

The Middle Ages' Influence on Women's Role in Romantic Poetry

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Abstract—Women in the medieval period suffered from abuse and inequality. The pressure on women was so noticeable that they were treated as a marginal component of society in all aspects, an important one of which is the literary aspect. The literary role of women has largely disappeared from the European society in general and the English one in particular. Therefore, women, at every stage, struggled to show themselves amid these great pressures; their struggle led them to reach and succeed in the feminist movement. They attempted to counter the stereotypical image of the medieval women being helpless and subservient in the warrior societies depicted in Old English texts and the evil shrews responsible for men's failings in Middle English texts. Their new adapted literary role focuses on showing their strength, intelligence, agency in society, and the extent of women's impact on society and its change, despite the fact that this change came in secret. This study sheds some light on the women's role in the literary social movement by critically examining the relevant literary works through which the role and effectiveness of women are revealed. This study contributes to dispelling some of the myths surrounding the perspectives assumed about women by providing greater clarity for their cultural and historical settings. Also, this study offers a feminist reading to the female characters in the selected works which clearly illustrates women's role and the impact of feminist literature on English literature and English society at that period using the famous old legendary epic in English literature, *Beowulf*.

Index Terms—*Beowulf*, romantic female poets, medieval period, women's impact

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that critics and scholars have spent years studying Romanticism, it remains one of the most significant periods in literary history. It includes people like Lillian Furst, A. O. Lovejoy, Rene Wellek, and many more. For an evergreen definition of the period, go no farther than Lillian Furst's "*Romanticism*" series and its critical idioms. A. O. Lovejoy (1924) demonstrates in his seminal essay "*On the Discrimination of Romanticisms*" that the word "*Romanticism*" can have a number of diverse connotations. Due to its versatility, *Romanticism*, Lovejoy shows, is worthless; its linguistic signifier relevance in conversations has diminished. He thought that arguments over Romanticism would go beyond specific movements. His remark sparked the urgency of conducting a thorough analysis of Romanticism. Rene Wellek's paper, "*Concept of Criticism: A Postscript*" was the first piece of writing to respond to Lovejoy's call for new critical thinking. He remained true to his word, maintaining that the primary Romantic movement is a unified group of theories, philosophies, and aesthetics, and that these, in turn, comprise a coherent set of ideas that each reflects the other. To prove his point, he cited works from both English and continental literature.

Roughly, the year 1800 marked the beginning of the Romantic Era in English poetry, which is best exemplified by the works of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and Shelley. The Romantics, in contrast to earlier writers, did not rely on God or society to guide their works. The Romantics found the kind of inner calm that could endure anything life throws at them in nature. The creative process is also emphasized; in Wordsworth's works, for example, the emphasis is on the way in which Wordsworth's intellect interacts with nature to produce harmony and order. It is because

The old view of Romanticism as a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism in the name of emotion or the intuitions of the heart ...is misleadingly simplistic, for the Sensibility movement intervened. Indeed, that description of Romanticism would fit Sensibility rather better, or at least some of its trends. (Ferber, 2010, p. 30)

Wordsworth admits that moments of clarity are few and may perhaps be an illusion, and that most of the time, life is disorganized, baffling, and shattered. Wordsworth defined poetry as a collection of poems generally considered to have marked the beginning of the English Romantic movement in literature (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 1798, p. 13). In his *Shelley and His Audiences*, Stephen Behrendt (1989) claims Percy Shelley used the traditional, audience-centred understanding of language to predict how his poetry would be received and communicated.

In the later 18th and early 19th centuries, there was a significant shift in the prevailing worldview. There was an abrupt onset of a new emotion: disconnection from the natural world. The publication of "*Lyrical Ballads*" by

Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798 is generally regarded as the beginning of Romantic poetry. Modern rational thinkers have ignored the natural world as a source of truth and value, which Romantic poets rediscover. Many Romantic writers regard childhood as the most formative period of life since it is the period in which people are both naive and smart. Since purity and originality are prioritized, feelings and emotions are given greater weight. It is not hard to find examples of works by great authors like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and Shelley which share common themes. While many readers enjoy their novels, few can appreciate the complexity of their verse. The notion that Romantic authors promote a morally pure view of the world is widespread yet false.

