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# Women Objectification in The Last Duel (2021) Film by Ridley Scott

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Women's objectification in film remains a critical issue, especially in narratives set within patriarchal societies. Ridley Scott's *The Last Duel* (2021), which portrays a historical case of sexual violence, provides a compelling subject for examining how women's experiences are represented. **Objective:** This study aims to analyze how the character Marguerite is objectified in the film *The Last Duel*, using both verbal and visual elements. **Method:** This qualitative research applies Martha Nussbaum's theory of objectification and Blain Brown's cinematography framework to examine dialogues and scenes involving Marguerite. **Result:** The film presents Marguerite through three narrative viewpoints: Jean de Carrouges, Jacques Le Gris, and Marguerite herself. While this technique provides a multifaceted look at events, it underrepresents Marguerite's emotional depth and trauma as a sexual violence victim. Forms of objectification identified include instrumentality, denial of subjectivity, inertness, ownership, violability, and denial of autonomy. **Conclusion:** Marguerite's portrayal reflects the broader patriarchal values of 14th-century French society, where women's agency is suppressed, and their experiences are filtered through male perspectives. **Contribution:** This study contributes to feminist film criticism by highlighting the limitations of perspective-based storytelling in fully capturing women's subjectivity, especially in narratives involving sexual violence.

## KEYWORDS

Cinematography, Marguerite, Objectification, and The last duel

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the world of cinema, where the imagination of reality is transformed into a story and blurred with fantasy, there is a troubling trend that often slips under the radar: the objectification of women. Whether it is the golden age of Hollywood or the modern blockbuster era, women's roles are frequently diminished to mere accessories, lacking the depth and equality afforded to their male counterparts. Such films often portray women as figures confined to domestic environments where they lack a voice or empowerment over themselves. In fact, women should have autonomous freedom and rights such as choosing their lives, access to politics, and other legal rights (Zahara & Farlina, 2023, p. 64).

Ostrowska, in "*Reluctant Feminists, Powerless Patriarchs, and Estranged Spectators: Gender in Post-1989 Eastern European Cinema*", discusses how the surge of films portraying women as objects in the late 20th century raised public awareness about gender equality (Ostrowska, 2020). With the recent development of

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cinema, there has been an increase in films that finally embrace the theme of women's empowerment as a means to advocate for gender equality.. Examples include "*Barbie*" (2023) and "*Little Women*" (2019), directed by Greta Gerwig, as well as "*Enola Holmes*" (2020), directed by Harry Bradbeer. However, the growing prevalence of this theme in cinema does not automatically signal the end of the struggle for gender equality for women (Mixon, 2020).

In this context, a critical review of the representation of women on screen becomes crucial. People need to scrutinize deeper than just counting the number of films featuring the theme of women's empowerment and inquire: how are women depicted in these films? Are they portrayed as empowered protagonists, or are they still trapped in stereotypes and objectification? Therefore, while cinema serves as a platform to address gender equality issues, society must also maintain vigilance against the potential proliferation of inadequate or even harmful portrayals of women (Singh, 2021).

In this case, *The Last Duel*, a historical drama film set in medieval France and directed by Ridley Scott in 2021, exemplifies a similar phenomenon and warrants criticism for its portrayal of women. The film is based on a historically recognized event that transpired in France, chronicled in the novel "*The Last Duel: A True Story of Crime, Scandal, and Trial by Combat in Medieval France*" (2004) by Eric Jager. It centers around the story of Marguerite de Carrouges, the wife of a knight named Jean de Carrouges, who accuses a government aristocrat and her husband's partner, Jacques Le Gris, of raping her. The film adopts a storytelling approach divided into three gender perspectives based on the main characters: two male perspectives from Jean de Carrouges and Jacques Le Gris, and one female perspective from Marguerite de Carrouges. In essence, the film's narrative delves into themes of power, justice, and gender dynamics within a patriarchal society.

Contextually, during the 14th to 17th centuries in medieval France, women were often viewed as objects due to the pervasive influence of cultural, religious, and political factors, particularly from the monarchy. They were portrayed as submissive and weak, existing predominately to serve men and as an object of their control. Women's roles during this era were largely confined to that of mothers or wives, limiting them to household and reproductive duties. In other words, women were considered instruments to fulfil men's various needs. In addition, designers deliberately shaped women's clothing to accentuate their body shapes, catering to the male gaze and, ironically, shaping the prevailing fashion trends of the time (Wang & Li, 2020).

