

# PRIDE AS WOMEN: THE GENDERED REPRESENTATION OF THE SIN OF PRIDE IN THE MEDIEVAL ART AND LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

While much has been written on the personification of the deadly sins in both art and literature, few studies have explored the gendering of sins, especially pride. This paper will investigate the gendering of the sins during the Middle Ages (from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century), focusing on the representation of pride in medieval literature and art. It will discuss the depictions of the sin of pride in three medieval literary texts: the twelfth-century French treatise *De arte honeste amandi* (The Art of Courtly Love), a thirteenth-century Middle English prose *Ancrene Wisse* (Rule for Anchoresses), and a fourteenth-century medieval poem *Piers Plowman*. Meanwhile, visual analysis of medieval artworks will provide further social context and insight in order to consider patriarchal domination and societal stereotyping of women at that time.

As Helen Cooper (1991) argued, gender became increasingly relevant to allegorical personification in the Middle Ages. Building on previous scholarly contributions, this study explores both positive and negative aspects of female-gendered personifications of pride in literary texts and visual images of the period. It highlights and explains the distinctive ways in which certain medieval writers and artists drew on and revealed contemporary assumptions about women's moral characteristics in their personifications of the sin of pride as feminine.

## INTRODUCTION

Pride is a complicated concept which can be positive or negative; an emotion or an attitude. As the famous ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (1989) observed in *Nicomachean Ethics*, proper pride can be seen as 'the crown of virtues' (p. 1124a) that presents the greatness of soul and magnanimity. In Biblical texts, pride only becomes sinful when it turns into an excessive preoccupation with oneself, leading to delusion and potentially sinful acts. The *Book of Proverbs* (XVI:XXVIII) claims that the cause of Satan's fall was selfish ambition derived from his excessive pride and belief in his superiority over God. Here, pride is viewed as a sin, arising from the presumptuous belief that one possesses the excellence and glory that belong only to God (Dell, 2009). While the prideful Satan is generally codified as masculine, this article argues that, particularly in Europe during the Middle Ages, the sin of pride was also often conceived as feminine.

Depictions of pride abound in medieval art, especially in the popular medium of decorative miniatures (small drawings) in theological illuminated manuscripts. For example, the medieval manuscript *De Lisle Psalter* (c. 1308-1340) contains an image of the Tree of Vices (fol. 128v), which shows the sin of pride growing from the original sin of Adam and Eve (Fig. 1). Pride (superbia) is written at the tree's base, which represents the sin of pride as the root of all vices. This illustration suggests that the sin of pride bred other vices, nourishing them to grow into the different fruits hanging on the tree's branches. A coiled serpent is also seen winding its way up the tree to catch the apple, encouraging Adam and Eve to eat the only thing in the Garden of Eden that God had forbidden them to consume. Similarly, in *The Parson's Tale* (1392), the famous medieval poet Geoffrey Chaucer describes the sin of pride as 'the general roote of alle harmes', from which 'branches' such as envy and sloth emerge.

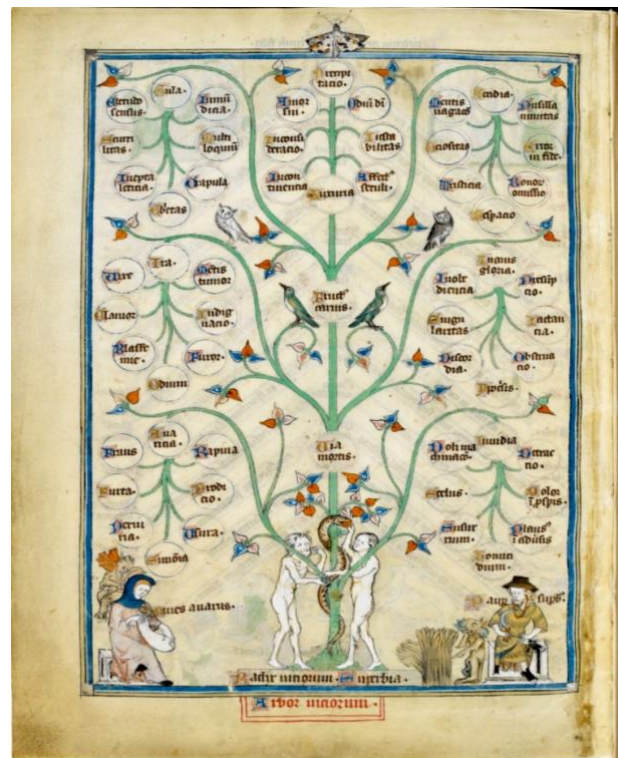


Figure 1: Tree of Vices, *De Lisle Psalter*, c.1308-1340. Arundel MS 83, fol. 128v, The British Library.