This oversimplified and overgeneralized analysis of Romanticism lacks essential context. Some of the authors whose works are included in *"The Romantic Canon"* are William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley, and John Keats. There are times when poems by William Blake and Robert Burns, two earlier writers, are included. Classic science fiction writers like Mary Shelley, or influential essayists like William Hazlitt, are rarely included in the canon. This canon, from feminist point of view, reinforces only male literary standards that "an entirely gentlemanly artifact, considering how few works by non-members of that class and sex make it into the ... canon as it is generally understood" (Robinson, 2000, p. 154). The exclusion of female poets from the canon was because of gender, not the literary value of their works. Anne Mellor clarifies that "literary periodizations for this era – neoclassical, Romantic, Victorian – are conceptually useless for, perhaps even counterproductive in, illuminating women's literary history" (Mellor, 2001, p. 393).

While Wordsworth and Byron were concerned with nature rather than society, feminine Romanticism celebrates the domestic affections, family and social bonds. Some of the most influential living female poets are Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Jonna Baillie, Mrs. Felicia Brown Hemans, and Leticia Elizabeth Landon. In light of feminist efforts to rediscover the works of women poets and the acknowledgment that these poets' works are, in fact, of equal quality, our traditional conception of Romanticism likely has to be drastically changed. Moira Ferguson claims that Romantic female poets "displaced anxieties about their own assumed powerlessness and inferiority onto their representation of slaves" (Ferguson, 1992, p. 3). However, Female contributions to the literary culture of the Romantic era were significant that:

By the end of the eighteenth century, the new institutions of print culture – newspapers and journals, circulating libraries, women's coffeehouses, and debating societies – enabled women to shape public opinion as effectively as men. The female-authored literature proliferating in all genres – poetry, drama, history, political tracts and essays, critical reviews, and especially the novel – contributed substantially to the political and cultural debates of the day. (Mellor, 2001, p. 398)

In the sense that this change is not obligated to be made by male poets exclusively, it could be by women poets and women have a great role in a vast change in romantic poetry.

The emancipatory victories of the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, as well as the heightened social consciousness prompted by the Industrial Revolution, all coincided with the ascent to literary fame of both Wordsworth and Coleridge. Having tired of the restrictions of the neo-classical style, Romantic poets were free to express their imagination and individuality in their works, which often dealt with themes of humanity and the natural world. Ancient and medieval stories, beloved for their grandeur and romance, enjoyed a renaissance in popularity. This is because poetry, according to Wordsworth, is

the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, and the impassioned expression that is in the countenance of all science. Poetry seeks to ennoble and edify. It is like a morning star which throws its radiance through the gloom and darkness of life. Poetry is the instrument for the propagation of moral thoughts. It sheds no tears, such as angels weep, but natural and human tears. (Wilkie, 1973, p. 194)

When considering literary figures who paved the way for the Romantic Era, Wordsworth stands alone. His use of everyday language in his writings helped bring him worldwide acclaim. Other well-known Romantic poets besides Shakespeare and Wordsworth are Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Wordsworth is often credited with reviving idealism, while Byron is often credited with reintroducing glamour; Shelley is often credited with giving poetry a new lease on life through music, and Keats is often credited with reviving beauty. After a long dormancy during the Elizabethan era, they each had a part in what is now considered the genuine Romantic Revival of poetry.

II. MIDDLE AGES AND ROMANTIC POETRY

The phrase "Romantic Era" conjures up images of a time when epic tales of heroic quests, supernatural intervention, and intense feelings predominated. Before 1820, European authors started using the term "romantic" to describe things that elicited feelings akin to romance. Knowledge of medieval romance, particularly in Britain, was sketchy and frequently influenced by Edmund Spenser's Elizabethan allegory *The Faerie Queene*, which Chris Jones rightfully refers to in this collection as a work of historiographical recovery. It provides opportunities for different kinds of adventures which seem to have "stimulated the Romantic imagination" (Choi, 2009, p. 197).