On the other hand, works of art and literature also reflected the practice of objectifying women. During this period, despite France emerged as a center of artistic and intellectual progress, women were often seen only in terms of visual value from a male perspective (Anwar Pasha et al., 2022). Many works of art commodify the image of a woman, portraying her with a very sensual appearance. For example, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *Odalisque* highlights women as objects of beauty exclusively in his art (Liu, 2022). Meanwhile, medieval French literature, exemplified by "*The Romance of the Rose*", a 13th-century allegorical poem by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, portrays a female character named "*La Belle Dame sans Merci*", described as a woman whose main purpose is to be pursued and admired by men (Liang, 2022).

Indeed, in medieval French society, men perceived women as objects they owned. The legal system and social norms that the time predominantly served male interests and disadvantaged women. The gender disparity in medieval France is evident, reflecting the depiction of French society portrayed in the context of the film *The Last Duel*.

However, despite the film's attempt to explore the gender and cultural context of French medieval society through three different perspectives, it still reflects the gender bias of its male director, Ridley Scott, in portraying female characters particularly evident in the narrative and his approach to handling complex and traumatic issues like sexual violence. The director consistently includes scenes depicting the objectification of women through unempathetic cinematographic techniques, including instances of physical violence, sexual harassment, and the portrayal of women as subjects entirely controlled by men.

Instead, this film should prioritize the experiences of victims, particularly in cases of sexual violence, given how frequently society underestimates them (Rackley et al., 2021). While acknowledging the importance of considering multiple perspectives to address cultural injustices, directors must be cautious not to commodify the experiences of sexual violence victims, especially those of Marguerite de Carrouges, for commercial gain, which may not equally reflect the reality she endured.

Two critical reviews of "*The Last Duel*" offer contrasting perspectives on the film's portrayal of toxic masculinity and handling of sensitive themes. Lance from *The Harvard Crimson* argues that the film struggles

to balance glorifying toxic masculinity with critique, resulting in a muddled narrative lacking a clear message (Higbee, 2021). He highlights the film's reliance on a contrived narrative and suggests a failure to adequately explore Marguerite's experience. Richard Brody criticizes the film's dialogue for lacking depth and authenticity, while also deeming its portrayal of sexual assault as exploitative and unnecessarily graphic (Catanese, 2011). Both reviews agree on the film's shortcomings but diverge in their focus, with Lance emphasizing the narrative structure and Brody highlighting issues with dialogue and cinematography.

Therefore, based on the research background above, this research aims to explore aspects of objectification of the main female character, Marguerite de Carrouges, which are expressed in the film *The Last Duel*. By using Martha Nussbaum's objectification (1996) and Brown's cinematography (2012) theory, this research aims to reveal in depth the practices of women's objectification displayed in it. Thus, through analysis of the data collected, it is hoped that this research can present an academic analysis that enriches understanding of how the objectification of women is represented in films, as well as providing deeper insight into gender dynamics in the film industry.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Research Design

This research employs a qualitative method with descriptive analysis to examine the portrayal of women's objectification in the film *The Last Duel* (2021), directed by Ridley Scott. Qualitative methodology entails understanding and interpreting social phenomena through an exploratory lens to uncover the depth and complexities of human experiences, emotions, behaviors, and interactions (Creswell, 2016). By utilizing theoretical frameworks such as Martha Nussbaum's *objectification* (1996) and Blain Brown's *cinematography* (2012) theory, the study focuses on analyzing the depiction of women's objectification, particularly in the character of Marguerite, through dialogues and scenes in the film. This research methodology enables a comprehensive exploration of women's objectification within the film, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the director's narrative elements and cinematic techniques to convey messages related to the research problem.

### 2.2 Data Source

The primary data source in this study is a film entitled *The Last Duel* directed by Ridley Scott and written by Nicole Holofcener, Ben Affleck, and Matt Damon. First released in United State on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021 with 2 hours and 32 minutes long duration. Additionally, various textual sources, including journals, books, news, and articles, are incorporated as secondary data sources to complement the analysis.