These descriptions are the basis of the formal medieval paradigm of pride, both St. Gregory the Great (the first Pope from 590 to 604) and the influential Italian theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) regard pride as the overarching ruler of the seven deadly sins (Tucker, 2015). As Shawn Tucker

(2015) further explains, this is a Christian grouping of vices which, along with pride, consists of envy, anger, sloth, gluttony, greed, and lust. As the sin of pride was usually associated with Satan and coded as male in this period, scholars have made little effort to examine representations of female pride in medieval literature and art. This article will explore how the sin of pride is personified in particular medieval texts and images, rather than treated as a conceptual vice used primarily for vigilance or introspection.

As the art historian Adolf Katzenellenbogen (1964) explains, the major aim of portraying vices in medieval literature and art was to convince people to avoid the sins depicted. This didacticism can be observed in depictions of pride and the female figures therein. The Latin word ‘superbia’, meaning pride, also conveyed the idea of feminine haughtiness or arrogance. For example, in the tabletop painting *The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things* (c.1500), attributed to the late medieval painter Hieronymus Bosch, the sin of pride is depicted as a woman (Fig. 2) who adjusts her hat in front of a convex mirror in a fine interior space. Bosch emphasises the dangers of pride, which prevents a woman from pursuing inner purity and spiritual cleanness in the earthly realm (Luttikhuisen, 2012). Notably, the woman’s mirror is held up by a wolflike demon which looks absurd wearing a similar headdress. The depiction of individuals holding or looking into mirrors was widely used in medieval art to portray the sin of pride.



**Figure 2: Detail of *The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things*, attributed to Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1500)**

This article firstly discusses the personification of pride as female animals and sirens, exploring how the image of a feminine figure criticised women’s moral characteristics. Next, this study investigates the gendered portrayal of the sin of pride as human beings. This section focuses in particular on the iconic portrayal of women, gazing into mirrors, obsessed with their grooming, and considers this iconography within the broader cultural context of medieval society. Finally, as a development

of the topic, this article examines an engraving, attributed to Pieter van der Heyden in the Renaissance era (from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the 17<sup>th</sup> century), who portrays the sin of pride as a powerful aristocratic woman. Examining pride’s feminine depiction through animal, human, and aristocratic models sheds new light on medieval society’s conception of sin and gender.

### PRIDE AS FEMALE ANIMALS

During the Middle Ages, books and manuscripts were precious objects. Europe did not have a printing press until 1440; prior to this, texts had to be written out and copied by hand. Texts were primarily written in Latin which was mostly only read by those of higher social strata, such as nobles and members of the clergy in the early medieval era. These individuals’ status also provided them with the wealth and means to acquire the manuscript volumes, which took a long time to produce and could be richly decorated, making them very expensive. For secular nobles, an education and good literacy could be a useful tool in gaining public power and religious prestige. It can therefore be suggested that the audience for the sources on pride in this paper consisted mostly of elite and religious persons.

Some women chose to become anchoresses (also known as recluses), devoting their lives to prayer and contemplation during the Middle Ages. These women lived walled into small cells attached to churches, withdrawing themselves from secular affairs and earthly concerns. As the famous writer and literary scholar J. R. R. Tolkien (1929) pointed out, the composition of *Ancrene Wisse* (Rule for Anchoresses) suggests that certain locales and social circumstances (such as those of the female recluse) provided more opportunities for women’s education in the Middle Ages.