The English Romantic movement was characterized by a strong preference for medievalism. The medieval period is associated with the romantic age for the same reason that the classical period is associated with the Renaissance: both periods generated new forms of writing. Writers of the Romantic era looked to the Middle Ages for a break from the monotony of modern life and literature.

The romantic poets were infatuated with the quaint sophistication and delightful ease of the past. Because they were unhappy in the present, they longed for the Middle Ages, which they imagined to be full of more magic, romance, wonder, and excitement than the present. Romantic writers found inspiration in the Middle Ages because it was a period which embodied many of the ideals of romanticism. Therefore, the medieval or Gothic renaissance can be seen as the cradle of the Romantic Movement.

A number of nineteenth-century critics of Anglo-Saxon literature considered the female protagonists in these works as either passive objects or helpless victims of the dominant male personalities and cultural ideals of the warrior culture that inspired the literature. Many scholars have noted an apparent diffidence in Anglo-Saxon literary writings in depicting intimate human relationships, romantic love and carnal pleasure. As it would be expected, texts in the Germanic heroic traditions, which are preoccupied with the public sphere, show little explicit interest in sexual themes. The cultural climate of Anglo-Saxon England led to contentious issues, of which sexuality seems to have been one being de-emphasized and modified in texts which prudishly react to both love and lust, and to sexuality whether in thought or deed. The writers operate within a system where the soul and flesh are considered binary states. The soul is bracketed with divinity, eternity and sanctity and the flesh with baseness and corporeality; this has been represented in the portrayal of women in *Beowulf*, the surviving Old English epic. As the poem progresses, the reader has a clearer picture of women's social and creative positions during the historical period of this poem. Consider the poem's treatment of the *wergild* and the soldiers' oath of allegiance to the king as defined in the heroic code of *Comitatus*. Although military ethics were the primary emphasis of *Comitatus*, it is also considered as an "institution" (Evans, 1997, p. 84) that "made use of underlying cultural and social infrastructure" and "may be understood as the common thread that... flowed through and kept together the very fabric of Dark-Age Britain" (Evans, 1997, p. 86). The Frith, or peace-weaving rite, in which people of different tribes were married to one another, was one cultural and social framework that contributed to the stability of these societies. *Comitatus* was established on threads for the purpose of "creating and securing tribe identity and allegiances for one king or leader", and intermarriages between them were physical emblems of intertribal treaties termed Frith (Amro, 2021, p. 343).

III. FEMALE READERS

The literate middle classes in Britain (women as well as men) have had access to literature they could not purchase before retailers began selling books from libraries in the 1780s. The bulk of book buyers, however, were middle- and upper-class women by the year 1800. The majority of women poets who saw their work published did so in periodicals, gift anthologies, and annals, where they reached an expanding audience of women. According to Gilroy, one of the key challenges of contributing to such literary sources was the restriction established by "a confined domain of acceptable literary femininity, writing from the heart about heart's concerns" (Zero, 2011, p. 101). However, many male critics and authors saw the emergence of a new (female) reading populace as a threat to culture for a number of different reasons. A major reason why women may feel patronized by literature is that it frequently upholds sexist beliefs about women's intelligence and makes broad generalizations about the average man's superior taste in art and literature contrasted to the stereotypically unsophisticated likes of the average woman. Poetry, as Haefner indicates, "What we were 'looking for' in much of the poetry written by men – psychological insight, transcendental truths, imagery and symbol, the theme of the imagination, myth poetic structures – may not be the right things to 'look for' in women's verse" (Haefner, 1993, p. 48). Therefore, this segment of women is considered a source of danger to the masculine situation, as the expansion of women's culture raises their ire and increases their anxiety.

Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835 by Jacqueline Pearson argues that female reading was increasingly seen as a harmful pastime that, as Mellor argues, "stressed the fundamental significance of the individual, the relationship between subject and object as inspired by Kant, the creative powers of the mind, and the value of passionate feeling" (Mellor, 1990, pp. 275-276). An insidious hobby that has the potential to sharpen women's minds but also exposes them to "unfeminine" thoughts and cravings they should fight against. Reading was also considered as a way for women to break free of the restrictive sexual philosophy of the time, which maintained that they should never pursue interests outside of the home. Finally, the market for books written by women was quite big because women constituted the majority of readers and many of them liked reading nonfiction books written by other women. Every woman who enjoys reading books by female authors is implicitly supporting the bluestocking circle.

IV. THE BLUESTOCKING VS. THE POETS

Since booksellers began selling books from libraries in the 1780s, the literate middle classes in Britain (women as well as men) have had access to books they could not previously afford. However, by the year 1800, the majority of book buyers were middle- and upper-class women. Most published women poets wrote for an expanding audience of women and saw their work circulated mostly in periodicals, gift anthologies, and annals. The constraint created by a narrow range of acceptable literary femininity made it difficult for women to contribute to such literary sources because they could not express their heart's concerns in writing. As Curran argues, the "achievement of these women poets was to create literature from perspectives necessarily limited by the hegemony of male values" (Curran, 1988, p. 205). The advent of a new (female) reading population, however, was seen as a threat to culture by many male reviewers and

writers for a variety of reasons. For one, women may feel patronized by literature due to the way it often reinforces sexist assumptions about women's intelligence and makes sweeping generalizations about the average man's superior taste in art and literature compared to the stereotypically rudimentary tastes of the ordinary woman. Rachel Anne Jones states:

In the hierarchy of the period the powerful male poet headed the natural order, followed by the feminized male poet, then the feminine poetess, and lastly the Bluestocking poet (Ross 189). The Bluestockings were seen as particularly repugnant and unnatural women in terms of ideological outlook because they sought to inhabit a male tradition, compete with men on their own ground, and influence culture and society like their male counterparts. (Jones, 1994, p. 13)

A dangerous pastime that could improve women's clarity of thought but could also lead them to "unfeminine" ideas and urges they should resist. What's more, reading was seen as freedom from the stifling sexual philosophy of the day, which held that women should never divert their attention from their usual domestic duties. Last but not least, since women made up the majority of readers, and as many of them preferred reading nonfiction books written by other women, the market for books written by women was rather sizable. The bluestocking circle we mentioned at the outset of the piece receives implicit support from every woman who reads literature written by women.

As a result, many scholars believe that there were no female authors during the Middle Ages. This presumption is sometimes coupled with the notion that women in the Middle Ages were predominately illiterate. Most women, with a few exceptions, are believed to have been illiterate due to the lack of attention that was supposedly given to female education. Of course, this presumption is incorrect. Carol M. Meale points out that in late medieval ages "Women owned and shared books; they composed texts, although their authority to do so was hedged around by prejudice; they communicated by letter; they commissioned works of art, from manuscripts to architecture; and they participated in administration and commerce" (Meale, 2007, p. 75). Direct addresses to women are not difficult to find in the medieval literature that "much recent scholarship has demonstrated the extent to which upper-class Englishmen and women looked to literature – romance in particular for models of behaviour on the battlefield or in bedroom" (Yeager, 2006, p. 111). It is at least plausible that the storyteller was responding to a need felt by women in the audience when Criseyde is mentioned reading romance to a group of women in *Troilus and Criseyde*, which is a little piece of evidence that refers directly to female consumption of such narratives.

