

**Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria**  
**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**  
**University of Saida**  
**Faculty of Arts, and Languages**  
**Department of Foreign Languages**  
**Section of English**



# **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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**Written by**

*Miss Djidi Asmaa*

*Miss Mahmoudi Sehla*

**Board of Examiners**

**Supervisor:** Dr M. Boulenouar

**President:** Dr A. Talbi

**Examiner:** Dr M. Ghrazib

**Supervised by**

*Dr M. Boulenouar*

University of Sidi Belabess

University of Saida

University of Saida

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## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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### *Dedications*

We dedicate this dissertation to our loving families and friends, a special feeling of gratitude dear parents Abdelkader, Keltouma Djidi and Mahmoudi Hlima whose words of encouragements and push for tenacity ring in our ears. Our sisters; Amel, aya and Iness, and the beloved sister Sanaa, and brother Khaled. Special thanks to Mohamed Guerroudj and my dear husband Zohier Khlef and my little baby *Nora Tassnim*.

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## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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### *Abstract*

In this research paper, we are about to examine the image of English women in the Middle Ages and their position within society and the roles that they were playing at that time. We will also explore feminism in Medieval Era and the lack of rights of women to participate in literature and all the other domains and how women's life was male-dominated.

We are going to initiate our dissertation with an overview about medieval society and the concept of feminism at that period and Medieval Literature and how the Church played an important role in controlling all literary works and pushed away women from participating in any kind of social activities except being housewives, peasants and uneducated mothers. However, we can't deny that there were very few women who had opportunities to be educated and they were the nuns and some of them could write thanks to learning Latin in the church.

Furthermore, we will talk about misogyny in the Medieval society and how women were marginalized and did not have equal rights to men, and how they wanted to break with this misogynistic society and get their rights to be as active as men. We will be also discussing some feminist and anti-feminist views on feminism. In addition to that, we will display the liberal Mary Wollstonecraft and her book « A Vindication of Rights of Women » and Olympe De Gouges and the reporter Talleyrand-Périgord and how they affected feminism to be more spread.

In the end of our research paper we will give our personal view point about women and medieval society, misogyny, male-dominated life and about feminism and the selected writers and the idea that I support and favor.

This dissertation is going to demonstrate the way medieval dominated women had succeeded in moving from harsh living conditions to better scope of life by the help of the feminist literature.

**List of Tables**

1.2 Notable Medieval Authors.....15

2.1 Famous Medieval Women.....42

2.3 Prominent Medieval Misogynists.....49

3.1 Differences between the Medieval and the Renaissance Periods.....58

3.2 Women’s Movement.....63

**List of Figures**

1.1 Feudal System Structure.....07

2.2 Common Topics of Medieval Women Writers.....44

*Table of Contents*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... I  
DEDICATIONS..... II  
ABSTRACT.....III  
TABLE OF CONTENTS..... IV  
GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....1

***Chapter One: The Medieval Era***

1.1 Introduction.....05  
1.2 Feudal System and Medieval Society.....06  
1.3 Literature of the Middle Ages.....07  
1.4 Famous Medieval Figures.....11  
1.5 Anonymous Writings of Medieval Literature.....15  
1.6 Middle English Literature Specifications.....17  
    1.6.1 Chivalric Romance and Religious Literature.....17  
    1.6.2 Courtly Love.....19  
1.7 Misogyny Definition.....20  
    1.7.1 Misogynistic and Anti-Feminist Medieval Literature.....21  
    1.7.2 The Impact of Misogyny on Medieval Women.....25  
1.8 Conclusion.....25

***Chapter Two: Feminism and Medieval Women***

2.1 Introduction.....28  
2.2 The Notion of Medieval Women.....29  
    2.2.1 Noble Women.....30

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

---

2.2.2 Peasant Women.....	31
2.3 Medieval Women’s Rights.....	32
2.4 Religious View on Medieval Women.....	32
2.5 Medieval Women as Nuns.....	34
2.6 Feminism in the Middle Ages.....	35
2.6-1 Notable Medieval Women.....	35
2.6.2 Different Topics of Medieval Female Writers.....	42
2.7 Male Standpoint on Feminism.....	45
2.7.1 Joseph Swetnam.....	45
2.7.2 Rachel Sphet’s Reply to Joseph Swetnam.....	46
2.7.3 Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord.....	47
2.7.4 Talleyrand Périgord’s View on Medieval Women.....	47
2.8 Precursor of Feminism.....	49
2.8.1 Definition of Precursor.....	49
2.8.2 Christine de Pizan.....	49
2.8.3 Olympe de Gouges.....	50
2.9 Declaration of the Rights of Women.....	51
2.10 Conclusion.....	52

### ***Chapter Three: The Impact of Medieval Feminism on Current Society***

3.1 Introduction.....	55
3.2 The Post Medieval Period.....	56
3.3 The Greatest Feminist Work after the Renaissance.....	58



## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

---

3.3.1 Mary Wollstonecraft's Biography.....	59
3.3.2 A Vindication of the Rights of Women.....	59
3.4 Women's Emancipation Movement.....	61
3.5 How did Feminist Literature Influence Gender Theory?.....	64
3.6 Conclusion.....	65
GENERAL CONCLUSION.....	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	IX
WEBLIOGRAPHY.....	XII

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*General Introduction*

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# **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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## **General introduction**

Feminism is a concept at once too broad and too complex, it can mean equality between the sexes and it can mean emancipation, and both refer to women who wanted to break with the medieval practice and to have their own place within society. The feminist study has always focused on analyzing gender inequality and the advancement of women's status and rights; it is also a movement which advocates gender equality for the sake of women's interests.

Our assertions are about women writers who caused a universal evolution after the medieval era by banishing anonymous texts and topics which were imposed by the Medieval Catholic Church. To do this, the precursors women writers initiated their objectives, their arguments, and come out with new works expressing feminism; this study is to prove the historical evolution from being inferior up to being equal.

This research paper sets a focus on the Middle Ages or the Dark Ages where society was based on the Feudal System and Church was the highest authority and the only source of education. It deals also with the notion of women and feminism of that period, because the Medieval Era was the period where women were victims of society, misogyny and patriarchy and were obviously seen as inferior and belonging only to domestic spheres.

This paper includes three main chapters; to initiate it, we are going to mention the whole social climate of the Middle Ages, starting first with the Feudal System and its structure, then we will discuss the conservative literature of the period and its specifications; where literary works were limited and almost religious, literary topics were to glorify religious stories and feudal leaders and performed in the Church by mentioning some famous literary figures who appeared during that period, in addition to anonymity.

Misogyny is another important kind of violence and hatred that medieval women lived in, so we will mention it and mention some misogynistic literary works, and its negative impact on women.

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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In the second chapter, we will touch on the image of women's life and position and the roles they played in society, in to their limited rights, and how religion pictured them. We will also deal with Feminism of that time and how it started and who were the first women to write, because they were some few female who exerted the nunnery's life where they learned how to read and write. Furthermore, we will mention the two most misogynistic men, who were strongly against feminism and women's liberation; they are Joseph Swetnam and the French bishop Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754-1838). Some medieval feminist precursors will be also mentioned in this chapter such as; Christine de Pizan and Olympe de Gouges.

The last chapter is going to be dealing with the post medieval period and the beginning of a new world of great thinkers and great works where women stated to get some kind of liberty and started to call for their equality by the help of Mary Wollstonecraft's great feminist work, "A Vindication of Rights of Women" (1792); which was a response to Talleyrand de Périgord, and where she called for women's rights in education and all social activities, this work helped women and encouraged them to create the Emancipation movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which has passed by three waves and still woks till the present time. By the end we will analyze the way feminist literature influenced the gender theory, and how women were seen after their emancipation, and how they moved to a better scope of writing and living altogether.

The purpose of this study is to show how women were suffering from misogyny and how they revolted asking for their rights and proving that they are eligible to participate in literature and show to men that they are not belonging only to domestic sphere, in addition to their emancipation movement which they succeeded to make.

The problematic that we are going to solve or find its answer is how did Feminist Literature influence gender theory? And to answer this question we will answer other questions which are;

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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- ❖ What was the notion of medieval women?
- ❖ How did medieval women break with the misogynistic society?
- ❖ How did they start using literature as a way both to show their capacities and prove their existence?
- ❖ How did Literature help women to fight their rights?

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*Chapter One*

*The Medieval Era*

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**Chapter I: The Medieval Era**

1.1 Introduction.....	05
1.2 Feudal System and Medieval Society.....	06
1.3 Literature of the Middle Ages.....	07
1.4 Famous Medieval Figures.....	11
1.5 Anonymous Writings of Medieval Literature.....	15
1.6 Middle English Literature Specifications.....	17
1.6.1 Chivalric Romance and Religious Literature.....	17
1.6.2 Courtly Love.....	19
1.7 Misogyny Definition.....	20
1.7.1 Misogynistic and Anti-Feminist Medieval Literature.....	21
1.7.2 The Impact of Misogyny on Medieval Women.....	25
1.8 Conclusion.....	25

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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### 1.1 Introduction

Somewhere between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance (5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century) there was a middle time called Middle Ages and the Latin word of Middle Ages is “Medieval”.

Life in Europe during the Middle Ages was very hard and life of all classes was dominated by the Feudal system where very few people could read and write. Since Latin was the language of the Roman Catholic Church and church was virtually the only source of education, Latin was the common language for medieval writings even in some parts of Europe that were never Romanized. It mainly glorified epic stories such as the Old French Chanson de Roland that are well-known to these days. Although the extant versions of these epics are generally considered the works of individual (but anonymous) poets, there is no doubt that they were based on their peoples' older oral traditions, a notable amount of medieval literature is anonymous. This is not only due to the lack of documents from a period, but also due to an interpretation of the author's role that differs considerably from the romantic interpretation of the term in use today. Medieval authors often deeply respected the classical writers and the Church Fathers and tended to re-tell and embellish stories they had heard or read rather than invent new stories. And even when they did, they often claimed to be handing down something from an author instead. From this point of view, the names of the individual authors seemed much less important, and therefore many important works were never attributed to any specific person. Theological works were the dominant form of literature typically found in libraries during the Middle Ages. Catholic clerics were the intellectual center of society in the Middle Ages, and it is their literature that was produced in the greatest quantity.

