



# Role Of Women In Medieval Literature And Society

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## Abstract

The role women in medieval literature and society were viewed as second class citizens. The role of women is represented as birds in cages. Women had no freedom and were suppressed. They played a complex and multifaceted role. Their life was very hard without love and respect. Women were portrayed as idealized love, objects of desire, symbol of beauty. While women faced significant restriction often romanticized and objectified women as virtues of chastity and obeisance. The nuanced dynamic highlights discrepancy and variation in women's experience during the medieval period.

**Keywords:** Femininity, Gender Roles, Chastity, Objectification of women, Misogyny.

## Introduction

During the medieval period from 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century, was a time of great social, political and cultural change. This article explores the contradictory role of women in medieval literature. Women's role in medieval literature and society aims to uncover the contradictions, subtlety and variation in their experiences, complex interplay between gender, power and culture in medieval society. Women faced restriction, biases, violence, hatred with double standard applied to their behaviour against men. Women's lives were largely defined by domesticity, marriage and family commitments.

## Role of women as "Virgin"

In medieval Europe, virginity held a sacred status, symbolizing purity, innocence and spiritual devotion. Women's primary functions was to remain virgin until they are wed and then permitted to produce children. The virgin is often the voice of reason in medieval society. Virgins were expected to maintain their chastity. Virginity was the valuable thing, often used to secure advantageous marriage or reinforces family alliances. Works like "The Golden Legend" and "The Canterbury Tales" feature virgin martyrs and saints highlighting their unwavering dedication to god. The emphasis on virginity also led to the disgrace of non- virginal women eternalizing harmful attitude towards sexuality and family desires.

### Role of women as “Mother”

In medieval period mothers played a vital role in both literature and society. Medieval literature often represents women in very obvious lights while the lights may not always be a good one, there is always a light shining on women as they are usually central to the society. Women incorporate a range of contradictory qualities, from nurturing selfless to powerful and authoritative. Mothers were expected to manage household, maintain family honour and reputation. It should pass down cultural and religious traditions. Men's still rule the roost especially as C.N. Trueman states, “producing heir within a rich family was considered vital” The mother who doesn't act as the virgin Mary or is not the image of perfection is seen to be failing at her only job in life.

### Role of women as “The Witches”

Role of witches were a source of both allure and fear, reflecting societal anxieties about magic gender and power. Witches are women many of them were vice women and their craft passed down from generation to generation. Witches have been an inspiration in literature for hundred of years, whether they are just characters or the inspiration for a whole literature. During a period when there were no doctors we know them today, no clean water, no hospitals, witches were expected to help those with diseases.

### Role of women as “The Whore”

In the middle age women were widely considered lower than men not worthy of performing the same tasks or activities that man typically did. Women didn't have the same rights as men or same privileges as men and they were suppressed by the society. Medieval prostitute was known as “the whore” in medieval literature. They were the popular topic for well known writers of the century to explore and incorporate into their works of literature. Whores were shunned and marginalized facing social and economic exclusions and were engaged in transactional sex for survival or economic gain. Whores were denied of social and economic opportunities.

### Role of women as “The Trickster”

In medieval literature and society women were employed as cunning and subversion to navigate patriarchal societies. Female tricksters outwitted male authority figures and used cunning and wit to manipulate male suitors. Women trickery was often linked to magical powers and devilish influence. Tricksters and pranksters are most common characters among medieval comic literature.

“when women exercise power, they frequently are viewed as manipulative, deceptive, illegitimate or unimportant. This accounts for the prominence in the bible of female trickster figures...” (forth 217).

They considered that it would be in Gods favour to keep women out of all policies and powerful positions, as Eve was the one who originally disobeyed him.

### Conclusion

Although these discrepancy medieval women writers, patrons and subjects left a static mark on literature, challenging male dominated tradition and paving a way for future generations. Through their representation in literature women were often idealized, stereotype, objectified, yet also portrayed as powerful, autonomous and influential. Medieval literature offers a reach and diverse tapestry of themes, motif and characters that reflect the complexities which explores love, morality, faith, power, medieval literature provides a value, believes and experiences of medieval society.

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