V. CONTRARY CURRENTS

The finest Romantic-era male poets were concerned with issues like mental fortitude, the emergence of a unique self-capable of transcendental thought, and the betterment of daily existence. Despite its condensed length, this review effectively shows the major differences and similarities between Romantic era male and female poets. Poets like Charlotte Smith, Anna Barbauld, Mary Robinson, and Hannah More fought hard for the right to write in the language of men despite Wordsworth's dismissal of it as "the language of men", which made it difficult for a woman to view herself as a poet (Margaret, 1980, pp. 8-9). Poetry as a tradition had been entirely masculine. Examples of the quotidian were presented to clarify the phrase, including cooking, cleaning, and socializing. Writing about everyday situations like the birth of a child was common for many female poets at the time because they felt they were helping to set a moral foundation for the country through their work. Women poets struggled to write under the dominance of patriarchy that "Even as women poets begin publicly to record their own experience for the first time in history, they do so under the shadow of masculine ideology" (Ross, 1989, p. 12). This is clearly because male poets took control over nature, feminising the term nature to legitimise their repression of female poets. This also stressed "the importance of the individual (man) in the natural world" (Mellor, 1988, pp. 6-8).

War was never seen as a positive strategy by male or female Romantic era writers, so this also contributes to the divide in perspective or portrayal of the French Revolution. And Harold sits upon this mass of skulls, the grave of France, *The Melancholy Waterloo* in Byron's epic poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818). Women writers frequently resorted to sentimentality as a means of conveying the frustration and helplessness they felt in their roles as housewives. Along with other issues that arose during this time of upheaval but exist to this day, the challenges women face while attempting to modify their worldviews were highlighted. Mary Robinson's *Winkfield Plain or, a Description of a Camp in the Year 1800* (1804) is an in-depth look at military camp life. In Ashley J. Cross's "From Lyrical Ballads to Lyrical Tales: Mary Robinson's Reputation and the Problem of Literary Debt", Cross refers to Robinson as a female contemporary of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Vernooy-Epp comments:

"an alternative to Percy Shelley's Defense of Poetry and William Wordsworth's Preface" ... In other words, Cross ranks Robinson's text alongside two of the most important publications that Romanticists have used as litmus tests for what counts as Romantic literature. If we consider a text like Robinson's as another such gauge, we must teach women writers as part of a Romantic canon. (Vernooy-Epp, 2009, p. 16)

Robinson deftly combines feminine rhyming and the present participle (shooting, adoring, blooming, assuming) to evoke pictures of the vivacity and diversity of existence in this transitory metropolis. She discusses the discrimination she faced for engaging in hobbies normally associated with men, including poetry writing, as well as the challenges she and other women faced at home (public-houses, heart sickness, marital sameness), during, and after the war (such as she herself did by writing this very poem using such controversial topics). Although women's poetry also depicted conflict,

it was usually the poetry of men, such as Shelley's "*Prometheus Unbound*" that called for the fall of the British monarchy and the foundation of a democratic republic (1820) Scepterless, unfettered, unrestrained, but man still stands after (the ugly mask has fallen.) Shelley's preface to *Prometheus Unbound* makes references to "the Aristotelian hierarchy of poetry to clarify male critics' dismissal of women's poetry as history, or a form of personal narrative" (Behrendt, 1989, p. 18). Exempt from awe, equal, unclassified, tribeless, and nationless Poets took to the stage to voice their disapproval of the high cost of employing violence to bring about political change. They were anticipating that a change in the social order would be brought about by education rather than an insurrection.

Mary Wollstonecraft advocated for women's equal access to higher education and active roles in literary canons in her seminal essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). She argued that women should have the same access to higher education as men do, so that they can legitimately contribute to the development of the nation, and that most middle-class women were educated to prepare them "to excite love ... [and] they cannot live without love" (Breen, 1992, p. xv).