In this chapter we are going to talk about life of the Medieval period and the social structure of that time and the Medieval English literature and some of the famous figures who appeared in the Middle ages and deeply influenced English literature and topics that were discussed and mentioned in the literature of a period where everything was somehow restricted, so writers didn't have a



## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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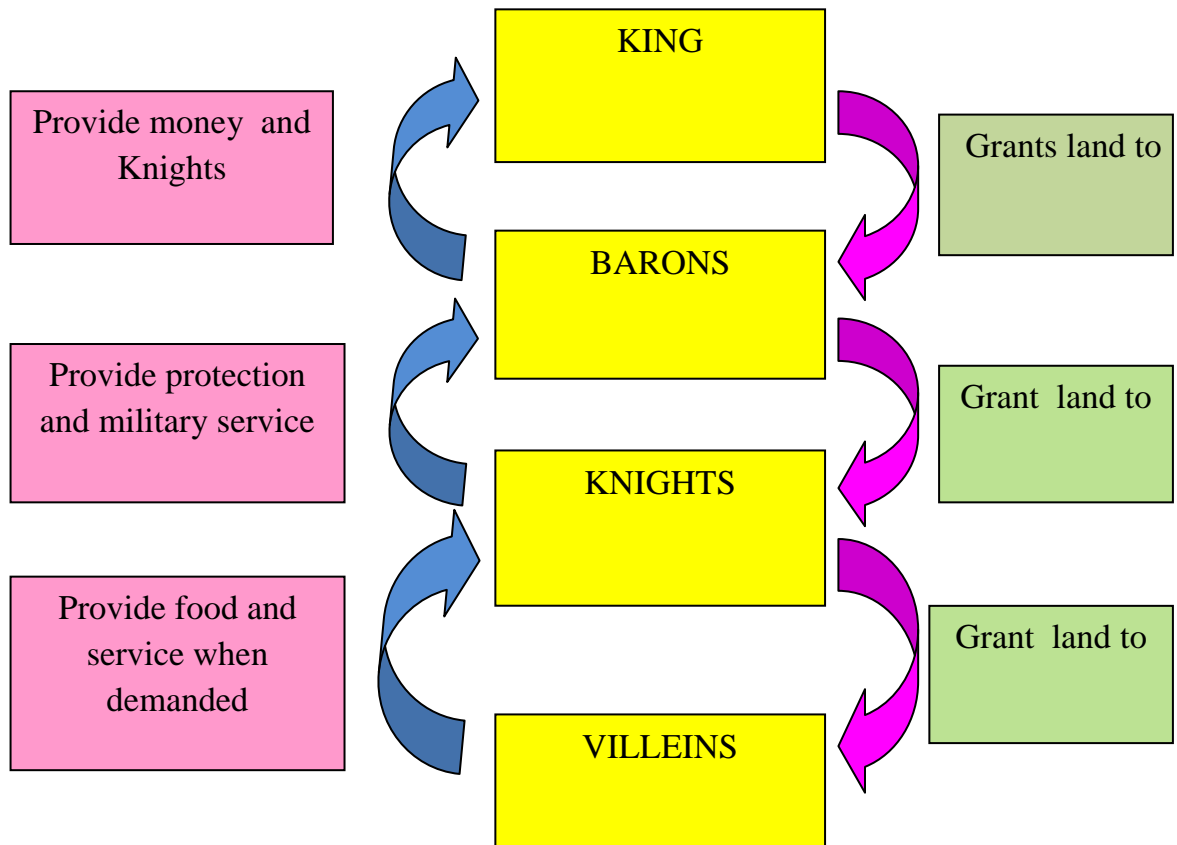
total freedom to write what they really wanted to write. In addition, misogynistic literature of the middle Times will be also mentioned in this chapter.

### **1.2 Feudal System and Medieval Society**

It was a system of social classes brought to England by William the Conqueror following the invasion of the country, it lasted many hundred years (8<sup>th</sup> century to the 15<sup>th</sup> century); it was to provide people with protection and safety.

Feudalism meant that the country was not just governed by the Kings and that the land belonged to God and kings had Divine Rights to rule, so they needed support from nobles and knights that's why they offered them lands and demanded from them military services. This system was an effective system where the King kept one quarter of the land as his personal property and all people owed allegiance to the King and their immediate superiors, this system included the King who was in complete control and owned all the land of the country and decided who would lease land to. The men, who leased land from the King, were known as "Lords" or "Barons". Lords were wealthy, powerful and had control of the land they leased from the King, they were known as Lords of the Manor (King) and established their own system of justice, minted their own money and set their own taxes, they had also to serve on the royal council, pay rent and provide the King with Knights for military services when he demands it. Knights or "Vassals" were given land by Lords in return and in addition to military service they also had to protect the Lords and their families as well as the King from attack, they were not rich as the Lords but quite wealthy. Peasants or "Serfs" were the ones given land by the Knights and in return they had to provide them with free labor, food and service whenever it was demanded, they were poor.

The following diagram demonstrates the structure of the Feudal System.



**Figure 1.1 Feudal System Structure**

### 1.3 Literature of the Middle Ages

Starting with Anglo-Saxon literature or Old English Literature which is the literature of the period of pre-French invasion in 1066 and its masterpiece is the Epic of “Beowulf”. However, by the beginning of the middle ages, the written form of the Anglo-Saxon language became less common and it underwent a gradual transition into Middle English, and the literature of the Middle Ages is the transition from rhetoric<sup>1</sup> Anglo-Saxon to Modern English. After the Norman Conquest of England there was a new aristocracy installed by William I and after a series of invasions such as Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings. Edward; Duke of Normandy took the thrown and opened a new chapter in English Literature when French became the language of the State and Aristocracy. During that time there was a trilingualism; which means that three different languages were used

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<sup>1</sup> Rhetoric; is the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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by different social classes; French became the language of the upper class and it was used in the Court and politics, Latin was the language of the Church and English was the language of ordinary and common people. Through that period religious literature continued to enjoy popularity, so most literary works dealt with religious subjects in Latin or Norman French, and among those literary works: in English Prose “Monasticism Rules” and in poetry “Hymns to the Virgin”.

Since Latin was the language of the Roman Catholic Church, which dominated Western and Central Europe, and since the Church was virtually the only source of education, Latin was a common language for medieval writings.

Middle English Bible translations, notably Wycliffe's Bible, helped to establish English as a literary language. Wycliffe's Bible is the name now given to a group of Bible translations into Middle English that were made under the direction of, or at the instigation of, John Wycliffe. They appeared between approximately 1382 and 1395 and Wycliffe's idea was to translate the Bible into the vernacular, saying in few words; “*it helpth Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue in which they know best Christ's sentence*” (Skinner, 2011:15)

In other words, Wycliffe meant that the main goal of translating the Bible is for the sake of ordinary people, so that they can learn, read and understand the Gospel which became available in the common English Language.

Although unauthorized, the work was popular, Wycliffe Bible texts are the most common manuscript literature in Middle English and almost 200 manuscripts of the Wycliffe's Bible survive.

During the Medieval Era very few people were literate and their early traditions were oral and dramatic, and the most famous writer of this period was Geoffrey Chaucer; he demonstrated the potential of Middle English as a literary language. He created a masterful blend of old and new literature using the natural rhythms of the spoken language. His work “The Canterbury Tales” proves his ability as a storyteller. Around 1362 appeared “Piers Plowman”, a long

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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allegorical poem in Middle English. It described major historical events, such as the Hundred Years War, the Black Death, and the Peasants Revolt, and also represents the picture of everyday life. "Piers Plowman" is the first poem of social protest in English Literature. The tradition of the Medieval Period was expressed in the romance, and adventurous tale celebrated the courage and loyalty of the knight; such as the legendary hero King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

Romance appeared in English literature from the 13th century, with King Horn and Havelock the Dane, and based on Anglo-Norman originals such as the Romance of Horn but it was in the 14th century that major writers in English first appeared. These are William Langland, Geoffrey Chaucer and the so-called Pearl Poet; whose most famous work is Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

William Caxton Had big influence to English literature, he had printed practically all of the English literature available at that time, including "Le Morte D'Arthur" and "The Canterbury Tales".

An important literary genre of the Middle times was the theater and one of the forms of theater in that time was the mummers' plays which are a form of early street theatre associated with the Morris dance, concentrating on themes such as Saint George and the Dragon and Robin Hood. These were folk tales re-telling old stories, and the actors travelled from town to town performing these for their audiences.

The first English plays were religious stories called "Miracles" or "Mystery Plays"; the subjects of these plays were various such as: the disobedience of Adam and Eve, Noah and the great flood and these were confined to be in the Church and were performed by Monks and it was about religious rituals<sup>2</sup> mostly talking about Christ. In addition to Miracles, Morality plays were also common in the Middle ages and the characters of these plays were not people like in "Miracles", they were virtues such as; the truth, greed, and revenge which

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<sup>2</sup> Rituals; are religious or solemn ceremonies consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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walked and talked. One of the best-known 15<sup>th</sup> century Moralities is “Everyman” which was translated from Dutch and which tells the story of the end of everyman’s life, among its characters are beauty, knowledge and good deeds. Then the theater shifted outside the Church and took different forms but still within evangelical<sup>3</sup> context as Saint’s lives, and it was soon moved to cities and townships and it required the participations of representatives from outside the church and the industry of platforms to perform those offers which was a new kind of plays known as Interlude<sup>4</sup>, they were played between the acts of long Moralities by two or three performers, they were often funny and mostly performed in colleges or rich-men houses like the “Four P’s”. After that the church couldn’t control the theater any more, but still religious plays were dominant.

According to Albert C. Baugh (1891- march 21,1981) a professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania and author of a textbook for History of The English Literature which was published in 1935; linguistically Middle English Literature undergoes four main periods:

The period between 1066 and 1250 which saw less important literature, it saw the flourishing of Anglo-Latin and Anglo-Norman literature. Only few works emerged such as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1140) or poems like Geoffrey Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis*.

1250-1350: literature during this period started to be more important belonging to the early romances written in the English language. Remarkable works such as “The Owl and The Nightingale” and the devotional work “Ancrene Riwe” (the Anchoress’s Rule) and the verse romances “Havelock the Dane and King Horn” (c.1300)

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<sup>3</sup> Evangelical; is something of or according to the teaching of the gospel or the Christian religion.