Many texts offered advice for female recluses from a position of spiritual authority, which aimed to impart ‘moral wisdom’ (Gabriel, 1955). Pride is feminised in animalistic representations in medieval texts for the purpose of educating certain female members of society in ‘moral wisdom’. For example, the early thirteenth-century Middle English (English language from around 1150 to 1450) prose text *Ancrene Wisse* provides religious and spiritual guidance for female recluses in England. Part 4 of *Ancrene Wisse* is devoted to analysis of the Seven Deadly Sins and their relevance to daily life for female recluses. The work includes important animal depictions of the sin of pride. The anonymous writer gives female forms to most of the whelps (also known as cubs) of the Lion of Pride. The whelp, Vainglory, shows excessive pride in her attributes, such as her beauty:

*Vainglory: that is if anyone is proud of anything that she does or says or has – beauty or talent, good connections or a better reputation than someone else, family or status, and more of her own way. (p. 75, translated by Millett, 2009)*

The representation of Vainglory here serves as a cautionary parable intended to educate female recluses about the nature of pride. It describes Vainglory’s eternal pursuit of beauty as harmful in earthly life; she is pleased if her appearance is praised by others and displeased if she is not valued as highly



as she would like. This depiction of Vainglory denotes how, in the author of the *Ancrene Wisse*'s view, a prideful woman's excessive concern with appearance gives the views and comments of others a significant influence over her emotional state.

The depiction of Vainglory's personality in *Ancrene Wisse* leads us to consider the function of such gendered depictions of pride as female animals, which were intended to provide moral education not only to anchoresses but also to a wider audience of literate medieval women. As Elizabeth Robertson (1990) argued, *Ancrene Wisse* shows that the potential of the women for whom the author wrote was defined and circumscribed by their femininity. To be specific, medieval women were primarily wives and mothers, while some gave their lives to God as nuns and anchoresses. In contemporary medieval thought, vanity and excessive preoccupation with one's beauty led to pride, and could distract women from their responsibilities in their homes and their devotion to God.

In another animal-linked description, in Part 4 of *Ancrene Wisse*, beauty is described as worthless as 'a gold ring in a sow's snout' (Millett, 2009, p. 75). Here, the author quotes from the *Book of Proverbs* (XI:XII), which criticises a beautiful but foolish woman who focuses solely on her appearance and clothes, which are merely illusory charms. Thus, the *Ancrene Wisse* author is aiming to instruct its female readers, telling them which behaviours are morally good or bad. In the case of this section of the *Ancrene Wisse*, it can be suggested that vanity is a representation of women's excessive pride, and the author sought to show its harmfulness and uselessness to their female readers.



**Figure 3: Personification of Pride, Book of Hours, ca. 1475. Illuminated by Robinet Testard, MS M. 1001, fol. 84r, The Morgan Library & Museum.**

As in *Ancrene Wisse*, the lion became a symbol of the sin of pride in medieval art, often specifically representing female or feminine vanity. In a fifteenth-century French Book of Hours (a devotional illuminated manuscript for Christian audience during the Middle Ages), a clean-shaven, richly clad youth is shown mounted on a lion. His long, wavy hair is held in place by a circlet (Fig. 3). Interestingly, the details of this figure lend a decidedly feminine touch. The youth holds a mirror in his left

hand, in which his reflection is clearly visible, recalling depictions of prideful women in other medieval images. The art historian Carmen Brown (1999) argues that the androgynous quality of the face may have been deliberately rendered by the artist to suggest that the sin of pride was not limited to women, or perhaps to imply that pride caused a loss of virility in men thus making them more like women. Meanwhile, the androgenous depiction of the figure's appearance might also allude to a contaminating aspect of prideful women, who would seduce men and use their beauty to weaken their wills by their beauty. Moreover, as Brown (1999) further explained, the androgynous form of the person in Figure 3 may suggest that a female figure is riding on a male lion, illustrating women's lust for social power and wealth, through which they could gain acceptance in medieval European society. Nevertheless, when the figure is interpreted as female, the lion, like the other animal depictions of women discussed in this section, remains a critique of their pridefulness.

### PRIDE AS MONSTROUS WOMEN

Medieval artists also depicted female figures of Greek mythology, including human-animal hybrids, with recognizably prideful and lustful qualities. The sirens, for example, were beautiful yet dangerous female creatures which medieval artists widely personified as the sin of pride (superbia) and lust (luxuria).