There were many women writers at the time who argued that women were better suited to positions of national leadership than men because of their natural propensity to care for and defend the family unit, defending the maternal role that had been traditionally assigned to them by their male contemporaries (nation in this case). When women started using the prevailing sexual ideology of the day to further their own interests, it was an act of liberation through, not from, femininity. Behrendt states that:

How to address the public sphere was an important consideration for women writers who supported themselves and their (often broken) families in precarious circumstances through their writing', but some still published 'poetry whose often sentimental nature only partially concealed a distinctly counter-establishment ideology. (Behrendt, 1989, pp. 87–88)

Female poets, in particular, often have a very different relationship with the natural world than their male counterparts do. However, male poets tend to see nature as the source of divine creative power, the power of God (or the universe), and a "spontaneous overflow of feelings" that He speaks for and understands, while female poets tend to reject this concept of the sublime, the mental empowerment, and instead see her as Mother Nature. On the other hand, the conversation between male critics and female poets tends to highlight the technical aspects of their verse. A whole system of vocabulary was created and associated with the criticism of women's poetry that they were praised for "quickness of apprehension", for "delicate taste", and correct diction and rhyming (Poovey, 1984, p. 39).

Female Romantic poets, in contrast to their male counterparts, either integrate with their relational selves and write about their relationships with the world around them or retreat into a depressed state of mind, both of which promote the cult of sensibility. Like this cult, the Sentimentalism literary movement of the 18th century valued the author's capacity to generate emotion in the reader through the use of vivid imagery and sympathetic words. Thus, the relational self can be seen as an advanced form of the "sentimental feminine identity" defined by previous sentimentalists, who saw this type of person as one who can connect with others or with oneself and express emotional worries despite the potential for shame and failure.

VI. THE MIDDLE AGES' INFLUENCE ON WOMEN'S ROLE IN ROMANTIC POETRY

Feminist literary work was done in secret because of the patriarchal authority and the extent of the influence of masculinity on the features of feminism and its literary movement. Therefore, women worked on the feminine good in order to prove their identity at that time with the absence of this identity from existence due to the presence of those masculine factors mentioned above. All literary women suffered during the medieval period due to male oppression, tyranny, and control over the parameters of literature and social landmarks in general. Therefore, this period is considered a period of feminist struggle to prove the existence of a segment of women in the midst of the dominant patriarchal authority.

With the intent of resolving the central study issue (How does middle age affect the position of women in romantic poetry?). The author of this piece re-examined the representations of women in works of medieval literature like *Beowulf*. In military societies like the Anglo-Saxons, women's roles in preventing war were vital. The monster, the peace-weaver, and the queen in her function as hostess of the mead hall all play significant parts in *Beowulf*. The "defender of the land finds good in, and thinks this woman can mend past wounds, and bitter feuds", as the poem puts it, when King Hrothgar's daughter, Princess Freawaru, marries the "gracious Ingled" (*Beowulf*, 700-750. Lines: 2027 – 2029). The earliest epic to be composed in a European language, *Beowulf* is a heroic poem that is regarded as the best example of Old English literature. It is thought to have been written between 700 and 750 CE and discusses events from the first half of the sixth century. Although originally untitled, it was later named after the Scandinavian hero *Beowulf*. Therefore, it is considered one of the important pillars of English literature and one of the important types of evidence in ancient English literature as a distinctive social epic. The political significance of the princess's wedding stems from the peace accord that is hoped to emerge from it. Consequently, one could argue that peacemakers are just as crucial to the welfare of their communities as warriors. Queen Hildeburh of Denmark lost her brother, her son, and her husband during the intertribal battles between the Danes and the Frisians, exemplifying the hardships women faced in their duty as peacemakers. Hildeburh's birth was supposed to be a symbol of peace between the two tribes, but it backfired, leaving her to grieve over the deaths of her loved ones and her own ineffectiveness in maintaining harmony.

Despite Hildeburh's failure, Queen Wealtheow seems to be fulfilling her role as a "peace-pledge between the countries" (*Beowulf*, 700-750. Line: 2017). There is no explicit reference to Wealtheow's history or the difficulties she helped settle, but she is depicted to be the gracious queen of the Danes and a capable hostess as she glides around the mead hall offering the cup to the mighty warriors.