### 2.3 Data Collection

The data collection technique is divided into five steps:

- a. Initially, the writer watches the film to collect data for analysis. This involves multiple viewings to comprehensively understand the characters, plot, conflicts, and themes.
- b. The next step involves reading the film script to grasp nuances in dialogue, wordplay, and spelling. This aids in uncovering the storyline and extracting meaning from the film.
- c. Subsequently, the writer identifies data points within the film script that align with the research question. This involves classifying and highlighting relevant details for analysis.
- d. Following data identification, the writer classifies the gathered data based on the research question. This classification is then delved into deeply in Chapter III for analysis and discussion.
- e. Lastly, the writer reduces the collected data from a broad scope to specific elements relevant to the analysis. This ensures that the data are optimized and aligned with resolving the research questions.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

After identifying the collected data, the writer proceeds to investigate and analyze the data within a qualitative framework to explore the way of director narrates Marguerite as sexual victim and the women objectification within the film. The data analysis technique employed in this research unfolds in three stages (Busetto et al., 2020), outlined as follows:

- a. Data Reduction: The writer gathers all the data findings, summarizes them, and initiates discussions aligned with the main topic. In this stage, the data is condensed into summary results from the viewing of the film *The Last Duel*, which are then connected to the underlying theory and problem formulation of the study.
- b. Data Display: the writer presents the research results through points of analysis that are interconnected with each other in Chapter III. These data are displayed in narrative text, highlighting all collected dialogues from the film. Additionally, screen capture images of pertinent scenes are attached to support the analysis and address the research theory.
- c. Verification: The writer elaborates on the research results by presenting arguments, supporting evidence, and drawing conclusions based on the research questions. Through this process, the researcher aims to offer insights that contribute to the overall understanding of the topic

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter aims to explain the process of film analysis using the Objectification Theory by Nussbaum and Cinematography Theory by Brown. The research analysis begins with the chapter "Marguerite's Destiny in Three Acts of Narration". This discussion focuses on how the film portrays Marguerite de Thibouville as the female protagonist depicted as a victim of sexual violence. Subsequently, the discussion shifts to the chapter "Marguerite's Objectification in *The Last Duel*". The discussion in this chapter aims to identify and reveal the forms of women's objectification, particularly through the character of Marguerite, depicted in the film. Thus, this chapter will provide an in-depth exploration of how *The Last Duel* portrays and presents its female character, Marguerite, within its cinematic elements.

#### 3.1 Marguerite's Destiny in Three Acts of Narration

Marguerite's destiny. In *The Last Duel* (2021), Marguerite de Thibouville's story unfolds through the viewpoints of three central characters: Jean de Carrouges, Jacques Le Gris, and Marguerite herself. The film follows the events leading up to and following Marguerite's accusation of sexual violence, set against the backdrop of medieval French society. Marguerite's perspective is essential for grasping her experiences, her agency, and the series of events that occur to her.

Although the film's three-part narrative technique yields a satisfying ending, the opposing perspectives of Jean de Carrouges, Jacques le Gris, and Marguerite de Carrouges sometimes obfuscate some of the plot's contextual components. While Marguerite's narrative of what occurred to her in the film is undeniably true (as the title card indicates), portions of de Carrouges' rivalry with le Gris and his treatment of Marguerite need more investigation. This is particularly true considering their relation to *The Last Duel*'s historical storyline.



Figure 1. The Truth According to Jean de Carrouges (00:17:00)

In the first act of *The Last Duel*, begins with the story According to Jean de Carrouges, portrayed by Matt Damon. In this episode, Jean starts by saving Jacques Le Gris's life during the Battle of Limoges. Then, he goes on to perform various noble acts, despite being scorned by his lord, Pierre d'Alençon (played by Affleck). Afterward, he marries Marguerite de Thibouville, a daughter of Robert de Thibouville who is considered a disgraced family in the past. This marriage takes place with the inclusion of the Aunou-le-Faucon's land as de Carrouges's dowry. In this context, Jean de Carrouges is shown as despondent and broke. Thus, although Jean is narrated as a knight who loves his wife, Jean's marriage indicates that he wants more "value" from the marriage (Scott, 2021).

As time passed, Jean realized that Le Gris was increasingly rising as the trusted Squire of Pierre d'Alençon and felt betrayed when Le Gris was granted land and a title that should have been his own. In this context, Prince Pierre seized the land (Aunou-le-Faucon) because Robert de Thibouville owed him a long-standing debt and bestowed it upon Jacques le Gris, thereby nullifying any claim Jean de Carrouges might have had.

Although Pierre's actions were legally valid, they infuriated De Carrouges and led him to believe that Jacques le Gris was exploiting something morally wrong, causing a rift in their relationship. They were once close and distant relatives to each other. However, they completely parted ways when Marguerite, Jean's wife, accused Le Gris of rape.



Figure 2. The Truth According to Jacques Le Gris (01:00:00)

The second act reveals Jacques Le Gris's version of events. In this chapter, Le Gris is portrayed as a reliable knight, especially in his service under Pierre d'Alençon. His charm also makes him popular among women. However, Marguerite sees him differently. When they meet at a royal celebration, Le Gris realizes Marguerite's beauty and develops feelings for her. Believing he has the right to pursue her, he forcibly engages in sexual intercourse with her. Later, when confessing to a priest, he avoids the term "rape," instead admitting to "adultery." Another cleric advises him, stating that rape is not a crime against the woman but a "matter of ownership" (Scott, 2021).