<sup>4</sup> Interlude; is a short dramatic piece, especially of a light or farcical character, formerly introduced between the parts or acts of miracle and morality plays or given as part of other entertainments.

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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1350-1400: this period saw a magnificence of literature. Great names arose and wrote at this time; Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, John Gower (author of the narrative miscellany *Confessio Amantis*) and John Wycliffe.

15<sup>th</sup> Century: this century knew the rise of English drama. Morality plays like *Mankind* were written and performed and in 1476 William Caxton opened the first printing press in London and in 1485 he printed Sir Thomas Malory's "*Le Morte d'Arthur*" (the Death of Arthur).

Through the historical timeline of the Middle Ages we notice that Middle English Literature includes three main phases: first; Medieval literature in the time of Normans and Saxons where it was very conservative and moderate, second; Renaissance or Re-birth with a more writing freedom and emancipation of women, then the contemporary literature with a total freedom of writing. So, it is obviously that women really proved their existence and their capacities in participating in literature.

### **1.4 Famous Medieval Figures**

English Literature of the Middle Ages knew enormous names of writers, poets, and authors who are still having their place and influence in nowadays' literature and still best known as fathers of literature.

#### **i. Geoffrey Chaucer**

The most significant Middle English author was Geoffrey Chaucer the exact date and place of his birth are not known but he probably lived between 1340 and 1400, he was active in the late 14th century and often regarded as the father of English Literature. He was born in London to a middle-class merchant family, very little information exists about his education but his writings reveal his level of education, he was also fluent in several languages such as French, Italian and Latin. Chaucer's first published work was "*The Book of The Duchess*" a long poem of more than 1300 lines which was an elegy for Duchess of Lancaster addressed to her widower. In 1372 he went to Italy where he became more familiar with the writings of three important Italian authors: Dante

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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(author of the Divine Comedy, 1265–1321), Giovanni Boccaccio (author of The Decameron, 1313-1375), and Petrarch (perfected the sonnet form, 13074).

During this period he wrote “The House of Fame”, “The Legend of Good Women” and “The Parliament of Fowl”.

Between 1387 and 1400 Chaucer gave much time to the writing of his famous work “The Canterbury Tales”, his plan for this work called for two tales for each one of the twenty nine pilgrims who were making a journey from Southwark, England to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury, England. Chaucer was supposed to write 120 tales but only 21 stories were finished.



Geoffrey Chaucer

Source: <http://www.biography.com/people/geoffrey-chaucer-9245691>

### **ii. William Caxton**

The first English printer who exerted an important influence on English Literature as a translator and a publisher, he was born on 1422 in Kent, England. He set up the first printing press in 1476, a few years before he had visited Cologne where he acquired his knowledge in the technique of printing and returned to England to apply this new art. From then on he devoted himself to writing and printing; kings, nobles and rich merchants were Caxton’s patrons and sometimes commissioned special book.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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The large number of books and devotional works published by Caxton were the staple reading of most literate people; he also printed nearly all the English Literature available in his time such as the “Canterbury Tales” and other poems of Chaucer, John Gower’s “Confessio amantis”, Sir Thomas Malory’s “Morte d’Arthur”.

William’s precise date of death is not certain, but he died in London probably in 1491, and despite the fact that the English language was changing rapidly in his time; Caxton helped facilitating the expansion of English vocabulary, the inflection and syntax.

Caxton translated 24 books and by the time of his death, he had published about 100 items of various kinds.



William Caxton

Source: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/caxton\\_william.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/caxton_william.shtml)

### iii. Sir Thomas Malory

Another famous figure of the Middle Ages was born around 1416 in England, Malory or Malleorre was a layman writer who had no professional knowledge or writing skills. As a young adult he was a land owner and in 1441 he became a knight, he inherited an estate from his father and became involved in politics and around 1445 Malory served in the British Parliament, but in 1450 he started committing crimes as theft, rape and extortion.



## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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He wrote some of the book « Morte d'Arthur » in the prison which tells the epic tale of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, the work was printed by William Caxton and was published in 1485.

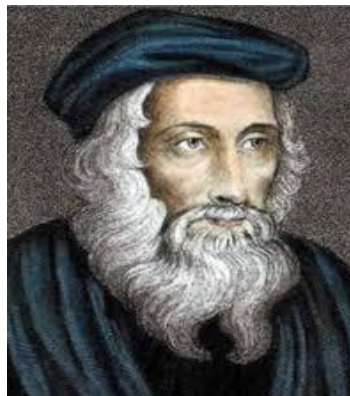


Sir Thomas Malory

Source: <http://students.ou.edu/P/Steven.R.Peck-1/story4.html>

### iv. John Wycliffe

An English scholar, theologian, philosopher, preacher and a Protestant how was born Yorkshire, England probably in 1330, he is known best of his role in translating the Bible into the common language. He was considered as an early reformer, he was a priest and believed that a true Church consisted of Jesus Christ and all of his followers, not the Pope and the institutionalized Catholic Church, Wycliffe's followers were known as "Lollards", the Lollard movement was a precursor to the protestant reformation.



John Wycliffe

Source: <http://www.hipswellparish.org.uk/example-page/john-wycliffe/>

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

The following table summarizes all the previous figure and their important works and position within the English literature.

<b>Notable Medieval Authors</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Major Works</b>	<b>Importance in English Literature</b>
<b>Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400)</b>	The most famous figure of the medieval literature, father of English literature and an English author.	“The Book of the Duchess”, “House of Fame”, “The Canterbury Tales”.	These are the most famous medieval men who had and still have very important roles in shaping the English Literature.
<b>William Caxton (1422-1491)</b>	English writer, publisher and the first English printer.	Print of “The Canterbury Tales”, “Confessio Amantis” and “Morte d’Arthur”	Writers of the medieval period still have their value and their works are still popular thanks to the translation and the invention of the printing press that help a lot in saving such important and rich document from a period where there was not easy for people learn how to write and make an effective work.
<b>Sir Thomas Malory (1416-1471)</b>	English politician, Knight, landowner and a layman writer.	“Morte d’Arthur”	
<b>Jhon Wycliffe (1330-1384)</b>	English scholar, theologian, philosopher and a preacher.	Translation of the Bible	

**Figure 1.2 Notable Medieval Authors**

### 1-5 Anonymous Writings of Medieval Literature

During the medieval period a lot of nameless works, or works by unknown writers appeared. Many important works of that period are not signed belonging to no one; for instance “Everyman” which is the best known of the morality plays of the 15<sup>th</sup> century that was written by an anonymous writer. The full title of the play is “Summoning of Everyman”; it was first written in Dutch then translated

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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into English. This play show how Christians should live and what they have to do in order to save their souls.

The characters of this play are virtues such as; God who is the Supreme Being, Death, Good Deeds, Knowledge, Confession, Angel...

The play is about Christian salvation and the good and evil deeds that are going to be tallied by God after death, the author begins the play with an introduction that makes the reader pay attention and reminds him that a judgment day will come for sure; *“Here beginneth a treatise how the High Father of Heaven sendeth death to summon every creature to come and give account of their lives in this world, and is in manner of a moral play”*. (Buster. Rasmussen, 2009: 181)

These introducing words mean how God (Father of Heaven) sends death to fetch every creature to come and give computation of their lives in this world.

The play opens with a messenger preparing the path for God who commands Death to bring Everyman for reckoning. When Death foretells Everyman about his demise he begs Death to be delayed, but Death tells him that there is no way for that. Everyman is scared and starts to look for a companion for his journey, he asks Fellowship, cousin and kindred, material possessions, goods, but they all abandon him to his own fate. Then he calls for his own good deeds that are smaller than his sins and nonetheless they ask everyman to call upon his knowledge. Knowledge comes and asks him to call for beauty, strength and discretion to help him, each of them promise to stand by Everyman, however, when approaching to the grave they all start to abandon him one by one except his own good deeds, and when Everyman is in heaven, Doctor who represent a wise theologian in medieval times says that his own good deeds are all that he is left with and they are too small to make him enter heaven.

At the end Everyman got a lesson that the good deeds are all that stand by people and are the only thing that save people's souls and send them to heaven.

### 1.6 Middle English Literature Specifications

Literature of the Medieval Period was somehow limited and mostly dealing with what is known as Chivalry and Courtly Love glorifying the bravery and the boldness of the Kings and the Knights of that time, these topics are not all that Medieval Literature dealt with, but they are the best known literary topics of that period.

#### 1.6.1 Chivalric Romance and Religious Literature

Religious topics were the dominant topics of medieval literature. Most medieval writers of that period were the clerics<sup>5</sup> and since Christianity was the religion of the medieval period, Christian legends flourished in form of the romance or what is known as Chivalric Romance. As a code of brave and courteous conduct and a literary genre, Romance or Chivalric Romance is a type of prose and verse narrative that was widespread during the high Middle Ages.

“Chivalry” is derived from the French word “Chevalier” meaning a horseman or a knight, and it is strongly related to knighthood referring to gallant and brave knightly values such as; honor, bravery, honesty, and important part of Chivalry was to show respect to women.

The standard plot of Chivalric Romance involves a single Knight seeking to win a lady’s favor by undertaking a dangerous quest encountering mysterious hermits, confronting evil and brigands, suffering from wounds and starvation. Medieval Romances often focused on supernatural events originating in magic, spells and fairy trickery.

Generally speaking, Romance means a near perfect hero who is a Knight idealized for his noble and chivalrous behavior and his daring deeds and he is going to face an enemy evil (villain) who is the protagonist and is really wicked. The hero sets at the journey or the quest for adventure or love in order to fulfill his hero status and there are supernatural mysterious elements in the plot.

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<sup>5</sup> Clerics; are priests or religious leaders, especially Christian or Muslim ones.

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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“The Song of Roland” is a major example of Chivalric Romance which describes the 8<sup>th</sup> century knights of the Dark Ages and the battle fought by the Emperor Charlemagne. “The Song of Roland” was written between 1098 and 1100, it describes the ideal knight Roland who was a very loyal defender of his Lord Charlemagne and his code of conduct became understood as a code of 3 “Chivalry”. The major representations of the knights of Chivalry are:

- To fear God and maintain his Church
- To serve the liege lord in valor and faith
- To give succor to widows and orphans
- To live by honor for glory
- To speak the truth at all time
- To respect the honor of women

Another major example of Chivalry is the legends of King Arthur and the Knights which is traced as far back as the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it is written in different versions and by different writers such as; Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Historia Regum Britanniae*), Robert de Baron (*Merlin and The Grail*) and Sir Thomas Malory (*Le Morte D’Arthur*). However, they all share the same Heroism of King Arthur and his Knights who met at a Round Table and went on several quests.

