foster dominance over women. This occurs at the hands of women rather than men. Without even lifting a finger it has been ingrained in society that women should allow other women to suffer to permit men to maintain their "dominant" place in society. Women are allowing men to foster dominance over them without doing much to work for it, they are allowing toxic masculinity to worm itself into the mentality of women. If this mentality is to continue the dominance can be fostered over women, not allowing for change to be made. As Gisele states, this type of behavior may be subconscious, as women have unwillingly and unknowingly allowed men to maintain this sort of behavior. Her mom embodies dominance too because she is making sure that her daughter will suffer and feel the divide as she felt and has experienced. Gisele's mom wants to solidify the cultural, bigender "cleavage" by making sure that it is enforced with her daughter. Either willingly or not Gisèle Halimi recounts how her mom

tried to foster dominance over her to maintain the dominance that men have fostered over women in society to maintain toxic masculinity.

Literature, especially biographies, is an amazing way to see how toxic masculinity has maintained its chair at the world's table. Gisèle Halimi bravely shared how toxic masculinity had worked itself into her life as she had worked to help women achieve new forms of equality. As other forms of French literature have exemplified toxic masculinity, biographical accounts can click with people in ways that other forms of literature might not be able to do. Gisele was able to share how being a woman in a man's world has permitted toxic masculinity because it shows how she has been devalued alongside many other women. She also recounted how her mom expressed toxic masculinity by trying to assert dominance to have her feel a similar divide and worthlessness as other women had felt in previous generations.

Conclusion

French literature from the 20th and 21st centuries has been able to discuss and explore toxic masculinity in ways that previous pieces of French literature have not had the liberty to do. As time has progressed, equality has slowly incorporated itself into human society. Due to these authors having had more freedom to discuss toxic masculinity in a more real and raw way. Simone de Beauvoir frequently discussed women as being seen as "l'autre" in comparison to men. Her arguments have been backed by biology to explain how women have been devalued and dominance has been fostered through continuous social rules that have evolved with time to live on. Annie Erneaux wrote *L'événement* to recount her abortion journey alongside her current self to share the struggles she experienced at the hands of others. Finally, Gisèle Halimi wrote *La Cause des Femmes* to write about feminism, why it is important, and why it has been so hard to

achieve. All authors provide modernized versions of how women have been dominated in society and how limited value has been placed on their being. These personal, bold fights against social norms allow for toxic masculinity to be identified and argued against in the hope that change can occur.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Introduction

French literature can share and connect with people from various generations, cultures, and backgrounds. This paper was able to explore how literature can provide an outlet for expression to share different stories and lessons. As these stories have lived on through different storytelling techniques, the traits of toxic masculinity can live in the nooks and crannies of the words and stories the authors put from pen to paper. Texts from the medieval period until today have acted as pieces of evidence, demonstrating the ways in which toxic masculinity has prominently played a role in French literature. After analyzing toxic masculinity through various time periods, it can be seen how it has not broken its bond with human society. Toxic masculinity can be defined and viewed in many ways, but Kupers' definition allows readers to see how four traits can be applied to literature in ways that can be easily analyzed. Toxic masculinity has no limits or bounds and can be expressed in many ways, shapes, and forms, although it is defined but not limited to four distinct aspects. Toxic masculinity maintains dominance, devalues women, homophobia, and wanton violence. While exploring the diverse ways that toxic masculinity has incorporated itself into the fabric of people's day-to-day lives, it has lived on like a relentless leech that refuses to die. Is this disease, leech, phenomenon, whatever it might be to each person a forever fragment or is it destroyable?

Further research

There are no limits and bounds to the analysis that can be performed to explore how assets like toxic masculinity can be seen in French literature. There is a limitless list of authors and forms of literature that can be explored through periods explored here. As certain periods have not been able to be discussed above it shows that there is plenty of room for exploration and analysis to continue. Further research allows extended exploration of minuscule details and many different sources for comparison. By providing further time for research and evaluation, whether as an addition to this work or outside of it, toxic masculinity can be proven to be ever present in French literature.

Medieval

This paper explored how toxic masculinity was shown in a couple of Marie de France's *Lais*. As Marie de France is a very prominent figure in medieval society and literature, many others have been able to provide extensive insight into how this time was. Further research would allow for many different assets of this time to be explored. Maintaining exploration through Marie de France would allow for further analysis of other *Lais* as well as other books that have been written by Marie de France. As there are many other authors, it would be interesting to explore how other authors wrote during this period and how Kupers' toxic masculinity has incorporated itself into their literature as well. Finally, as courtly love is a prominent storytelling form during this time, researching how others outside of literature on courtly love had written about toxic masculinity would be a powerful addition to expanding the argument that toxic masculinity lives in French medieval literature.