Wealtheow came in,
Hrothgar's queen, observing the courtesies.
Adorned in her gold, she graciously saluted
the men in the hall, then handed the cup
first to Hrothgar, their homeland guardian,
urging him to drink deep and enjoy it, (Lines: 612-617)

So, the helming woman went on her rounds
queenly and dignified, decked out in rings,
offering the goblet to all ranks,
treating the household and the assembled troop,
until it was *Beowulf's* turn to take it from her hand.
With measured words she welcomed the Geat
and thanked God for granting her wish. (Lines: 620-626)

Queen Hrothgar uses the above lines to emphasize her role as hostess when she invites the Danish thanes and *Beowulf*, a warrior from a different clan, into the mead hall. In response, Byron Edgington argues that we shouldn't look down on the practice of passing the mead because it was part of a rite that "bestowed recognition on individual thanes, or troops who had distinguished themselves in battle" (Edgington and Edgington). "The mead cup was handed to signify the allegiance of each man in his turn to the monarch, whose mead hall they attended" as a gesture of *comitatus* among members of the same tribe (Edgington and Edgington). After *Beowulf* kills Grendel, Wealtheow showers him with gifts as a symbol of her position as the one who bestows respect upon the warriors who serve her, much as the mead they drink together is a symbol of Wealtheow's position as the one who bestows honor upon the troops who serve her (*Beowulf*, 700-750. Lines: 1191-1220).

The following snippets from the queen's speech show why it's incorrect to view a monarch as little more than a party mascot or a waiter who can't do much more than pour drinks. Hrothgar's wife Wealtheow, who favors her nephew Hrothulf over her son *Beowulf*, makes a series of speeches urging her husband to make the latter the heir to the Danish throne. In the Mead Hall, where the warriors have gathered to celebrate Grendel's death, she addresses *Beowulf* and the others, urging them to fulfil their duty as men and warriors and reiterating the importance of her request as their queen.

And now the word is that you [Hrothgar] want to adopt
This warrior [Beowulf] as a son. So, while you may,
Bask in your fortune, and then bequeath
Kingdom and nation to your kith and kin,
Before your decease. I am certain of Hrothulf.
He is noble and will use the young ones well.
He will not let you down. Should you die before him,
He will treat our children truly and fairly. (Lines: 1175 – 1183)

Here each comrade is true to the other,
Loyal to the lord, loving in spirit.
The thanes have one purpose, the people are ready:
Having drunk and pledged, the ranks do as I bid. (Lines: 1228 – 1230)

We know very little about Modthryth because the chapter of the book devoted to her story was badly damaged. It's impossible to get a good read on her character or figure out what might possibly motivate her to use such terrible violence. The speaker highlights her "grave wrongs," including torturing and executing "any retainer ever made bold to stare her in the face," by contrasting her with the other queens in the poem (Lines: 1933–1934). Despite being overshadowed by her more famous cousin, Queen Hygd is shown as a warm and knowledgeable hostess. She, like Queen Wealtheow before her, passes the mead around the hall while praising and rewarding the brave soldiers. Her leadership and foresight shine through in her selection of *Beowulf* as her husband's heir over their own son, whom she judged to be too weak to protect the people and the land at the time of his father's death (*Beowulf*, 700-750. Lines: 2369 – 2373).

This poem posits that Anglo-Saxon queens took on a political role, acting in the best interests of the Geats even when doing so put them in danger. To the contrary, Hygd's character shines in comparison to that of the malevolent Queen Modthryth, who represents all that Anglo-Saxon women should shun. The section of the book containing Modthryth's story was severely destroyed, therefore we know very little about her. Because of this, determining her personality or understanding why she is acting so aggressively is challenging. To set Elizabeth apart from earlier monarchs, the poem emphasizes the "awful wrongs" she perpetrated, such as torturing and executing "any retainer ever made bold to stare her in the face" (Lines: 1933 – 1934).