In this context, it became the big issue for Marguerite in Ridley Scott's picture because she became pregnant after being raped by Le Gris, even though the film implies that she may have become pregnant due to the same treatment by her husband soon after that. In the 14th century, it was widely held that women needed to have intercourse to get pregnant, and if Marguerite had sex with le Gris, it was unlikely to constitute rape. This thinking style is exemplified by an ancient Greek hypothesis (Galenic reproduction model), which claims that to get pregnant, both partners must enjoy sex.

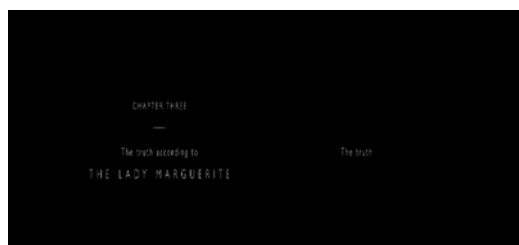


Figure 3. The Truth According to The Lady Marguerite (01:25:00-01:26:00)

Furthermore, The third act is titled "The Truth According to The Lady Marguerite" and to emphasize its significance, the words "the truth" linger longer on this title card compared to the previous one (Scott, 2021). This segment is intense, portraying both Jean and Jacques as boastful brutes and opportunists. While Jean believes he treated his wife tenderly, Marguerite's account focuses mainly on his conflicts with her father over her dowry. The narrative even revisits the rape scene, which is arguably uncomfortable and unnecessary (Vaes et al., 2019). Thus, the narration culminates in a trial where Marguerite delivers a defense of her right to declare Le Gris is a sexual predator who deserves punishment.

Next, the narration of the resolution of Marguerite's accusation is depicted through a medieval tradition known as Trial by Combat. It was a legal tradition to prove someone's right through personal battle, in this case, a fight between Jean de Carrouges (representing Marguerite's truth) and Jacques le Gris. However, because there was no separation of church and state throughout the Middle Ages, this act was coupled with a belief known as "iudicium Dei"—God's judgment. At the time, it was thought that God would defend the innocent in any trial to discover the error.

Hence, anybody who won a duel between Jean de Carrouges and Jacques le Gris would be proven innocent. Le Gris lost the combat, indicating that God noticed his error and failed to defend him. Le Gris was quickly reduced to the status of a common criminal in the eyes of the court and those watching. Although Ridley Scott typically creates effective deaths, the treatment of Le Gris's corpse after a fight, in this instance, was intended to depict his new position as a criminal and shame the person and his reputation.





Figure 4 & 5. The Marguerite's Destiny (02:23:00-02:24:00)

Ridley Scott concludes *The Last Duel* with a tranquil moment in which Marguerite observes her growing child. Before the picture fades to black, the camera concentrates on Marguerite's face, and although the moment is subject to interpretation, what is seen and not presented is essential given the film's emphasis on perspective. The absence of Jean de Carrouges and Marguerite's position on a field with a castle in the backdrop were crucial to this scenario. Thus, the incident provided Marguerite with a brief respite from the oppressive role that politics, societal standards, and men had previously played in her life. The title card that followed it highlighted the premise, revealing that Jean de Carrouges perished in combat a few years after the duel, and Marguerite never married again.

Therefore, although *The Last Duel* begins to address issues of sexual violence in its narrative by focusing on the perspectives of the two main male characters, de Carrouges and Le Gris, Marguerite's narration at the end serves as a crucial counterpoint and offers a different perspective on the events. However, Ridley Scott's directorial storytelling technique lacks depth in exploring Marguerite's empirical experience, particularly as a victim of sexual violence. The repetitive depiction of sexual violence within it makes the film seem more focused on a particular viewpoint rather than the truth it aims to convey. While the narrative process in filmmaking is important, producing a storyline that is empathetic and effective is equally crucial.

### 3.2 Marguerite's Objectification in *The Last Duel*

In contemporary discourse surrounding gender equality and women's rights, the theory of objectification becomes a crucial point of discussion. Objectification, as described by Nussbaum, refers to the process in which individuals are treated merely as instruments or objects for the gratification of others rather than as individuals with inherent dignity and worth (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 249). This objectification mainly occurs in the portrayal of women across various social aspects, including media, advertising, films, and various forms of popular culture.