17/18th Centuries

This section of French literature cross-references two men in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although that is just two simple examples from two large periods. Continued examination of other pieces of literature during both periods would allow more characters to be added to the comparison mixture. Each of these periods was only referenced with a singular piece of French literature, scripts from plays from each period. Additional sources of literature from each period would confirm, like the medieval era, how toxic masculinity can be referenced in 17th and 18th-century literature. Further research would also allow for other forms of literature to be explored. As only play works were analyzed here, it does allow for literary diversity to be explored. Analyzing literature in similar assets to the other periods that were dissected would also provide female-based toxic masculinity to be investigated similarly to the medieval and 20th-century French literature chapters of this paper.

20th/21st Centuries

The 20th and 21st centuries allowed for more modern literature to be researched and biographical and opinion pieces add to the conversation of change and equality to be achieved. These pieces of literature added great backing to the argument that toxic masculinity has lived on through assets such as French literature. Continued research into this time would break down how literature outside of the biographical realm has had toxic masculinity written into its stories. Exploring how modern male writers have written their own experiences with toxic masculinity would be vital as well because everyone should be included in the topic of conversation. Just as it was discovered how women can exemplify toxic masculinity, the reverse can be explored as well. As it was seen in French literature in the medieval, 17th, and 18th centuries men suffered

from toxic masculinity at the hands of other males, there are certainly further accounts of similar situations in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Research Conclusion

There is no limit or ending that can be seen for the ability to evaluate and explore how Kupers' toxic masculinity is written into French literature that was not evaluated above. Continued research would allow a deeper dive into the periods previously explored. Other branches of French literature could be referenced and referred to strengthen the argument that toxic masculinity is present within the provided periods. The periods not referenced could also be studied. It can be assumed that toxic masculinity did not jump and select various periods in its feature of French literature. It has been shown that toxic masculinity has been involved in various forms of French literature, so it can be concluded that the periods not referenced would also have an entanglement with French literature. Continued research would be nothing but beneficial to the argument made here, solidifying the evidence given.

Fixing the problem

After analyzing the vast amount of literature presented above, one might find themselves asking an important question, "How can this problem be solved?". The seriousness of the situation and the question have been around for a long time and have been asked by many people, even those not realizing this was the kind of topic they were questioning. Toxic masculinity is dangerous, harmful, and damaging to everyone involved and the mentality and lives of future generations. If toxic masculinity does not change similar effects and problems will continue to carry on into the future. As people should find traits they are proud of and are associated with, they should not come at the expense of others. Men can be proud of their

masculinity, although those who utilize their masculinity to hurt and degrade others promote their personal regression. Starting to have conversations around the difference between masculinity and toxic masculinity would help create a distinct divide between the two. Masculinity does not need to be toxic, instead, it should be an asset to the person who embodies the characteristics that fall under its umbrella. If women embody more “masculine” traits then they should be able to do so without any question or criticism from others, and the same goes for men who embody their more “feminine” side. Conversations with others about the problems that come along with toxic masculinity and why it is a prominent issue are one of the first of many steps toward bringing about much-needed change.

In terms of literature, what writers have boldly done must continue. To fight toxic masculinity the conversation around the issue needs to stay relevant. If authors diligently write about the problem, their experiences, viable solutions, and more then there is a possibility of seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. The fight to break down this barrier is not over, and unfortunately, may never be over. There is no exact solution or answer to what people can do to rid themselves and this world of toxic masculinity entirely. It is possible that toxic masculinity could live on forever, although there is hope that it could diminish to lower levels so future generations do not have to suffer as past and current generations have. By binding it together, it will be much harder for toxic masculinity to continue to live on as it has effortlessly done so up to today. In French literature, as well as literature all over the world, toxic masculinity has sat comfortably between the stories and chapters. French authors have tirelessly worked to share their stories and their views on this topic to reach audiences all over the globe. There is no limit to what can be discussed and learned through literature. Books allow people who cannot easily jump on a plane to meet someone in another world or at another time to travel there and walk

hand-in-hand with those telling the story. The lessons and changes in terms of toxic masculinity with the help of French literature are priceless, as long as at least one person accepts this truth and pushes forward towards a changed future.

Toxic masculinity in other facets

Toxic masculinity, as one would understand, is not limited to literature. Literature is just an outlet for those to be able to express themselves while others might choose other ways. As literature is known as a great and fundamental tool in a culture toolbox, it is not complete without all the additional pieces. Since culture is not solely based on one major asset, in this case, literature, there are a multitude of other branches to be examined under a microscope in a similar sense to how French literature was explored here. Cultural facets provide differing views and can reach various groups of people. In terms of sharing how issues such as toxic masculinity have affected the current modern world through time, other forms should be considered. These allow multiple forms of expression and analysis to occur.

