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

Janna Stickler
Illinois Wesleyan University

Daniel Terkla, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc

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.