In terms of classical art, the sirens are hybrid monsters, part human women and part bird, who are dangerous to men (Fig. 4). The vase (480-470BC) pictured below was made in Attica, a historical region of ancient Greece, and depicts the story of the Greek epic poem the *Odyssey*. The vase portrays the ship of Odysseus, on each side of the scene a rocky promontory projects over the sea, with a siren standing on the top. These sirens are represented as birds with women's heads, their hair looped up with a dotted stephane (a circular headband, often made of precious metal, and worn by royalty or nobility), and their lips are parted as though singing. In Homer's *Odyssey*, the sirens are enchantresses with sweet melodic voices that seduce sailors from afar, luring them to their doom by singing charming songs and enticing them into a deep sleep.



**Figure 4: The Siren Vase, c. 480-470BC, Attica, Greece, The British Museum.**

Medieval renderings of sirens are a continuation of the classical tradition. Interestingly, medieval sirens are presented as hybrid bird monsters and as creatures that are half-woman, half-fish. The inspiration possibly originates with a Christian theological perspective peculiar to medieval society wherein it was deemed necessary to preach against the vices regarded as morally negative human qualities (Katzenellenbogen, 1939). To be specific, in the *Odyssey* the sirens are threats to Odysseus but not fundamentally evil; but in Christian theology, the ambiguity was destroyed: Odysseus's encounter with the sirens is parallel to a battle of good versus evil, which represents the virtue versus vice binary.

Sirens appeared in many medieval bestiaries: collections of stories, images, and textual descriptions of animals' natures and their symbolic meanings in arts. Bestiaries contained both real and fictional creatures and each beast comprised a means for Christian teaching. Medieval artists borrowed the classical reference to sirens in order to depict the sin of pride in relation to Christian morality. For example, the first stylistic sirens to appear in medieval bestiaries were portrayed as hybrid bird-women (Fig. 5) playing with their long lustrous hair and gazing into mirrors. According to Beryl Rowland (1989), the portrayal of a woman who gazed into a mirror in medieval art probably originated with the medieval bestiaries' depictions of prideful sirens. The image of a woman holding a mirror echoes the concept of vanity, which is both in keeping with the bestiary tradition of the siren and associated with the motif of pride and lust. Thus, the intense gaze of woman who is admiring herself is akin to the siren, as depicted in the bestiary.



**Figure 5: A Siren and a Centaur, Bestiary, about 1270, Ms. Ludwig XV 3, fol. 78, The J. Paul Getty Museum.**

The illuminator, an artist who added illustrations and decorative elements to medieval manuscripts, who produced the Ashmole Bestiary (England, c.1200) depicted the siren with a fishlike tail extending into the surrounding frame (Fig. 6). This is the second stylistic form of sirens, half-woman and half-fish, which acted as an iconographical hint of female prostitution in medieval art. For example, the siren in Figure 6 is visually identified with sexual desire through her graphical nudity, which the art historian Debra Hassig (1995) argued can be seen as a sign of medieval women's sexual availability and their inferiority in social position. To be specific, sirens were identified as aquatic harlots in medieval bestiaries. They represented prostitutes (the real-life female sex workers) that were known as *meretrix* (meaning 'she who earns') in medieval canon law (Bullough, 1982). Notably, these sex workers not only plied their trade in towns but also were patronised by religious organisations and accompanied men on crusades. In other words, the medieval portrayal of the siren is associated with the female prostitutes in contemporary society. Prostitutes formed part of community life but were also condemned as immoral by religious thinkers and society. They were seen as deviating sinfully, driven by pride, vanity, and desire for wealth and power, from the idealised roles of women as wives, mothers and members of religious institutions. Hence, the personification of sin of pride as a monstrous female creature, whose naked torso reveals an erotically charged female nudity, provides visual signals in order to dissuade readers from undesirable sexual relationships, differentiating prostitutes from the 'respectable' women.





