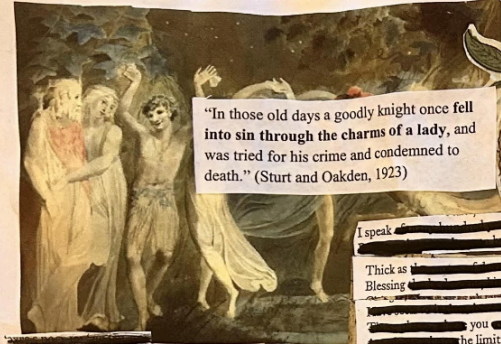
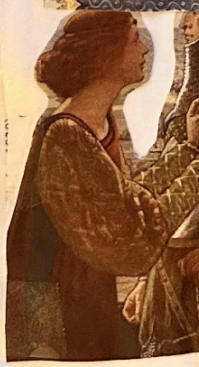


"It happened that in the court of King Arthur dwelt a handsome and vigorous young 'bachelor' knight, who, on his return one day from a hawk[ing] party of water-fowl, saw before him a young maiden, whom in a transport of wilfulness and brutality he ill-treated. The unmanliness and violence of the deed raised such a clamour, and so keen a pursuit of the offender, that he was seized, tried, and condemned to lose his head."

"It happened that there was at King Arthur's Court a young knight, in the full vigor and pride of his strength, who one day, as he was riding out, came upon a maiden walking all alone. She was very beautiful, and the sight of her made him forget his knight-hood. He went up to her, and tried to carry her off with him by force. But before he could succeed help came, and he was seized and taken before the King." (Darton, 1904)

"But back in the days of good King Arthur, that I am telling you about, it so befell upon a day that a brave knight of the court came riding along by a river. He was in sore trouble, for he was in disgrace and banishment. He had sinned grievously against the days of chivalry of the Round Table, and King Arthur had condemned him to die." (McSpadden, 1907)



"In those old days a goodly knight once fell into sin through the charms of a lady, and was tried for his crime and condemned to death." (Sturt and Oakden, 1923)



I speak no more,  
Thick as Blessing  
you the limiter  
a bold knight-bachelor  
Condemned to death,  
mercy  
gave him life.

No living creature  
a woman  
What thing is that women most desire,  
said  
require  
you have my promise,  
The knight  
lie

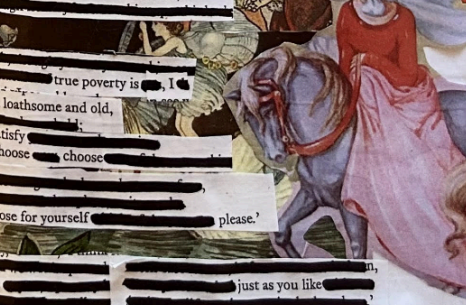
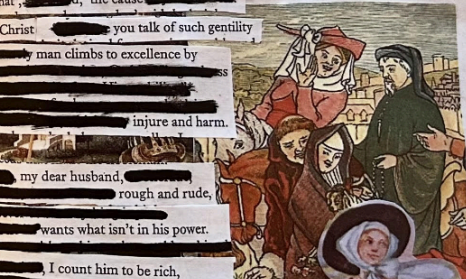
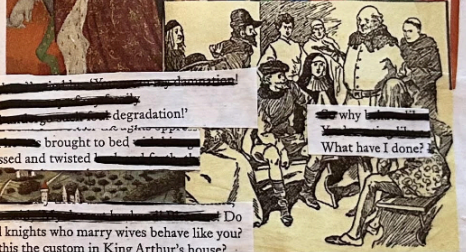
replied  
let my body go.



Do  
All knights who marry wives behave like you?  
Is this the custom in King Arthur's house?  
'Is that', 'the cause of  
Christ  
you talk of such gentility  
man climbs to excellence by  
injure and harm.  
my dear husband,  
rough and rude,  
wants what isn't in his power.  
I count him to be rich,

true poverty is  
I'm loathsome and old,  
I'll satisfy  
'Choose choose  
Choose for yourself please.'

I'll be both just as you like



"Well, it so happened that this King Arthur had among his knights a jolly young fellow, who, as he came riding one day from hawking, found a maiden he found walking alone. For which he was condemned to lose his head." (Farleton, 1930)

"It so happened that King Arthur had in his court a young man who one day was riding by a river. He saw a maiden walking all alone. In spite of all she could do, he forced himself upon her. This oppression stirred up a lot of offence." (Barbara Cohen, Century Tales, 1988).

The lady blushed. How pretty the water glistens in the brook. 'Almost as sweet to taste as a kiss of your lips,' said the knight, and he helped himself to a kiss. [...] So the over-zealous knight was summoned. (McCaughrean, 1984)



## Explanation

I was drawn to Chaucer's Wife of Bath from *The Canterbury Tales* for my encounter because she's such an intriguing, complicated figure – someone who commands attention and respect with her voice and experience, yet exists in a society that undeniably silences and oppresses women. To me, Alisoun, as she is revealed to be named, is by far the most interesting of Chaucer's pilgrims. The element that I find the most compelling, however, is her eponymous contribution to Chaucer's canon, where a knight – explicitly defined as a rapist – gets not just ultimate redemption but an ultimate reward: a beautiful *and* young *and* loyal wife.

This dissonance stuck with me, and I couldn't stop wondering what Chaucer intended by this: whether he was critiquing or reinforcing medieval norms of chivalry, respect, and female autonomy. My encounter, therefore, is a paper collage that aims to visually wrestle with this tension to explore the knight's crime, (a) woman's perspective, and how history has interpreted both.

Unlike Chaucer's narrative poem, my collage is a visual patchwork. I've pulled in historical depictions of the Wife of Bath from art and literature across history, alongside images of medieval women: queens, peasants, fairies, and Celtic figures. On top, I've pasted a blackout poem I created from the text of the Wife of Bath's tale using black marker and scissors. All of these elements aim to give a voice to the unnamed woman, who as described by Alisoun, saves the knight by informing him of a woman's true desire: to have dominion over her husband. After finishing the Wife's tale, I still had questions for her. How did she feel about the knight's initial rejection of her body? What did she think about her husband's crime? Did she hold anger? Or resentment, jealousy, or judgment?

I've also included shattered excerpts from numerous historical adaptations or rewritings of the Wife of Bath's tale – all that dodge the word "rape." Some of the included quotes sanitise the knight's actions, others go so far as to blame the maiden herself for "charming" him. I annotated the quotes as I saw fit, aiming to bring a little life to the passages.

Using tangible paper and images, I'm aiming to layer history, myth and critique. The blackout poem works to focus and center the knight's rape: you can't ignore the act when it's a visual center of the piece – in the same way that the rape of the maiden is the inciting incident for Alisoun's narrative.

My intention was to reckon with the knight's fate after the conclusion of the tale. Chaucer gives him a happy ending: I want the viewer to ask, is that justice? What happened to the inciting maiden, or the woman he eventually takes as his wife, who promises to be both "beautiful as well as good"? I don't have an answer, but I ultimately want this piece to encapsulate the historical and current truth of men reaping prizes whilst women (real or mythic) bear the burden.