A unique way people have expressed how they have been affected by toxic masculinity is through dance. Hervé Koubi, a French-Algerian choreographer, has explained how he has broken down toxic masculinity and gender clichés in his preferred form of expression. He has been given the chance to travel the world with a small company of dancers showing a play called “Boys Don’t Cry”. The play is described as

“«Boys don’t cry» (Les garçons ne pleurent pas), inspiré d’une chanson des années 1980 du groupe « The Cure », groupe de rock britannique, illustre parfaitement ce regard porté par les générations précédentes qui considéraient, à tort, qu’un garçon ne doit pas pleurer.

Il s'agit de ce trait typiquement masculin qui consiste à cacher ses émotions et garder ses sentiments pour soi" ("Spectacle Chorégraphique Époustouflant De Hervé Koubi").

Christopher K. Morgan, who is an artistic director in the United States, helped Hervé Koubi with his and his company's U.S. debut in 2013. Morgan expressed his opinion about Koubi's take on "Boys don't cry" stating in an interview, "These dancers are sharing their own deep experiences about toxic masculinity, that view that dancing is not a masculine endeavor...and yet here they are in this position of power, touring the world with their art form" (Kaufman). As has been stated before, literature is not the only course of action for the cure, it is an outlet for those who endure toxic masculinity. Forms of art such as dance allow people to express themselves and the pain they have experienced from toxic masculinity through physical expression. The connection and expression allow for the conversation to be had about the issues of toxic masculinity in various forms and outlets. Kupers' toxic masculinity applies to four different key traits, which Koubi and other dancers are trying to fight against. As previously discussed, enforced gender traits such as hiding emotions and not crying if you are a man enforces toxic masculinity. When men can use forms of expression like dance to combat gender stereotypes helps fight the problem. This does not allow other people to hold the positions of power that so many so desperately attempt to maintain. Instead of people being able to use their bodies and minds to put pen to paper and let the words flow, people such as Hervé Koubi are using their bodies to express written emotions more physically.

Modern forms of cultural communication about toxic masculinity are expressed through cinema very regularly now. As modern society has started to grapple with the idea that change needs to occur, a quick and effortless way to get the message across to broader audiences is through cinema. Movies are a straightforward way to connect with people all over the world due

to immediate accessibility to modern technology. In the most recent form movies like Barbie have presented issues with masculinity and its toxicity like what was explored here. One news article stated, “It is not so much that there is a crisis of masculinity as it is that masculinity is itself a crisis” (Noman). The “crisis” being masculinity itself is a huge statement. Movies such as this one, similar to the forms of French literature explored above, are helping make the distinction that was previously discussed in the introduction. As was previously stated, there is not a clear distinction between masculinity and toxic masculinity. This movie flips the cultural script on gender roles, stating issues that have been identified previously about how society has allowed the problems to stay steady. Movies such as this one help provide a whole new generation with the issue of regressive masculinity and toxic masculinity in a light and uncomplicated way. Movies such as this one take tangible products such as a common doll like Barbie and provide real-life issues in a different light.

As there are plenty of other cultural facets to explore, it can be predicted that toxic masculinity has been shown in many other ways. When viewing diverse cultural platforms various viewpoints and perspectives can be evaluated. Dance is a way to express feelings, such as pain, physically. Hervé Koubi had shown his experiences with toxic masculinity alongside other dancers. Movies such as the 2023 Barbie movie have shown directly into the eyes of the viewers how masculinity and toxic masculinity have sat comfortably in many societies. These alternative forms allow people who understand topics differently a wide range of possibilities for proper comprehension. As these varying cultural outlets have made great strides, like French literature, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Movies and dance show how important it is to discuss issues like toxic masculinity to help move towards a better future.

Conclusion

The end of toxic masculinity does not come from an analysis of pieces of French literature from various authors seeking change. The change has started and will continue as people continue to bind themselves together to help strengthen the push for change. It is not an overnight fix; it is a treacherous path with plenty of obstacles in the way. One must ensure even when the fight gets hard and it might be easier to let the quicksand take one back into toxic masculinity, there is always a way out.

French literature has been explored and will continue to be concerning issues such as toxic masculinity. Kupers' toxic masculinity and its four traits, fostering dominance, devaluation of women, wanton violence, and homophobia, have all been discovered in various forms of French literature from the medieval era and on. It is seen in all the French literature reviewed here that people have had ideology like, "La femme était vue par rapport à l'homme, comme impuissance, incomplétude, et l'imperfection (Gargam and Lançon 80). Continued work will hopefully see that people, women or not, will not have to feel or be seen in that way anymore. This work will remain hard and fought against by plenty of people, although as many strong people have previously done, the drive needs to be continued. While toxic masculinity is certainly not something that can be tackled overnight, recognition and responsibility will bring humankind closer to a refreshing and unified way of being. Toxic masculinity could remain forever, but the wish is that there will no longer be the mentality that, "The most mediocre of males feels himself a demigod as compared with women" (de Beauvoir, 104).

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