Similarly, in the case of this research, the film *The Last Duel* presents the theme of women's objectification experienced by its female protagonist, Marguerite, based on the context of 14th-century French society. By applying Nussbaum's theoretical framework of objectification and Brown's cinematography theory, this chapter provides an analytical description to understand how women are reduced to mere objects, stripped of their humanity and autonomy through its cinematic elements. Therefore, to comprehensively identify this issue, the author decides to dissect it through six indicators of Nussbaum's objectification theory that found: instrumentality, inertness, denial of subjectivity, violability, ownership, and denial of autonomy.

#### 3.2.1. instrumentality

Instrumentality refers to the way in which the objectifier views the object as a mere tool to serve their own purposes or desires (Nussbaum, 1995, p.259). In the context of objectifying women, this means seeing women primarily as instruments or means to achieve certain goals, rather than as individuals with their own agency, desires, and rights. The example of this objectification in the film can be seen when Marguerite is shown washing the feet of her spouse, Jean de Carrouges. As the Scene below:

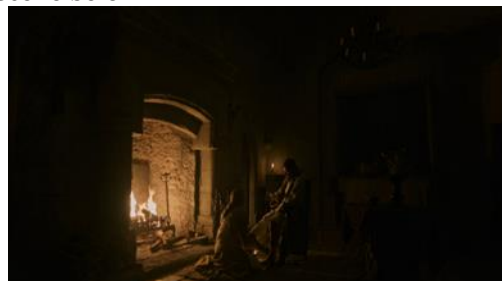


Figure 6. Marguerite Washing her Husband Feet (00:25:13 – 00:25:44)

The setting of the scene is a dimly lit room. The only light in the room derives from the chimney and the candles that encircle Marguerite and Jean. Marguerite needs to wash Jean's feet. Figure 6 with its full-shot shows the atmosphere in the scenario appears friendly, as Marguerite demonstrates her obedience to her husband by willingly catering to his needs. Jean gazed at Marguerite affectionately while Marguerite, engrossed in washing her husband's feet, did not return his gaze. Both individuals are lengthy white nightgowns since the scene occurs during the nighttime as they prepare to sleep.

However, the scene above implies women's objectification, portraying woman as mere objects whose sole purpose is to satisfy the demands and desires of their husbands. This approach frequently engenders a sense of subordination among women and establishes an imbalanced gender hierarchy (Sultana et al., 2021). Indeed, the scene above can be seen as a symbol of women as instrument to their husbands. This statement directly represents the belief that women should consistently display submission and sincerely serve men. Furthermore, it promotes the notion that women are solely important as subordinates to men rather than as autonomous beings with their own rights and pursuits. This is a manifestation of objectification, wherein women are regarded solely as instruments to fulfill men's desires, disregarding their own demands as women and as individuals with autonomy.

### 3.2.2. Inertness

Inertness, as outlined in Martha Nussbaum's theory of objectification, refers to the perception of the object as lacking agency or the ability to act independently (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 251). In the context of objectifying women, this means viewing women as passive and submissive. As *The Last Duel*'s scene and dialogue below shows Jean ordered Marguerite not to leave the house while he was away carrying out his knightly duties in order to fulfill the king's orders:



Figure 7. Jean ordered Marguerite to stay in the house and should be guarded (01:42:00-01:43:00).

The director sets the scene in a dining room, illuminated solely by candles and a crackling bonfire. This choice aims to authentically capture the ambiance of a 14th-century French household where electricity was non-existent. Furthermore, it signals the director's intention to cultivate an intimate atmosphere between Jean, Jean's mother, Marguerite, and Alice, their trusted household assistant. However, the dialogue employed reduces the warmth and intimacy depicted.

Indeed, When Jean tells his mother to make sure that Marguerite is taken care of by Alice, it suggests that Jean views Marguerite as not being independent. Later, Marguerite responds with her sigh and says, "I'd like to see my friends. We're so isolated", she hints at her disappointment with Jean's perception of her. This conversation also implies that Marguerite is proactive, self-reliant, and doesn't require constant supervision. However, Jean dismisses Marguerite's desire by affirming, "precisely". Thus, this scene and dialogue indicate that Marguerite is seen as passive. She is not seen as someone capable of managing and looking after herself but rather depicted as an object figure without the freedom to pursue her own wishes.

Therefore, depicting Marguerite as passive resonates with Nussbaum's notion of inertness. She's portrayed not as actively engaged in her own life but as someone stripped of agency and autonomy. Marguerite's character is reduced to an object, devoid of the freedom to pursue her desires and make decisions independently. It underscores the entrenched power dynamics that diminish her as a fully realized person, highlighting societal norms that curtail women's autonomy and perpetuate their subjugation.