**Figure 6: The Siren, Ashmole Bestiary, Made in England, c. 1200. MS Ashmole 1511, fol. 18, Oxford Bodleian Library.**

The shape and detail of the object in the siren's hand in Figure 6 are redolent of a comb. However, the fact that she is gazing into it betrays the fact that it is a mirror. Both the comb and mirror were symbols of women's excessive vanity, which is an attribute to the theme of pride. Thus, viewers can observe a female figure's excessive pride through the siren's gesture and expression. That is to say, the personification of pride as a female creature dwells in the portrayal of sirens. Moreover, in Figure 6, the siren's face, hair, and overall posture suggest a life of relative ease and luxury, which echo the theme of pride, both being closely related to female vanity. No real distinction is drawn between pride (*superbia*) and lust (*luxuria*) by either the author or illustrator since these vices are both characterised using female monstrosities and linked to the seductiveness of the female.

The images of seductive monstrous women as the incarnation of the sin of pride, may reflect a misogynist view of women in medieval society. The miniatures of this fantastic hybrid creature appear to be visual instruments with which to instil morality into men and alert both men and women to the dangers of vanity and sexual pleasure. However, while the sirens might be shown to be morally inferior, they are not physically and intellectually inferior because of their great power and fatal charms.

#### PRIDE AS GUILTY WOMEN

From the images discussed above, we may observe that pride was often visually connected with women's excessive concern with their appearance. The influential scholar of medieval literature D. W. Robertson (1953) argues that a preoccupation with false sensual beauty dominated in medieval society which originated with the male *libido* (sexual desire), this consequently motivated women to pursue fallacious concepts of beauty in order to attract a mate. This obsession with beauty predisposed both men and women to morally degenerate behaviour, as exemplified by the devotion of excessive amounts of time to personal grooming and external appearances. Therefore, the personification of pride in medieval religious

texts and artworks might evoke guilt or shame and prompt guilty parties to confess their sins in the church.

In accordance with prevailing visual depictions of the sin of pride, Andreas Capellanus's twelfth-century moral treatise *De arte honeste amandi* (The Art of Courtly Love) comments on women's cult of beauty, which was influenced by Ovid's conception of courtly love in *Fasti* (Parry, 1960):

*'Every woman, not only a young one but even the old and decrepit, strives with all her might to exalt her own beauty; this can come only from pride... and pride follows beauty'* (Parry, 1960, p. 206).

This description calls to mind the passage from *Ancrene Wisse* discussed earlier in this paper (See discussion in 'Pride as female animals'), in that both depictions suggest that pride is the driving force behind the feminine pursuit of beauty.

The portrayal of the seven deadly sins as guilt-ridden human beings ready to confess their faults to God was an attempt by early medieval writers to exert influence over the moral condition of the populace (Salter and Pearsall, 1969). Moreover, this strategy tended to place the deadly sin of female pride in a prominent place. For example, the fourteenth-century poet William Langland personified the sin of pride as a woman called Peronelle Proude-Herte (Parnel Proud-Heart in modern English) in Passus V of his poem *Piers Plowman* (Robertson and Shepherd, 2006, p. 67). First, Peronelle confessed her sin of pride, after which she unsewed her clothes and adopted a haircloth to vanquish her sinful flesh. The actions of Peronelle recall the female inclination for excessive ornate clothing, which Peronelle had avowedly renounced when she confessed in front of the Lord:

*High heart shall never overcome  
me but I'll hold myself low*

*And suffer myself to be  
slandered – and I never did so  
before.*

*But now I'll make myself meek  
and beg for mercy*

*From all of whom I've had envy  
in my heart. (Robertson and  
Shepherd, 2006, p. 67)*

This quote indicates Peronelle's desire to make penance for her sin (pride), whereby Langland appears to emphasize the role of gender at a literal level through the representation of each sin. However, Kirk (2003) has postulated that Langland openly appreciates the ubiquitous economic contribution of women via the gendered distillation of each sin, as exemplified in their roles as cloth makers, brewers, and tavern keepers. Thus, in this sense, Langland offers a realistic representation of the role of women in medieval production and commerce. However, he

seems to warn that there is a distinction between dressing to reflect care for their work and, possibly, to promote their cloth- and clothes-making skills versus dressing excessively because of pride and vain obsession with appearance.