In the Legend of King Arthur and his knights the Chivalric code implicated how the knights were to behave toward ladies, God, their king, and their country. The moralities of integrity and honor over greed and pride were the official oaths that the knights were to follow. In addition, the elements of Chivalry were incorporated into honor, devotion pity and humility.

In the legends, there is always a woman who is in tribulation and distress and a problem that only an Arthurian Knight can solve, and the quest is generally involved in the story, it may be to take back lands that have been stolen and the greatest quest of the Arthurian legend was to find the Holy Grail; which was the cup of Jesus Christ at the last supper, good usually conquers evil.

### 1.6.2 Courtly Love

According to dictionary definition; Courtly Love means an illicit form of love celebrated in the literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in which a knight devotes himself to a noblewoman who is usually married and shows indifference to preserve her reputation.

Courtly Love is a form of romance that occurred in the Middle Ages particularly from the 12th to the 14th centuries amongst the upper class and it was practiced by the members of the Court, and it is a literary fiction created for the entertainment of the nobility. The terms that appeared in the actual Medieval period are “Amour Henestous” (honest love), “Fin Amor” (refined love), it begun in a ducal and princely courts of Aquitaine (south-western France); Provence (south-eastern France), Champagne (wine region in north-east of France) at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

“Courtly Love” was first brought to England by Eleanor of Aquitaine (1124-1204); one of the wealthiest women in Western Europe during the Middle Ages and a member of the Ramnulfid<sup>6</sup> dynasty of rulers in Southern France, she became Queen consort first of France the of England between 1154 and 1189, she brought to the English Court her interest in poetry, music and art.

The Courtly love of the Middle Ages was to be the love service between a young knight who serves his lady and this love inspired him to do great deeds in order to win her favor. This Courtly love relationship was not between husband and wife. However, it was an idealized sort of relationship that could not exist in real life.

Geoffrey Chaucer was greatly influenced by the Courtly romances and used many of the standards and conventions of Courtly love in various stories in the Canterbury Tales where his pilgrims represent nearly all levels of social scale

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<sup>6</sup> Ramnulfid; the Ramnulfids, or the house of poitiers, were a French dynasty ruling the county of poitou and duchy of aquitaine in the 9th through 12th centuries.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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and range anywhere from a knight to a miller to a person to a pardoner, and their status determine what kind of tale they will tell.

The Knight's Tale is in the highest rank, tells a tale that is the courtliest of all the other tales. The characters are of noble status and represent the best and the ideal type, all the characters are exalted by being perfect. When describing each character, Chaucer said that there was never any one nobler and more courageous and more beautiful than this particular character. For example when describing "Theseus", Chaucer says; *"That gretter was ther noon under the sonne"* (Chaucer, 2012:37)

This means that there was no one greater under the sun. Chaucer describes Theseus as being the bringer of the rules and that he is full of wisdom and Chivalry. Theseus was not just a ruler; he has also the wisdom and fairness to rule justly and wisely.

### 1.7 Misogyny Definition

Misogyny means the hatred of women. The word comes from the Greek word "mesein" meaning to hate and "gyne" meaning women.

In feminism theory, misogyny describes a stand that is perceived to be negative and demeaning toward women as a group. It also means scorning women because they are just females and seeing them less deserving and worthy than men, and people, usually men who display hateful behaviors that oppress women are said to be "misogynists".

Misogyny is also a personal and emotional prejudice resulting in contempt, pejorative and scorn towards women who want to break and step outside the bounds sexism.

In the Medieval culture misogyny was always present and it was a virulent way of treating women and an exclusively male-domination and a part of anti-feminism.

### 1.7.1 Misogynistic and Anti-Feminist Medieval Literature

*“Misogynist writings identified women as lustful, arrogant, deceitful, physically disgusting, loquacious, petulant, vain, and in general inferior to men”*  
(Bettela, 2005: 10)

As mentioned above, Medieval literature was conservative and moderate and it didn't accept the feminist idea, it was full of male authors and characters, so being a male in the Middle ages meant being a powerful and a lucky person who can easily participate in literature.

Medieval English literature show the monstrous image of women who are always blamed for men's downfall and are seen as seducers and betrayers of men.

The discourse of misogyny and anti-feminism runs like a rich vein throughout the breath of medieval literature, most texts and works were written against women and were to show the ugly image of them and about the faults of women and often deriding them. For instance; the Wife of Bath's tale of Geoffrey Chaucer is one example of anti-feminism. It is a tale that starts with the wife sharing information about her sexual experiences and about having five husbands which made her an expert rather than being just experienced, she defends her position and sees no problem in having married five times. The tale is about a young knight who rapes a maiden and when the king decides to kill him, Arthur's lady intermediates and asks the king to give him another chance by granting him a quest which is to find what women really want otherwise he will be beheaded. After asking many women, the knight was desperate, and finally he meets an ugly old woman and he asks her his question, but she has a condition and having no way to refuse, the knight accepts, and after providing him with the right answer and saving his life the old woman asks him for marriage and he sadly accepts. However, at the end the ugly woman transforms to a beautiful and a good lady and they have a happy marriage.



## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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In her prologue which is a part of the Canterbury Tales, the Wife of Bath was portrayed as a manipulative and a deceitful women who is shameless about her sexual exploits and how she uses her sexual power to obtain what she wants while this image was not the describing all women of that time, this female character is meant to embody women's stupidity and deceitfulness and lewdness. In the tale Alisoun discusses her five marriages and her tactics for gaining power and financial independence through the use of her body and Alisoun's way of courting Janklyn while she is married is another image that shows women as deceptive.

Another major theme of this tale is dissatisfaction with the religious thoughts. The Wife is Christian and the common thought that was introduced during the Middle Ages was that since the Bible depicts Jesus attending only one wedding, then this is God's demand that people should marry only once, and despite this, Alisoun defends her right to remarry, and she is also described as autonomous and that she outlines her strategies for control herself and the situations around her although true autonomy for women in the Middle Ages was an impossibility.

Through the Wife of Bath's Tale, Chaucer tried to reveal women who were trying to be rebellion against the male-dominated society and he described them as having twisted understanding of the Bible and God. For instance, when she talks about the Bible she says; *"wher can ye saye, in any manere age, that hye God defended mariage by expres word? I pray yow, telleth me. Or where comanded he virginitee?"* (Chaucer. Benson. 2008: 106)

In English words, this can be translated as; where can you find, in any historical period, that high God forbad marriage by express word? I pray you tell me, Or where commanded he virginity?

Here, she justifies bad behavior with the Bible and her misinterpretations of it which marks her as foolish rather than educated and corroborates the

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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stereotype of women in medieval times who were not capable to understand the deep meaning of the Bible.

Antifeminism was the loudest voice among the competing views about women in the middle ages; the society was revolving only around men, and another work that premised on antifeminism is “The Nun’s Priest” of Chaucer which falls under the genre of beast fable. This genre is a tale that has animals in it with human qualities; these animals are capable to talk, to dream and to use wits and intelligence to manipulate others just like people do.

The story is about a widow who possesses a beautiful rooster called Chauncleer and seven hens. One day Chauncleer wakes up from a terrible nightmare, lady Pertelote; Chauncleer’s hen wife mocks him and tells him that being afraid of dreams is cowardly and by showing such fear he lost her love. Later, Chauncleer sees a sight of a fox named Don Russel hiding near the farmyard, the rooster begins to run, but the fox says that he came just to hear Chauncleer’s beautiful voice, and the rooster believes him and starts to sing and at that moment the fox grasps him about the neck, and when the hens see him, they start making a noise and run after the fox with the widow and the dogs. Chauncleer asks the fox to turn around and insult his stalkers and when the fox opens his mouth, the rooster escapes to a treetop when the fox tries again to appeal him, but the cock has learned a lesson and won’t believe him.

In “The Nun’s Priest Tale” women are represented by “hens”, and they are treated the same way as women were treated in Chaucer’s time; “*Seven hens for him to do all his pleasure*” (Cambdin, 1999: 65)

The hens are only for the rooster’s pleasure and so were women of that time. The rooster represents the priest and he controls everything that happens in the farm just like the priest does with the Church.

Chaucer contends that women’s advice should not be taken because their advice and opinions lead to men’s downfall and they are the ones to be blamed for men’s faults. “*Womane’s counsels be full often cold, womane’s counsel*

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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*brought us first to woe and made Adam from Paradise to go*”(Chaucer. Purves, 2012: 550)

As descendents of Eve, women were always blame from being the reason of men's fall and they were always the ones to blame; *“If I counsel of women woulde blame”* (ibid: 550)

Sir Gawain and The Green Knight is another antifeminist work by an anonymous writer in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, where a knight called Gawain takes a challenge and cuts off the head of the Green Knight, and after one year and a day he goes seeking him. In his way to the Green Chapel<sup>7</sup>, Gawain finds a castle and stays there with a lord and his lady and an old woman. When the lord goes hunting, his lady starts to seduce Gawain and ask him for a love token, he refuses her but she takes some kisses from him and when the knight leaves to continue his search on the green knight he meets him and know that the green knight is actually named Bertilak and he is the lord of the castle where Gawain recently stayed.

In this story, misogyny stands in the way women show bad behavior to strangers by being seductress and manipulate men by inviting them to their bodies; for instance when lady Bertilak says; *“ye ar welcum to my cors”* (Winny, 1992: 70)

In other words she is calling him and trying to seduce him by telling him you are welcome to my body, which means that she uses her body as a tool to get what she needs.

Morgan on the other hand is another character who is a portrait of ugliness who at the end is revealed to be the one who enhances the Green knight to go to Arthur's court in order to test his knights; so she controls both Lord Bertialk and Lady Bertilak that's why she is classed amongst the wicked women.

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<sup>7</sup> Chapel; is a small building for Christian worship, typically one attached to an institution or private house.

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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The main message behind this story is to never trust a woman, since Gawain realizes that he has been tricked by a lady and even the holiest men are beguiled by women.