### 3.2.3. Denial of Subjectivity

This indicator of objectification refers to the behavior of objectifiers who fail to recognize the subjectivity of the objects they interact with such as ignoring or denying the thoughts, emotions, and experiences of others. In other

words, when someone denies subjectivity, they essentially treat others as if they are just objects, lacking inner life, emotions, and agency (Gupta, 2021). It can manifest in various ways, such as ignoring their wishes, disregarding their feelings, or not considering their perspectives as human beings. In the context of the film *The Last Duel*, this form of objectification is seen when Marguerite conveys her defense aspirations during a trial that questions the sexual violence committed by Le Gris to her. As in the following scene:



Figure 8. Marguerite During The Court (02:01:31 – 02:03:39)

In the scene described, the director utilizes a medium shot focusing on Marguerite from her head to her shoulders. This effectively captures Marguerite's emotions as she directs a serious and angry gaze towards the judges. Meanwhile, the background behind Marguerite is deliberately blurred, depicting the six male witnesses of the trial seemingly disinterested and not paying attention to her. Essentially, their portrayal suggests a disregard for Marguerite's humanity and her rightful demand for justice, treating her more like an overlooked object rather than acknowledging her as a person deserving attention and respect.

Indeed, during the trial, Marguerite was not believed by any of the judges and prosecutors. Some judges went as far as to humiliate Marguerite by seeking answers like, "Did you enjoy having intercourse with your husband?" This question was posed multiple times, causing Marguerite to feel cautious and deeply shamed. In this context, Marguerite was six months pregnant during the trial. It was her initial pregnancy following the assault.

The judges also suspected Marguerite of having an affair. She was widely believed to be pregnant as a result of the sex assault by Jacques le Gris. The judge continually asked Marguerite the same question. After Marguerite expressed her disapproval of the abuse inflicted by Jacques le Gris, one of the judges responded, "Let us say we believe you are telling the truth, and such an act did." The scene portrays the lack of gender equality for women, Marguerite's thoughts are not respected. Her words were not widely believed. Her statements seem more like fabrications than facts.

Hence, the scene and dialogue above depict women being objectified by disregarding their experiences, emotions, and agency. Marguerite is not given the trust to speak, as her voice and will are dismissed simply because she is a woman. When Marguerite initially disclosed being sexually assaulted, she was met with rejection, further reinforcing her lack of authority. Moreover, the denial of subjectivity evident in this scene and dialogue is starkly highlighted by the prosecutor and society's failure to address the issue, underscoring the unequal rights and societal underestimation faced by women compared to men.

### 3.2.4. Ownership

*The Last Duel* demonstrates the ownership of women by men. Female characters are portrayed as physically and sexually captives without independence, indicating women as objects that may be used, repaired, or replaced and left behind. Women are alike, unable to pick their spouse. All the woman will be paired with men chosen by their parents. As showed in the scene and dialogue below:



Figure 9. Robert de Thibouville Talking with Jean de Carrouges (01:25:20 – 01:26:37)



The depicted scene portrays an encounter between Jean de Carrouges and Robert de Thibouville, Marguerite's father, at a small bar owned by Robert. This encounter marks Marguerite's first meeting with Jean. The lighting emphasizes the conversation between Jean, Robert, and Marguerite, with dim background lighting reflecting the bar's atmosphere. Robert's attire exudes both ease and formality, suggesting a warm reception of Jean. Marguerite is dressed elegantly, with minimalistic makeup, remaining quiet as she listens to her father negotiate her marriage to Jean in exchange for land and property due to financial difficulties. Marguerite's silence reflects her passive role in the arrangement.

On the other hand, the dialogue above explicitly reveal that Robert leased his daughter to Jean as a trade for money. Indeed, Jean also demanded of Robert, "I should expect she's capable of performing her wifely duties? bearing an heir." Jean's statements indirectly imply that he expect to get particular consideration from Marguerite after giving her an inheritor. The situation illustrate how both individuals exploited Marguerite, implying she is considered a property that can be exchanged for other materials. Marguerite kept silent in this moment due to the realization of her restricted freedoms and the cultural subjection of women to men.