Indeed, medieval women from lower social groups were often assigned the tasks of making clothing for the needy, sewing harvest sacks, and manufacturing cloth. Conversely, women of greater means were able to use their affluence to support the arts or make religious donations and to invest in elaborate clothing. This paper now examines how images of aristocratic women were used by medieval artists to portray the concept of sinful pride, thereby simultaneously indicating the growing tendency for females to occupy more influential positions in the public life of medieval society.

### PRIDE AS ARISTOCRATIC WOMEN

In addition to their depictions of animals, hybrids, human prostitutes and women of lower social strata, medieval artists also used aristocratic women as figures of Pride. For example, the gendered artistic representation of the sin of pride in a medieval miniature (Fig. 7) is illustrated on folio 165 of the fourteenth-century French manuscript, held in the British Library (Yates Thompson 21, c. 1380). This miniature shows figures of the Seven Deadly Sins outside a walled Garden of Pleasures; and the artist particularly personifies the sin of Pride as a woman who holds a mirror to comb her hair. It is worth noting the details of the sin of Pride's gown, which reveal the woman's passions in dressing herself in fine clothing.

According to the historians Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (1988), aristocratic women were equated with the provision of charitable education and effective household regulation, in addition to their roles in establishing the religious, moral, and social standards for extensive properties they inhabited. Therefore, they played a very significant role in society, which is connected to this sections' sources concern with their morality. Both the sins of pride and lust are depicted as a richly dressed woman in medieval art, which identified a woman's clothing with her excessive demand for a high quality of life and suggested that her sins distracted her from her responsibilities.



**Figure 7: The Seven Deadly Sins, Jean de Meun's Testament, Yates Thompson 21 (c.1380), fol. 165, The British Library.**

In order to establish a stable manifestation of the connection between appearance and social status in the medieval period, the fabulous attire worn by higher status women prior to the emergence of the middle class was the distinct privilege of the nobility (Hunt, 1996). In Figure 7, the sin of pride is portrayed as a well-off woman whose outfit is distinct from the other female characters. She wears a horizontal-neck gown with a

nipped-in waist, which had flared sleeves and a special semicircle-shaped design of the upper outer garment. This portrayal of the sin of pride not only shows the woman's social rank in contemporary society, but also presents the development and blossoming of women's fashionable styling and clothing in the Middle Ages, especially among the aristocratic women.

In the *Dunois Book of Hours* (c. 1339-1450), an aristocratic woman is depicted seated on a large white goat, clutching two arrows in her right hand and a mirror in her left, into which she stares (fig. 8). She is clearly intended to represent lust as a female trait. The design and pattern of the woman's gown reveal her identity as an aristocratic woman. She wears a V-neck Burgundian gown which had evolved from its loose-fitting predecessor the *houppelande* (a front-closing outer garment with long *dagged* sleeves), which was only worn by aristocratic women in the late Middle Ages. The decorative style on her gown includes a prominent sun pattern that might have been embroidered in gold thread. In addition, the woman's headwear consists of a caul, which was widely worn by fashionable medieval noblewomen and facilitated the fashion for shaven foreheads and eyebrows (Calthrop, 1963). The fancy caul depicted in this image might have been made of brocade, fine satin, and velvet, which would further show her social rank and passionate pursuit of beauty. Both her attire and her mannerisms are imbued with the sin of lust and intended to convey the overconcern of the aristocratic woman for her appearance.



**Figure 8: Detail of a miniature of well-dressed woman, The Dunois Hours, c. 1339-1450. Yates Thompson MS 3, f. 172v, The British Library.**

With the advent of the monied merchant or middle class in the Middle Ages, it became feasible for more people to aspire to

fine attire, irrespective of whether they were a member of the court or nobility. This prospect resulted in the introduction of the Sumptuary Laws, a series of regulations designed to curb conspicuous consumption or display in areas such as clothing, food, and jewellery by members of the lower social orders. As noted by Alan Hunt (1996), the English Sumptuary Laws comprised legislative prohibitions on diet and attire in medieval society from 1363 onwards. For example, lower class women were prohibited from wearing veils costing over 23 pounds in today's money.

