

## ABSTRACT

## Foundation Myths and the Woman in Narratives of Resistance

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Because of the traditional link between nation and woman, the patriarchal rationale guiding England's evolving imperial identity has shaped perceptions of the woman. Medieval writers popularised the Trojan and Arthurian myths as national narratives, and creative appropriation continued throughout England's literary history, so that authors might critically evaluate its national principles of belonging, identity, power and gender, in both England and its later Caribbean colonies.

By way of a postcolonial feminist approach, this thesis investigates the narratives of the woman within the worlds of Troy and Camelot from writers like the *Gawain*-poet, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Tennyson and Walcott who have each revisioned female archetypes of deviance, even where they cling to the stereotype. Exploring the circumstances surrounding the vilification of their heroines, these writers enter into the consciousness of female characters who, ironically, are victimised by structures designed for national protection. In reimagining national ideals that recuperate the disregarded woman, each author creatively suggests the routes to realise national potential. This thesis brings a Caribbean perspective to select traditional literature of the English canon as it investigates postcolonial issues of the carceral, of authority, of the ideal and of the patriarchal imperial gaze.

Keywords: Genevieve Ruth Phagoo; *Gawain*-Poet; Chaucer; Shakespeare; Tennyson; Walcott; Trojan and Arthurian foundation myths; women.