Thus, the scene and dialogue above depict Robert de Thibouville arranging a marriage for Marguerite in exchange for material wealth, reflecting the view of women as commodities exploited for economic or social gain by their families (Baldissarri et al., 2019). Women are seen as objects without agency in choosing their partners, merely serving as tools for their family's advancement. This practice disregards women's desires and well-being, reinforcing the belief that they are possessions to be controlled by men and their families (Nwanya, 2022). Thus, this scene illustrates the indicator of women's objectification, ownership, by highlighting the disparity in gender equality and portraying a man's sense of ownership over a woman after exchanging revenue in her arranged marriage.

### 3.2.5. Violability

Violability as described by Martha Nussbaum, refers to objectifying behavior that assumes the object of its attention lacks integrity and treats a person as if their boundaries can be ignored or violated without consequence. When a person is perceived as violable, they are seen as something that can be broken, manipulated, or interfered with without regard to their autonomy or dignity. This perception denies individuals their inherent worth and autonomy, reducing them to actionable objects rather than subjects with rights and agency. In the context of *The Last Duel*, this objectification can be seen in the scene and dialog below:



Figure 10. Nicole de Bouchard Left Marguerite Alone at Home (1:43:12 – 1:43:32)

The film "*The Last Duel*" also illustrates Marguerite is being manipulated by Jean's mother, Nicole de Bouchard. The following scene shows Nicole de Bouchard, playing the role of Marguerite's mother-in-law, expressing her desire to depart and leave Marguerite alone in their residence. Despite Jean's explicit instructions for his mother to ensure Marguerite's well-being and not abandon her.

In this context, this scene takes place one day after Jean de Carrouges left Marguerite at home. He does not allow Marguerite to go out at all. Jean also left Marguerite with his mother. But the next day, when Marguerite was about to go to the fields, she saw that Nichole was going out of town. Marguerite then asked "Are you leaving?" and Nichole replied "Yes". Marguerite with a confused expression on her face asked "When will you return?" and she replied "When my tasks are completed before the nightfall". Marguerite still did not understand what Nichole was doing and Marguerite then emphasized her mother-in-law by saying "Jean Insisted I not be left alone, you heard him" (Scott, 2021). However, Nichole did not listen to Marguerite's words and she decided to leave without paying attention to Marguerite or listening to Jean's orders.

Marguerite is not allowed to leave the house and she can only go out if she gets permission from her husband and in-laws. Marguerite cannot do anything because of this patriarchal culture. Patriarchy forces a woman to obey the words of her husband and the words of her husband's family (Panuntun & Chusna, 2021). The patriarchal system

is closely linked to the process of women's objectification. This is due to the patriarchal system's tendency to view women as commodities that may be had, exploited, manipulated and dominated.

Hence, the evidence presented above clearly illustrates how women, particularly in societies with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, are often underestimated, disregarded, and vulnerable to manipulation. The enduring influence of patriarchal culture across generations not only affects men but can also be perpetuated by women, as exemplified by Jean's mother, Nicole de Bouchard. In this context, Nicole's manipulative behavior towards Marguerite represents a manifestation of ingrained patriarchy. Additionally, this case highlights how Marguerite is subjected to a form of objectification characterized by violability, wherein she is treated as an object that can be manipulated and deprived of her rights to life and autonomy.

### 3.2.6. Denial of autonomy

Denial of autonomy refers to treating individuals as if they cannot maintain dignity and control their lives. This objectification can manifest in various ways, such as imposing one's will on others and ignoring one's human values or right to life (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In other words, the denial of autonomy devalues the personhood and dignity of individuals, perpetuating unequal power dynamics and inhibiting their ability to live fulfilling lives on their terms. This case is shown in the following scene from the film *The Last Duel*:

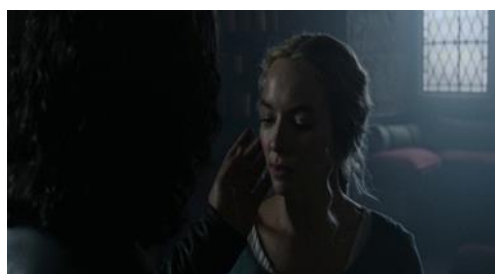


Figure 11. Jacques le Gris went to Marguerite's House (1:12:39 – 1:15:56)

Based on the scene and dialogue above, Jacques le Gris intrudes into Jean de Carrouges' residence without obtaining Marguerite's permission. The scene occurred immediately following Nicole's departure, leaving Marguerite alone at home. Jacques instructed someone else to rap on the door, prompting Marguerite to unlock it. The person claimed to be famished, and Marguerite graciously offered food. However, when Marguerite opened the door, the stranger had disappeared, leaving just Jacques le Gris.