### **1.7.2 The Impact of Misogyny on Medieval Women**

In the Middle Ages women fated to be sinner, being considered as sinful and imperfect being affected women in a bad way, because they were treated according to Eve. Medieval women were suffering from being inferior, exploited, controlled and dominated. Women in that time suffered also from being seen as deceitful and agent of evil.

Although not all of medieval women were deceitful, the misogynistic way of thinking touched all women of that time, and feeling that they were inferior touches them emotionally and that was the reason behind women rejecting marriage and offering their love to God taking the Church as their home, they did so because they knew that men hated them and didn't trust them, so they couldn't marry him if there is no love and no trust.

However, some women were strong enough to get over misogyny, they chose to create their path and broke with the male-dominated society, although most of them were living in the convents, they succeeded to have their personal goals and to share their opinions and defend their rights and prove themselves as equal beings to men.

### **1.8 Conclusion**

The Middle Ages were also called The Dark Ages because life during that period was not easy, people were not equal and didn't play the same roles in medieval society.

Church was the main controller that guided almost all sides of the medieval society, and people of that time had a big a kind of gap in their culture because of the lack of knowledge, while very few were educated thanks to the Church and they used their culture and education in their works and writings which were

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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mostly dealing with the historical events and the social structure. These works were often magnifying the Feudal Leaders, Kings and Court using the codes of Chivalry and the Courtly love in addition to the religious literature. Meanwhile, women of the Middle Ages didn't really participate in literature because they were a little marginalized and played inferior roles belonging just to the domestic sphere and didn't receive any kind of education and they nevertheless were attacked by misogyny.

The next chapter will show the position of Medieval Women, their rights and women writers and what topics they dealt with, it will deal also with the most known precursors of Feminism and the male views on women.

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*Chapter Two*

*Feminism and Medieval Women*

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**Chapter two: Feminism and Medieval Women**

2.1 Introduction.....	28
2.2 The Notion of Medieval Women.....	29
2.2.1 Noble Women.....	30
2.2.2 Peasant Women.....	31
2.3 Medieval Women’s Rights.....	32
2.4 Religious View on Medieval Women.....	32
2.5 Medieval Women as Nuns.....	34
2.6 Feminism in the Middle Ages.....	35
2.6-1 Notable Medieval Women.....	35
2.6.2 Different Topics of Medieval Female Writers.....	42
2.7 Male Standpoint on Feminism.....	45
2.7.1 Joseph Swetnam.....	45
2.7.2 Rachel Sphet’s Reply to Joseph Swetnam.....	46
2.7.3 Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord.....	47
2.7.4 Talleyrand Périgord’s View on Medieval Women.....	47
2.8 Precursor of Feminism.....	49
2.8.1 Definition of Precursor.....	49
2.8.2 Christine de Pizan.....	49
2.8.3 Olympe de Gouges.....	50
2.9 Declaration of the Rights of Women.....	51
2.10 Conclusion.....	52

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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### 2.1 Introduction

According to the first chapter, the Middle Ages were not a comfortable era for women to live. During that period women were clearly seen as inferior to men and were totally dominated by the male members of their families and society in general.

Medieval women were oppressed and exploited, they had to follow men's order and they were regarded as the subjections to men. Those women had little or no roles to play within society, they were just belonging to the domestic sphere and were often non-educated mothers and sisters who held a quite limited rights while they held only duties toward the male members of the family, so women in the Middle Ages experienced a kind of marginalization in terms of gender, and the perception of gender was strongly influenced by the Catholic Church which didn't present women in the best light, the Church regarded women as responsible for the fall of man.

Feminism didn't really exist in The Middle Ages because of the male-dominated society and the inequality of gender in an era where women were just a property held by men, this idea made women ignored and seen as agents of evil and this ugly image was mentioned through literature of that time as mentioned before.

In spite of all the misogyny and the marginalization that Medieval Women experienced, there were some women who took the pen to defend their rights and honor against misogynistic attack and to support their contribution in society.

This chapter will analyze the position that women held in The Dark Ages which were really dark on the side of women, it will be also discussing the harsh jobs and works that were done by women whether peasant or noble they were and the rights they had, including the most famous Medieval Women who entered the history and got a great position in literature through their works and achievements and the nature of their writings, and the place where those women



## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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writers lived, in addition to The Medieval notion and views on feminism such as Talleyrand-Périgord and Olympe de Gouges.

### 2.2 The Notion of Medieval Women

During the Middle Ages women held a difficult position in society, and this stereotype required them to be far from the life outside the home.

*“The female venue was conceived of as private, domestic responsibilities such as cleaning and cooking or overseeing servants in such pursuits, child care, maintaining the kitchen garden where herbs, small fruits, and vegetable were raised, taking care of poultry, producing cloth for the household’s use”*

(Mitchell, 2007: 131)

All Medieval women whether noble or peasant belonged to the house responsibilities while they forgot about their rights in being important members of society as men.

Being a woman in the Middle Ages meant being a wife, a mother and a house- keeper who is considered as property to her husband and her life was divided between family, marriage and religion. Women got married as young as eleven or twelve and they had to obey their husbands and all the male members of the family. Women in the Middle Ages were mistreated and they were beaten if they misbehaved or tried to emancipate. They had just to provide their husbands with a clean house, food and raise children; they held only the domestic responsibilities and all of their properties became their husband’s properties; *“Women were assumed to be inherently inferior to men and properly guided by men”* (Rigby, 2003: 95).

Inferiority of gender meant that just because they were born women they couldn’t have control even over themselves, so they had to be controlled by men and this view made them always in a second position and they had never felt free in doing anything or making decisions, especially women couldn’t make mistakes otherwise they would be harshly punished; *“Marital disloyalty by the*

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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*wife was harshly punished, but the husband could enjoy many more liberties”* (Tierney, 1999: 911).

It is clear that there was maladjustment in men’s and women’s rights, disloyalty is not allowable, but in the Middle Ages, women were punished for that while men didn’t and they held rights on things that women were not allowed to do.

In terms of education women were not educated and were intellectually inferior to men and couldn’t participate in any social activities, they suffered also from the misogynistic society and marginalization when they got the image of devil, they were also accused by being manipulators and deceptive who can knockout men using their bodies or sexual aspects; *“Women were thought to be sexually voracious and had to be kept in check”* (Ward, 2006: 3).

In other words, literature had given society an ugly image about women who deceive their men and made relationship with somebody else, as well as women who used their sexual experience to get what they wanted just like “The Wife of Bath” did.

### 2.2.1 Noble Women

Noble Women in The Middle Ages lived a little in better conditions than other women. However, they did never chose their path of life or at least chose who would be their husbands.

The marriage of a Noble Woman was extremely arranged for the benefits of two families, and Noble Women got married at a very young age and were expected to bring with them a dowry<sup>8</sup> to the marriage whether money, land or goods and after marriage a woman and all her property became the personal property of the husband and law gave the husbands the full rights over his wife.

Noble Women’s role was to run the estate when their husbands, fathers and brothers were off fighting, and sometimes participated and fought in the war

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<sup>8</sup> Dowry; property or money brought by a bride to her husband on their marriage.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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defending their estates. The main duty of a Noble Woman was to give her husband a son, and although women played important roles in the Middle Ages, still they could not make decisions of importance and still felt inferior; *“The noblewoman always remained in a subordinate position and saw ruled by her husband despite all representational duties at court”* (Tierney, 1999: 911).

Even if she was a noble woman she couldn't have control over herself, she was taught to be controlled by her husband.

### 2.2.2 Peasant Women

Life of peasants in general was hard, and peasant women were considered worthless and they had no choices in their entire life. To get married, a peasant woman needed the approval of the king (lord), and after marriage, peasant women had to help their peasant husbands with their daily chores and had many domestic responsibilities such as preparing food and cleaning the house.

Peasant women often participated in vital cottage industries, for instance; baking and manufacturing textiles, and the most common symbol of peasant women was the distaff for spinning flax and wool. They also participated in the farm work, feeding the chickens and collecting their eggs, milking cows, sheep and goats...

*“A peasant woman is instructed to sweep the house, set the table, milk cows, suckle calves, strain milk, get her children up and dressed, cook meals, send corn and malt to the mill, make butter and cheese, feed pigs and chickens, tend the vegetable and herb gardens, prepare flax and hemp for linens and wool for yarn, winnow grain, take excess supplies to market, and her husband in the field whenever she can”*

(Bardsely, 2007: 67)

Work dominated peasants' days, some peasant families lived in their Lord's castle where peasant women had menial<sup>9</sup> tasks and worked hard for the sake of their Lord and his family. In contrast to aristocratic and noble women, the

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<sup>9</sup> Menial; work which doesn't require much skill and it lacks prestige.

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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peasant women had very little time to care for their children, because they were too busy with the working on the farm and on the castle.

### **2.3 Medieval Women's Rights**

As humans, Medieval Women didn't have rights, they had only duties. In terms of education women had a little education which was considered as the preparation for marriage, they had an educational training about how to be a good wife. Very few girls from the upper class were had the opportunity to be sent to the nunneries for their education, while the peasants were not allowed to go there, they learned only the alphabets and the religion, and the reason behind them learning the religion was to control their thoughts.

Men did not accept the idea of women's education, they feared that women could read and write filthy<sup>10</sup> and love letters which might degenerate women's minds and thinking.

When it comes to marriage, women had no voice and choice; their parents are the ones who choose whose the man their daughter will be married to. Women or better to say girls since they got married very young had to obey their fathers and the decision they took for them, and the husbands were often from the same social status as his wife.

### **2.4 Religious View on Medieval Women**

The Medieval Public Opinion and the Legal System were guided by the Church and Aristocracy, and these two authorities agreed upon the idea that women had to be placed as servile to men.

According to religion women's inferiority to men was because of their sex (female), this inferiority by nature was also in the fact that woman was made from the rib of a man (Adam and Eve) and the Church blamed Eve for the fall of Man and the Medieval women were seen as the descendants of Eve.

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<sup>10</sup> Filthy; is something which is dirty and disgusting.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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Medieval women were blamed for anything that happened; they were seen as signs of evil and imperfect animals that always deceive; *“What else is a woman, but foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours”* (Levack, 2004: 62).