Great queen Modthryth

perpetrated terrible wrongs. (Lines: 1932 – 1933)

Even a queen

Outstanding in beauty must not overstep like that

A queen should weave peace, not punish the innocent

with loss of life for imagined insults. (Lines: 1940 – 1943)

Beowulf faces three terrible opponents, and the bard emphasizes Modthryth's violent temper and propensity to shed blood as abnormal and unpleasant for women, despite a brief reference to her "reformed" behaviours after marrying King Offa. A number of competing interpretations of Grendel's mother have developed as a result of the numerous translations of the original text into various languages. Others argue that she is a human being whose actions are described in a way that emphasizes the "monstrosity" in the eyes of Anglo-Saxon society, while still others insist that she is a non-human monster that exists solely as another challenge that *Beowulf* must face and successfully overcome in order to rise in ranks. According to Jane Chance, author of *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*, Grendel's mother is somewhat weirdly, depicted in human and social terms, and utilizing words like "wf" and "ides", generally reserved for human women". The mother of Grendel is referred to throughout the Old English text with masculine pronouns and adjectives, such as "monstrous woman", "a lady-monster woman", "warrior", "destroyer", and "[male] defender", as pointed out by Chance. As an *aglaeca*, a term that means "monster" but also translates as "strong opponent" and "fierce combatant", the fact that the last three descriptors are masculine in Old English may be seen as a hint of her unfeminine strength and savagery.

Since she "arrogates to herself the male status of the warrior or king", thereby "blurring the sexual and social differences of gender roles", Grendel's mother is "wretched or monstrous" in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon audience (Chance, 2005, p. 97). Her representation in this article makes her appear like the polar opposite of the women we have discussed and the antithesis of the ideal Anglo-Saxon woman. She and Mordthryth are known as strife-weavers for the havoc they cause in their own villages (Carr-Porter, 2001, Para 2). This further emphasizes the value of the other women's responsibilities as mediators and courteous hosts who practiced *comitatus* in their own ways.

Beowulf's Comitatus and peace-weaving are portrayed consistently as heroic and societal laws throughout Old English literature. Yet when Christianity developed, people started using these ideas in ways that mirrored religious themes, and soon enough, that's how they were seen by the majority of the population. Accordingly, Christians show that they are committed to Jesus as the supreme leader by preaching the gospel and advocating for the rights of other Christians. As a result, Christian saints like Juliana play pivotal roles as heroes in these works; in contrast to *Beowulf*, the saints' virtues and abilities are primarily spiritual.

VII. CONCLUSION

Patriarchal civilizations have a long and problematic history of degrading women's status, relegating them to the home, and promoting damaging stereotypes of women through art and literature. This study examines the careers of women authors who had been imprisoned before the publication of their works (1790-1840). Popularity and respect for women poets increased for a number of reasons, including the French Revolution, political and social turmoil in Britain, an increase in the number of female readers, and public coteries (such as The Bluestocking Society). Female poets of the time had great popularity with readers, but this did little to assuage the growing resentment of male Romanticists. In response to this conflict, two schools of Romantic poetry developed independently, one written by men and the other by women, who had diametrically opposed views on poetry's place in politics and social life.

Men were lauded for their masculine reasoning, while women were expected to write in a manner befitting their more submissive social status. Almost all female Romantic painters of the time emphasized slow, steady progress, whereas male Romantic artists tended to endorse a faster, more revolutionary pace. For women writers, rising beyond prejudice and economic disadvantage required forging a social identity based on the cult of sensibility. Poets like Charlotte Smith and Anna Barbauld paved the way for the Romantics with their innovative works like "Beachy Head" and "The Mouse's Petition". Through their efforts and commitment, they earned the title of "unsung legislators" around the globe.

Therefore, women's literary works and movements were based on defining the literary identity of women and getting rid of male literature, especially in the Middle Ages, when the role of women began to disappear significantly. This was because of what they faced from the pressure of the hereditary and famous social factors at that time in confining women to homes and performing duties that did not go beyond the boundaries of the home, as we mentioned above, the identity of women was almost non-existent. The tireless work of women at that time led to the emergence of feminist literature and its development in English literature and moved to all of Europe, so this stage is considered the stage of feminist struggle and rebellion against society and customs.

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