The atmosphere is quite suspenseful. Marguerite's countenance is likewise filled with fear and disgust towards Jacques le Gris. Meanwhile, Jacques le Gris appears to exert a strong influence and attempts to make physical contact with Marguerite. The room is dimly lit due to the indoor setting of the scene. Marguerite is dressed in a conventional, floor-length dress, resembling typical everyday attire. In contrast, Jacques le Gris is donning a combination of a long-top and slacks. In this particular incident, Marguerite experiences intense fear and attempts to refuse Jacques. However, Jacques persists and proceeds to engage in a sexual assault against Marguerite.

The narrative above also shows how Jacques forced Marguerite to have sex with him. Marguerite even begged Jacques to stop by says "Please!" but Jacques didn't listen to her. He response with, "I only want for your happiness. I cannot bear to see you in such hardship. I know your house's finances are fragile" (Scott, 2021). Jacques' dialogue shows that Marguerite seen as a woman with not value. Even her words are not listened to.

Therefore, the scene and dialogue above demonstrate Jacques' objectification of Marguerite, which undermines and disregards her autonomy. The sexual assault experienced by Marguerite highlights Jacques' perception of women as objects solely for his sexual desire, with little concern for their rights or well-being (Mohajan, 2022, p. 6). As Nussbaum suggests, denial of autonomy becomes evident when women's right to self-governance is undervalued, and their lives are easily controlled.

## 4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The implication of the results of this study is as a contribution to knowledge for the development of gender equality discourse, especially in examining various forms of objectification present in film works. In addition, the contribution of the results of this study is as a consideration for the community and input for filmmakers to be more serious in reviewing gender equality, namely in narrating women in a cinematic element of the film.

## 5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The limitations of this research are the obstacles experienced by the author in obtaining research data that analyzes *The Last Duel* as the object of research. In addition, the limited scope of the author who needs to place himself in Marguerite's environment, especially the scope of French society in the 14th century.

On the other hand, the writer's recommendation by introducing the application of Nussbaum's theory is to identify women's objectification in dramas or short series, as previous studies have not explored this avenue. The researcher also recommends further exploration of the theory in different contexts and encourages the analysis of "The Last Duel" using alternative theoretical frameworks.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The film entitled *The Last Duel* (2021), directed by Ridley Scott, reveals the objectification of women in 14th-century medieval France, depicted through various dialogues and scenes contained as narrative elements of the film. This objectification can be seen from how the female protagonist Marguerite is viewed, considered, and treated like an object by other characters such as Jean De Carrouges, Jacques Le Gris, Robert De Thibouville (Marguerite's father), Nicole de Bouchard (Jean's mom), and the Judges.

The main narrative of the film is about the problem of sexual violence experienced by Marguerite, which then brings the film story to a trial determined by a "Trial by Combat" between Jean and Le Gris to prove who is right and wrong. Marguerite's position as a victim is narrated in three action scenarios. First, the truth, according to Jean De Carrouges. Second, the truth is according to Jacques Le Gris, and finally, the truth is according to The Lady Marguerite. Although Ridley Scott, as a director, wanted to show various perspectives in resolving this issue, he failed to explore Marguerite's experiences and emotions as a survivor more deeply. Various unnecessary scenes, such as rape and violence scenes, are still repeated, which resolves the conflict displayed ineffective and rambling.

In addition, the forms of objectification found using Nussbaum's theoretical framework can be seen in six indicators, namely instrumentality, denial of subjectivity, inertness, ownership, violability, and denial of autonomy. In this case, these six indicators of objectification show the solid patriarchal culture surrounding Marguerite's life, especially in the sociocultural society of 14th-century France.

Therefore, the film "The Last Duel" vividly portrays the objectification of women within the context of French medieval patriarchal culture. Through its dialogues and scenes, the female protagonist, Marguerite, is consistently treated as an object by various characters throughout the story. Despite attempting to present multiple perspectives on the issue of sexual violence experienced by Marguerite, the film falls short of fully exploring her experiences and emotions as a victim of sexual violence. The forms of objectification revealed through Nussbaum's theoretical framework underscore the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms within Marguerite's life and the broader socio-cultural landscape of medieval French society.

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## Author Contribution Statement

The author declares that this article's entire research and writing process was carried out independently. The author is fully responsible for all data related to this research. No other party has participated as an author or made a significant contribution to the content of this work.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

## Ethical Approval Statement

The author declares that this study is a literature review and does not involve human participants, personal data, or any other subjects. Therefore, this study does not require ethical approval from a research ethics committee. The entire research process was conducted in accordance with academic ethical standards, upholding scientific honesty, integrity, and the ethical use of legitimate sources.

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