Women were related to all what is bad and evil, and because of their gender they could not have equality, they were also seen as weaker creatures and this idea is even supported by philosophy. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle also regarded women as inferior creatures who are inferior by nature. For instance; according to Plato (427- 347) the main function of women in a society is the production of children especially sons. For him, women are physically degenerated, believing that man is the only one who is created and given soul directly by God, while women are just second generation who must spend their life under the control of men.

Aristotle (322- 384) also agreed with the notion that women are deficient by nature, he believed that women defective in anything.

According to Aristotle, men rightly take charge over women because they won superior intelligence; he compares the relationship between man and woman to the relationship between human beings and animals;

*“It is the best for all tame animals to be ruled by human beings. For this is how they are kept alive. In the same way, the relationship between the male and the female is by nature such the male is higher, the female lower, that the male rules and the female is ruled”.*

(Cohen. Gonzalez, 2009: 20)

In his text, Aristotle describes women as animals that know nothing and have to be ruled by a superior power which is held by men, i.e. women are not intelligent and cannot make decisions or do anything without men, and they stay always under his pity and control.

### 2.5 Medieval Women as Nuns

Nuns were a religious community of women, in other words Women of the Church or simply Sisters.

Many women or girls from the wealthiest families were placed into convents by their families; “*The medieval nunnery was essentially an aristocratic institution open to all females of the upper classes*” (Daichman, 1986: XII).

Females from the upper class were welcome to the nunneries because they brought with them a dowry which was added to the wealth of the nunnery or the convent. Once women joined the nunneries they remained nuns for their entire life and they were seen as married to God and they placed rings in their fingers and wore a wedding crown or headdress.

Families sent their daughters to the nunneries in order to have an education and to learn reading and writing. However, this was not the only reason behind women entering the religious life and becoming Sisters, many other women chose the Church as an escape from their life especially from marriage, they did not want to get married and have children and live in a hard conditions, that's why they escaped to the Church and devoted their lives to serve God, hoping that their afterlife will be better.

The daily life of the Medieval Religious Women was dedicated to worship, working in the convent, attending the Church and spending many hours doing a private prayer, and their life in the nunnery was not much better than the life of the other Medieval Women, they had also to wash and cook for the monastery, raise necessary supplies of vegetables and grain and provide medical care for the community.

### 2.6 Feminism in the Middle Ages

During the Medieval period and within the Medieval Society, feminism was the last thing to think about or to deal with, women of that time face a lot of troubles in their society holding different and inferior rights from those of men.

In terms of education, a very large part of medieval women were not educated and cultivated, that was due to the misogynistic thing of the medieval society. They had a big privation of education except nuns and sisters who chose the Church and give up their social life; *“Women rarely had pens in their hands; the power to fashion a text of one’s own was not readily obtained”* (Dinshaw. Wallace, 2003: 2).

A very few women could get paper and write words about their thoughts, feelings or intentions, and the main reason was the lack of education. Despite the patriarchy and misogynistic society and tough conditions, there was a kind of feminist awareness. Some women tried emancipation, but they were blamed by society, those women wanted to break with the male-dominated society and to have their imprint in their society and to be important parts of it. Others chose literature as a direction to express their feelings and to call for equality. Here is a list of the most important and famous Medieval Women who succeeded in entering the historical and the literary worlds, although there are plenty of women but I have chosen the most famous ones.

#### 2.6.1 Notable Medieval Women

##### i. Hroswitha of Gandersheim

Hroswitha or Roswitha; a poet, historian and first dramatist or playwright of Saxon background, she was born possibly in 935, nothing is known about her early years, she was a canoness of a convent in Gandersheim where she wrote plays on Christian themes, poems and prose. She is known for being the first women to write plays.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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Hroswitha's writings are in Latin since it was the standard language of scholarly writings, she wrote book of Legends; eight holy legends and Saint's lives in verse. The first legend "Maria" treats the life of the Virgin Mary using the theme of the virtue of chastity, while the second legend "Ascensio" specifies the ascension<sup>11</sup> of Christ into heaven. Book of Drama and book of Epics; such as the Epic of "Primordia Coenobii Gandershemensis"; meaning Origins of the Abbey of Gandersheim, in addition to religious poems, but the works of Epics are lost while those of Legends and Drama still exist. Most of Hroswitha's works recite life of the martyrs<sup>12</sup>, where she magnifies those who sacrificed their lives and lived in harsh conditions, forgoing all their material possessions and sexual pleasure in the pursuit of spiritual goals.

Hroswitha occupies a very important position in the history of Modern European Literature, and the date of her death is not certain, but she probably died in 973. However, her works didn't appear until 1491.

### **i. Anna Comnena**

Anna Comnena (1083-1148), a Byzantine princess, political figure, medieval historian and a medical writer; the eldest daughter of the Emperor Alexius I; Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire. She is considered as the world's first female historian.

As most of the royal women, Anna was well educated, she received an education rarely available to other females, and she expected to take her father's place as head of an empire after his death, but things went against her desire. In 1097 she married an historian and by the inducement of her mother she tried to seize the throne for him, but she failed and was forced to give up the Court, and after her husband's death she entered a monastery where she started her writings. Her works are generally about the daily life at court and the domestic disputes, battles and exchanges between her father and the Western Crusaders, she described also weapons, she wrote also about her family's deeds such as "The

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<sup>11</sup> Ascension; is the act of rising to an important position or a higher level.

<sup>12</sup> Marthys; are people who have been killed because of their religious or other beliefs.



## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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Alexiad"; a complete 15 volumes written in Greek rather than Latin which is a major source of information about the life and the reign of her father Alexius, and it was written as a glorification to his accomplishments. She wrote also about her isolation at the convent. In her works, Anna revealed herself as a female who was given a prominent permission to write what she thought.

### **ii. Hildegard of Bingen**

A German writer, composer and a philosopher, she is also known as Saint Hildegard of Bingen or Sybil of the Rhine, she was born in 1098 as the tenth child to a wealthy family, her father was a knight, at the age of eight she was sent into a monastery at Mount St Disibode to be educated, and this was the will of her parents, and when she was eighteen she became a nun, then the head of the female community at the monastery.

Hildegard had a series of continual religious visions since her childhood until she was 24 years old; all of her visions were later written and explained by her. She also wrote her biography, and she was famous for writing treatises about natural history and medicinal because she was well known for her healing powers involving practical application of plants, trees, herbs, and precious stones, in addition to music and moral plays that were performed in her own convent. Her two major visionary works were; "Liber Vitae Meritorum" (Book of Life's Merits), and "Liber Divinorum Operum" (Book of Devin Works), and her religious writings were reflecting her religious philosophy. She died in 1179.

### **iii. Eleanor of Aquitaine**

Eleanor of Aquitaine was born in 1122, daughter and heiress of William X, duke of Aquitaine.

Eleanor inherited the duchy of Aquitaine in 1137, and during the same year and after the death of her father she married Louis; heir to the French throne, and they became king and queen of France. After marriage she gave birth to two

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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daughters which was probably the cause that led their marriage to fail, since there was no male heir.

In 1152, Eleanor married Henry; duke of Normandy, and in 1154 they became king and queen of England after the death of Stephen who had seized the throne of England at Henry I's death. Eleanor and Henry II had three daughters and five sons, she became more active in ruling of Aquitaine, she ruled for 65 years altogether and she was known as the most respected and powerful woman in Europe, because in an age when men were considered as superior to women, she helped people believe that education is important and gave women more rights and she helped also in the equality of gender. She helped popularize the idea of the Courtly Love; she died in 1204 and was buried in Fontevrault.

#### iv. Julian of Norwich

An English anchoress and one of the most important Christian mystics, she was born in 1342, very few information are found about her, even her name is not the real one, she was called Julian after the Church of St Julian in Norwich. She lived a solitary life of prayer and meditation, she was known as a counselor<sup>13</sup> whose advice combined spiritual insight with common sense.

At the age of thirty, Julian suffered from a grave illness, and on her deathbed she had a series of visions of Jesus Christ and she claimed that she had received fifteen revelations on one day and another on the following day, Julian started writing her visions instantly after seeing them in her book "Revelations of Divine Love"; known as the Short Text and it is believed to be the earliest surviving English book by a woman, she wrote also a theological examination of the meaning of the visions known as the Long Text.

Although Julian lived in a period of trouble and disorder, she was always optimistic talking about God's love, "*The greatest honor we can give Almighty God is to live gladly because of the Knowledge of his love*" (Thomas, 2005: 29).

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<sup>13</sup> Counselor; is a trained person who gives guidance on personal, social, or psychological problems.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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Julian believed in God's love and was grateful for everything that God granted people, she also believed that suffering is not a punishment by God because God loves everybody, and sins are necessary because they help bringing people to self-knowledge. The date of her death is uncertain, but she probably went away in 1416.

### v. Margery Kempe

One of the more interesting characters of the Middle Ages, Margery Kempe was born in about 1373 for a commercial and mercantile middle class family.

Margery Kempe is one of the few women writers of the Medieval Era. Very little is known about her childhood, in 1393 she married John Kempe and had fourteen children with him. At the age of forty, she had a series of religious visions; she took a vow of chastity and started a series of pilgrimage to holy sites in Europe.

She was living a spiritual life and started preaching<sup>14</sup>, but people and the Church didn't accept women who preach, the Church was the one and only authority allowed to preach in that time, Margery was brought to the Church Court many times, she was arrested, but released later.

In 1436, Margery was illiterate and couldn't write, so she dictated her religious autobiography to two scribes<sup>15</sup>. Her book was named "The Book of Margery Kempe", it included her vision and religious experience, and it embodied also conversations between Christ and Mary and contains some prayers.

Margery's work is the first example of autobiography in English; it falls within the visionary literature. She left away probably in 1438.

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<sup>14</sup> Preaching; religious teaching, sermon, discourse.

<sup>15</sup> Scribes; people who copy out documents, especially before that the printing was invented.

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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### **vi. Marie de France**

A French poet writing in England during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, very little is known about her historical background, she was born in France but lived and wrote in an British Court. Through her writings, she might be a well-educated woman who spoke and read English, French and Latin which was unusual for women of her time.

Some scholars believe that she was an illegitimate sister of the King Henry II, and if this is true then she was the sister of Eleanor of Aquitaine. She published three main works; a collection of fables, a book of lays and a poem of the Saint's life. Through her works, Marie gave an image of how Medieval Europeans were thinking about, the way they spoke and how their traditional legends changed over time; her stories help us to get an idea about historical development of the Chivalry, Courtly Love and Fiction in general.

