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A Threat to Male Order: Women Who Go Beyond Their Place in Medieval Society

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Oral Presentation O5.3

**A THREAT TO MALE ORDER: WOMEN WHO GO BEYOND THEIR PLACE
IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY**

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The subjection of women is a common theme throughout much of history, including the Middle Ages. This topic carries over into many literary works of the time period, such as Heldris de Cornuälle's *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century Romance* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide*. The female protagonists in these two romances differ from most historical women of their time in that they are both able to briefly exit their feminine spheres and defy men's expectations of them. As some scholars argue, these unconventional behaviors highlight the strengths that Silence and Enide possess. Other scholars assert that because these women are talented, Silence and Enide challenge the dominant male values that characterize medieval life. Therefore, although Silence and Enide are first viewed in a positive light, through their words and actions they become threats to patriarchal values; it is ultimately necessary, then, that Silence and Enide be returned to the submissive, silent roles to which they, as women, are typically confined.