In other words, the nobility sought to legally prohibit the merchant class from emulating them in terms of appearance. The handbooks produced for preachers dating from this period are replete with references to excessive dress, echoing the ostensible rationale for the Sumptuary Laws, which was to restrict extravagance and promote moderation (Hunt, 1996). Thus, the emphasis on the negative pride-related nature of the concern for one's appearance was, in part at least, inspired by the disquiet arising from changing social conditions.

The elites used legislation to control dress and stop the lower classes from showing elite features in their attire, which played an essential role in bringing in the Sumptuary Laws. Furthermore, since the sin of pride is classified as women's passion for beauty, the restrictions in the Sumptuary Laws are an important context for the depictions of pride in medieval text and images. These visual images and literary texts seek to apply a specific moral standard to the behaviour of women via the personification of the sin of pride as female figures.

#### LATER DEVELOPMENTS

In terms of the image from the *Dunois Book of Hours* discussed above, the depiction of female power and the women's self-directed satisfaction convey a message that is automatically perceived as pertaining to a person's identity in society. To be specific, a woman's clothing demonstrates her economic strength and social status. Therefore, the iconographical presentation of the sin of pride placed a particular focus on depicting a woman's appearance because women's clothing became a showcase to convey a woman's personal identity, and even family background after the development of fashion and increasing interest from the middling social strata in the Middle Ages.

As literary scholar Patricia Parker (1987) noted, women in the Renaissance were associated with excess, corporeality and vanity, all of which are traits that were influenced by medieval literature and art including the examples discussed in this paper. However, in the Renaissance, the sin of pride was also often accompanied with the disguised symbol of loyalty to illustrate a woman's immense power. For example, in Figure 9 the Flemish painter Pieter van der Heyden presents a scene in which an elegant woman gazing in a hand mirror is shown surrounded by onlookers whilst a peacock extends its glorious tail next to her.



**Figure 9: Pieter van der Heyden, Pride (Superbia), from the series *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 1558, The Metropolitan Museum.**

Whereas a peacock's spread tail symbolised the vanity and lust of the medieval bestiary tradition, the association of pride with the peacock indicates the woman's confidence was delivered through her 'grace and the splendour of many virtues' (Hassig, 1991). On the one hand, a woman's pride is an outward manifestation of her virtues, abilities and achievements in a male-dominated society. On the other hand, the excessive emotions of pride may cause women to be overconfident only owing to their beauty or wealth, as well as obsessed with external validation, like the depiction of Vainglory in *Ancrene Wisse*. In Heyden's image, pride is depicted as a graceful woman that is a positive outcome of the exhilarated pleasure and a feeling of achievement acquired by women.

Moreover, Heyden's image along with other depictions, such as the powerful sirens discussed earlier in this paper, demonstrate that perceptions of women and their role in society were highly complex in medieval and Renaissance Europe. The importance of women's roles was recognised, and moral forms of pride were acceptable, while sinful pride was dissuaded because of its potentially terrible consequences for individual women's souls and European society, for whom they were mothers and moral guides.

#### CONCLUSION

The vivid images and literary texts depicting the sin of pride played an essential role in preaching and urging people to contemplate morality and the need to self-regulate in the medieval period. The personification of pride can be viewed as a series of moral lessons that visually connect the idea of this sin to theological texts. From the medieval art and literature that has been discussed above, the depictions of the sin of pride contain highly feminized details, such as mirrors, combs and aspects of luxury dress, all of which had come to symbolise the paramount importance for contemporary women of the sin of pride. Although different depictions of sin as female animals and female humans portrayed negative perceptions of pride and women in the Middle Ages, in some cases, these depictions also reflected feminine forms of power and the importance of an appropriate pride and confidence in women, which would help them to obtain the social acceptance even public power and authority. Therefore, the personification of the sin of pride as a

female in medieval literature and art offers different perspectives or prisms through which people can consider how they are impacted by pride, both historically and in the present. This indicates that it is imperative to carefully examine and understand nuances in manifestations of pride, encouraging readers and viewers to consider how some women in the past have negotiated gender biases and inequalities.

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