A female author like Marie is an exploration that shows what life of women was like in the Middle Ages since it was extremely unusual for a woman to publish and distribute a work, and in order to protect their identities and to have their works taken seriously, most female authors were taking male pseudonyms.

Marie de France wrote a collection of 102 fables such as "A woman and her Paramour", and she was the first author of Courtly Love and Chivalric tales where she showed how they were understood and experienced by women.

Summarized details about the most notable medieval female writers are found in the following table.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

<b>Famous medieval women</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Major works</b>	<b>Personal Remarks</b>
<b>Hroswitha of Gandersheim (935-973)</b>	Poet, historian and playwright. First women who wrote plays.	Eight holly legends and Saint's lives such as "Meria", drama and epics; "Primordia Coenobii Gandershemsis".	All medieval women who tried to pass messages through writing might be strong and active, because it was very hard for women to write and since their lives were controlled, so whatever their writings were about, they must be useful and help people believe that even women are able to share their thoughts, believes, philosophy, and can be women of power and break with the misogynistic societies and start controlling themselves instead of being controlled.
<b>Anna Comnena (1083-1148)</b>	Byzantine princess, political figure, medical writer, and first female historian.	Writings about the life at the Court, battles, family deeds such as "The Alexiad".	
<b>Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)</b>	German writer, composer and philosopher.	Personal religious visions; "Book of Divine Works", personal biography, treatises of natural medicines.	
<b>Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204)</b>	Queen of France then queen of England, active ruler of Aquitaine.	Active queen and ruler, helped people believe in women's education and in the equality of gender, popularized the idea of Courtly Love.	
<b>Julian of Norwich (1342-1416)</b>	English anchoress and writer.	Writings about personal religious visions; "Revelations of Devine Love".	
<b>Margery Kempe (1373-1438)</b>	Medieval writer, preacher and first women to write autobiography.	Writings of her religious autobiography, Chivalry, Courtly Love, fiction, fables; "A women and her Paramour".	
<b>Marie de France (12<sup>th</sup> century)</b>	French poet writer.	Writings about Feminism; "The City of the Ladies", "Letter to the God of Love".	

**Figure 2.1 Famous Medieval Women**

### 2.6.2 Different Topic of Medieval Female Writers

It is believed that women of the Middle Ages didn't have much opportunities to enter the literary field. However, some women used their skills with the written works to gain a reputation. They were few and faced so many difficulties to reach their goals, very few women were educated, but they could write and share their thoughts through their works.

Medieval female writers were divided into two main categories; women of the Church and women of the secular world. Generally, women's writings included letters, autobiographies, romances, fables, Saint's lives, love poetry, religious topics and few writings embodied feminism.

In terms of religion, women of the Church were given more opportunities to write thanks to their education and learning of Latin, their writings were generally about the religious life and their life in the Church or the Convent, and this can be seen for instance in the works of Hroswitha of Gandersheim whose writings dealt more with religious themes such as the legend of "Maria"; where she illustrated the Mary's life mentioning the morality of tidiness; *"It is, in this regard, a mirror image of the Virgin Mary herself, the sublime model of the virginal life, the inventrix virginitatis, according to Hroswitha"* (Warner, 2013: 79).

In her legend, Hroswitha took Mary the Virgin as an example of the perfect model of virginity. Her legend "The Ascensio" also dealt with a religious event which is the Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven, and treated Christ's life and all the stories that followed the Ascension concerned the life of the Church and the Christian apostleship. Other religious works existed in the writings of women such as Margery Kempe who was the first women to write a religious autobiography about her religious experiences and pilgrimage where she included also some prayers, religious themes are also found in the works of Marie de France and almost in all nun's and women writers of the convents.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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Women who wanted to share their thought and show their capacities in writings chose to write about their lives and their family's history such as Anna Comnena who wrote about her father's life which is considered mostly the only source of information about her family, writing about her life in the court was also a part of her great works. Some women were also interested in writing about Chivalry and Courtly Love, and the first author of Courtly Love was a female Marie de France in her poem "Lanval".

Other few women wanted to show women's status and complaining through their writings, so they wrote to call for equality and ask for their rights in a feminist way.

In her "Romance of The Roses", Christine de Pizan debated with male authorities, and in her two famous works "La Cité des Dames" and "Trésor de la Cité des Dames" which were later translated into English; "The City of Ladies" and "The Treasure of the City of Ladies", she defended female virtue and raised women's social well-being. She explored the status of women within society and critiqued their portrayal in literature and she advanced the idea of gender equality; *"If it were customary to send little girls to school and teach them the same subject as are taught to boys, they would learn just as fully and would understand the subtleties of all arts and sciences"* (Kinnear, 1982: 80).

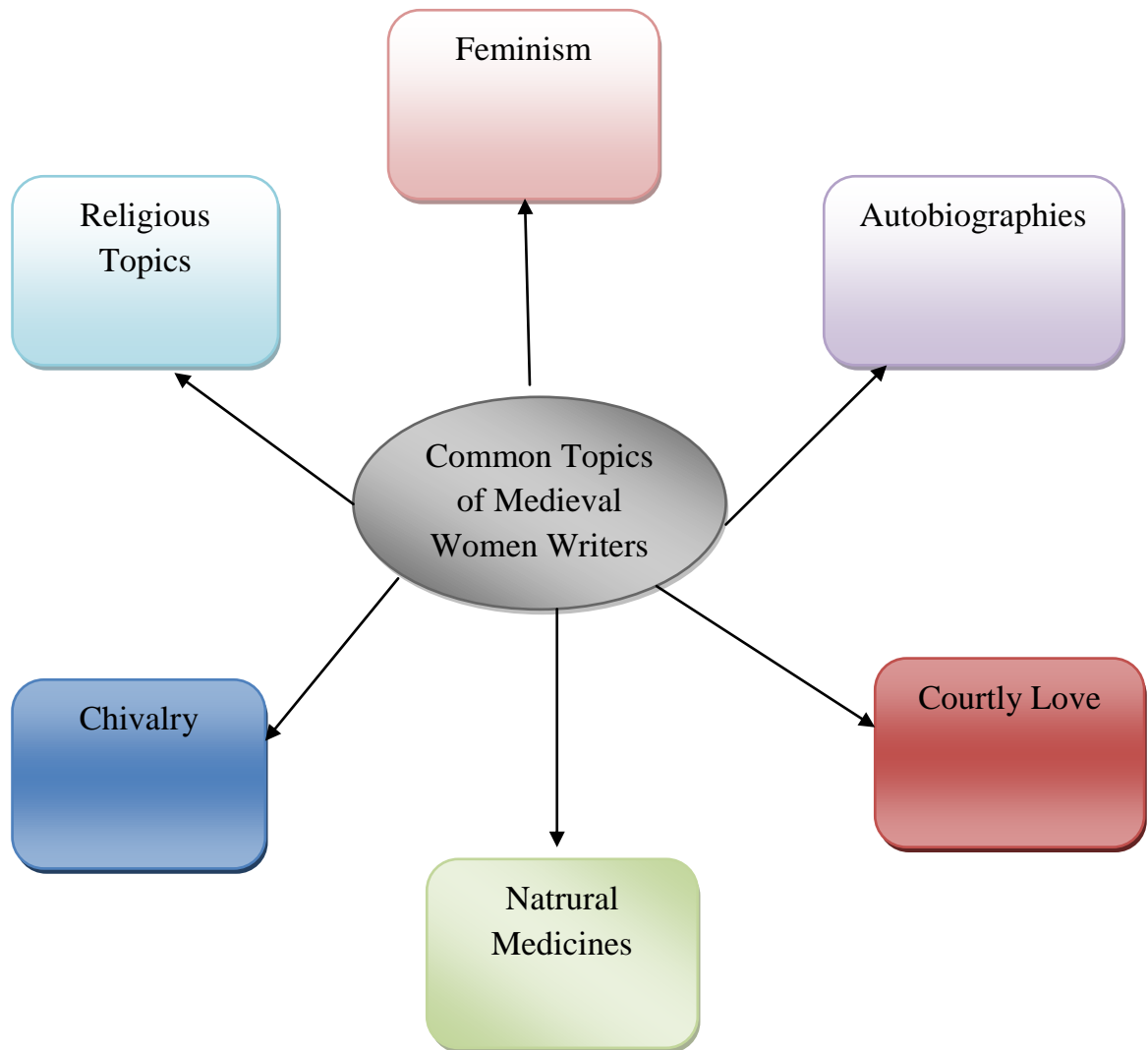
Christine believed that girls are more capable than boys and if they were to have the same opportunities of education, they would achieve what men can't reach, if they were educated the same way, than girls are the ones who can deal with everything better than men because simply they had a clear and sharp understanding of things, and especially they have more curiosity than man, and this can be seen Christine's passage; *"Not all men (and especially the wisest) share the opinion that it is bad for women to be educated. But it is very true that many foolish men have claimed this because it displeased them that women knew more than they did"* (Cohen, Fermon. 2010: 157).

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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In other words, Christine talked about the different opinions that men had about women, not all of them were against the idea of women's education and those who didn't accept that it is normal for women to be educated are stupid and afraid of the success that women can make, and they knew that women are more intelligent and masterful than men.

So, medieval women wrote about everything that existed in their time although it was not easy for women to get an opportunity to express their feelings and share their thoughts.



**Figure 2.2 Common Topics of Medieval Women Writers**



### 2.7 Male Standpoints on Feminism

Generally men didn't accept the idea of equality and feminism, they didn't agree upon the fact that women should have equal rights and same educational opportunities that men had; one of the most well-known politicians who were considered as women's haters is Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord.

#### 2.7.1 Joseph Swetnam

The most known misogynist in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Joseph was a Jacobean fencer and a pamphleteer. Almost nothing is known about his personal life except the date of his death 1621.

Joseph Swetnam was called the women-hater because he hated women a lot. In 1615 he wrote an attack on women under the title of "Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward and Unconstant Women"; which was published under the incognito Thomas Tell-Troth, however, he was quickly revealed as the true author.

*"Swetnam thus constructs a double-bind for his women pamphlet readers; either they remain silent at this misogynistic Arraignment, a silence which apparently registers assent, or they respond publicly and prove themselves as lewd, forward, idle or unconstant as the countless, nameless women who fill his pages"*

(Nevitt, 2006: 128)

Joseph Swetnam's thinking towards women was very misogynistic and negative, he believed that women are always worthless and lead to the corruption of men. For him women are dissolute and lewd in a way that have to be proved publicly, he wanted women to keep silent and don't try to criticize him, and he named various victims of women's seduction such as David Solmon and Samson.

In his tract, Joseph portrayed women as unworthy, lustful, wanton and evil using the typical conventions of anti-feminism, mentioning the arrogance, deceitfulness and wickedness and viciousness of women and calling them

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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“degenerates”. He also used the Biblical quotes in reducing the values of women and warned from womankind.

### 2.7.2 Rachel Speght’s Reply to Joseph Swetnam

An English feminist, poet and polemicist, she was born in 1597 in London, known for her criticism of gender ideology. She is considered as the first Englishwoman to identify herself.

Speght’s most famous work is her tract “A Mouzell for Melastomous” in 1617; meaning “A muzzle for black month”, it was a response to Joseph Swetnam’s “Arraignment of Women”. Speght’s salient work defended women’s nature and the estimate of womanhood. She strongly attacked the misogyny of Swetnam and daringly called him “the veriest<sup>16</sup> idiot that ever set pen to paper”, because of his attack and his humiliation of women. What is most noteworthy in Speght’s work is her revaluation of Adam and Eve, and she suggested that Adam is equally at fault. She used the witty expression to prove that women are cleverer than men when she pointed out that when Eve ate the forbidden fruit, couldn’t have seduced Adam to do the same thing if she was not the more smart and clever of the sexes. She confirmed that gender equality was established within the Bible, she argued that; “*yet she was not produced from Adam’s foot, to be his too low inferior; nor from his head to be his superior; but from his side, near his heart, to be his equal: that where he is lord, she may be lady*” (Pacheco, 2002: 248).

Rachel Speght reinterpreted the fact of Eve coming out from Adam’s rib, and she confirmed that God created Eve from the side of Adam to be his companion and partner and that they are equal and have to complete each other.

The aim of Speght’s publication is to help women and make people realize the importance of women in the society; she justified also the right of women to be respected publicly.

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<sup>16</sup> Veriest; is used to emphasize the degree to which a description applies to someone or something.

### 2.7.3 Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord's Biography

A French bishop, politician, diplomat and a cleric, Talleyrand was born in 1754 in Paris in a noble family, he was known for his skills and political cleverness. At the age of four he was sent to be nursed in Paris' outskirts where he had an accident and had a lame leg that prevented him from pursuing the military career. He joined the Church and in 1788 and after an intervention of his father, he became a bishop of Autun, and he was in practice the sole representative of the French Church between 1780 and 1785. In 1792 he became a diplomat, then the minister of foreign affairs after residences in London and the United States. He was interested in reading the works of philosophers and the contemporary progressive thinkers.

Talleyrand had an important role in the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815), and in the Treaty of Paris, he helped France to preserve its status and position internationally. After the death of Louis XVIII in 1824, Talleyrand was appointed as a French ambassador in London from 1830 till 1835 when he came back to Paris and stayed retired till he died in 1838.

### 2.7.4 Talleyrand- Périgord's View on Women

In his report on the public education which had been presented to the French National Assembly in 1791, Talleyrand reported that there should be a public education;

*“To ensure each one the facility of perfecting skills, of rendering himself capable of the social functions to which he has a right to be called, of developing to the fullest extent those talents with which Nature has endowed him; and thereby to establish among all citizens and actual equality, thus rendering real the political equality recognized by the law”*

(Carson, 2007: 62)

Since not all medieval men had opportunities of education, Talleyrand proposed to establish a system of equal education available to everybody where they can improve their skills and show their capacities in participating in the

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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social functions, the idea of public education was to provide education to all people of all social classes, not only for the sons of wealthy families.

However, the proposal of Talleyrand wasn't directed for girls. The public education that Talleyrand wanted was only for males and he believed that women should receive only a domestic education; *"If they are to be thus assured they must be helped to understand their position by means of education. But it should begin in the home"* (Barnard, 1969: 78).

In that time it was believed that women have to belong to the domestic sphere and got to be educated in their home. And Talleyrand was for the idea that women's education starts from the home.

Most prominent medieval misogynists	Characteristics	Misogynistic Works	Personal Remarks
<b>Joseph Swetnam (?- 1621)</b>	Jacobean fencer, pamphleteer and women-hater. Most known misogynist of the Middle Ages, attacked women in a violent way describing them as unworthy, idle, deceitful and evil.	"Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward and Unconstant Women" (1615)	Personally, I think that men who were against women or against their education lacked the self confidence, because they thought that if women get an equal education or start writing, they would compete with them and
<b>Talleyrand de Périgord (1754-1838)</b>	French bishop, politician, diplomat and a cleric. He was against women's education and reported that women belong only to the domestic sphere and their education should be at home.	Report on the public education to the French National Assembly (1791)	may succeed by their works, so for me; misogynists hate women because they just feared them.

**Figure 2.3 Prominent Medieval Misogynists**

### **2.8 Precursor of Feminism**

Although there are many precursors or pioneer of Medieval Feminism, I have chosen the most important and the well known women who were among the firsts to deal with such a domain, which people were not allowed to deal with.

#### **2.8.1 Definition of Precursor**

According to the dictionary definition; precursor means something that comes before something else, and that often leads or influences its development.

Being a precursor is to be the person who comes before the others of the same kind.

In the feminist studies, precursors of feminism are the ones who dealt with feminism before anybody; precursors are the ones who came with the idea of women's independence and the break with the male-dominated society that was full of misogynistic thinkers.

#### **2.8.2 Christine de Pizan**

A late medieval author and writer, Christine lived between 1365 and 1430, she was born in Italy then moved to France at a young age when her father Thomas de Pizan became the astrologer of King Charles V. At the age of fifteen she was married to a nobleman who supported her. After the death of her father and the illness of her husband, she started writing prose and poetry which were sent to the Court and she gained money in return.

Christine was a writer who broke with the traditional roles assigned to medieval women, she was one of the few educated women, she wrote in many genres and starting the debate about women through works like "Letter to the God of Love" (1399), "The Take of the Rose" (1402), and her most famous book "The Book of the City of Ladies" (1404) which dealt directly with women combating the misogynistic thinking that existed. In her book, she embodied all famous women who have ruled in history, who preserved their chastity, who had

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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been faithful to their husbands, and women who have honored their families, her book glorified all great women and provided them with place to be safe from the attack of men.

Although medieval women were not allowed to have a voice of to be liberated, Christine managed both.

### **2.8.3 Olympe de Gouges**

French author, activist, playwright, political writer and advocate for women's rights and she is considered as a feminist pioneer<sup>17</sup>. Born Marie Gouzes in 1748, in southern France, she was raised in a modest family, daughter of Pierre Gouzes and Anne Olympe. However, it was rumored that she was the illegitimate daughter of Marquis Lefranc de Pompignan; who had a secret relationship with her mother, and De Gouges herself believed in her illegitimacy.

In 1765 De Gouges was married to the French officer Louis Aubry, they had a son but she became a widow after only three years of marriage. In 1770, she moved to Paris seeking fame as a writer and chose "Olympe de Gouges" as her pen name (blend of both her mother and father's names). She had connections with the most famous writers and philosophers of her time.

Although she was not well educated and has a poor grammar and punctuation, she wrote novels, plays and sociopolitical pamphlets which focused strongly on the matters of the civil rights especially the rights of women. Encouraged by members of a feminist organization called "The Society of Republican and Revolutionary Women" De Gouges produced her great work "The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Citizen" in 1791, where she advocated for the complete legal equality of sexes.

In 1793, De Gouges was arrested because of her violent and vehement writings, she spent three months in the jail where she tried to defend herself; and through her friends succeeded to publish two texts; "Olympe de Gouges au

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<sup>17</sup> Pioneer; is a person who is among the first people to explore or settle a new country or area.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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Tribunal Révolutionnaire” (Olypme de Gouge at the Revolutionary Tribunal), and “Une Patriote Persécutée” (A [female] Patriot Persecuted).

Olympe de Gouges was executed by the Jacobins in November 1793 for her provocative behavior and attempting to reinstate the monarchy.

### 2.9 Declaration of the Rights of Women<sup>18</sup>

Although it was devoted to gender equality, the French Revolution failed in the recognition of the rights of women, and this enhanced Olympe de Gouges to publish the Declaration of the Rights of Women and Female Citizen in 1791.

In her pamphlet, de Gouges called for equality between man and women asserting that women were also active members in the Revolution. She wanted men and women to be equal holding the same political and social rights, she assumed that women are as capable as men in being members of state; “*Women have the right to mount the scaffold; they must have the right to mount the speaker’s rostrum*” (Foley, 2004: 124).

In the time of de Gouges, women were harshly treated and severely punished if they had mistaken and misbehaved, and women who made any kind of mistake would have a tough punishment with no mercy, and they would be killed for that, so Olympe de Gouges stated that since women are treated this way and have the right to be killed on the scaffold<sup>19</sup>, so they also have the right to get on the rostrum<sup>20</sup> where they can offer free speeches.

De Gouges’ pamphlet was directed to women as mentioned in the preamble, where she asked women to wake up and face the corrupt government they were living in, and to realize that they must get the same rights as men; “*All citizens including women are equally admissible to all public dignities, offices*

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<sup>18</sup> Declaration of the Rights of Women and Female Citizen; pamphlet by Olympe de Gouges published in 1791.

<sup>19</sup> Scaffold; a raised wooden platform used formerly for the public execution of criminals.

<sup>20</sup> Rostrum; a platform on which a person stands to make a public speech, receive an award or medal, play music, or conduct an orchestra.

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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*and employments, according to their capacity, and no other distinction than that of their virtues and talents” (Naish, 2013: 29)*

Confirming that women are part of society and active members who share the same rights with men, de Gouges affirmed that women should have as important roles as man had, they can work according to their capacities and should be taken according to their intellectual levels and talents not by their sex.

The purpose of the Declaration of the Rights of Women is for women to be considered as equal as men and this equality can't be realized if people keep silent on the rights of women.

### **2.10 Conclusion**

The general intellectual climate of the Middle Ages was based on male intellectuality and women of the Medieval Era faced a lot of trouble when trying to demonstrate themselves and defend their rights, as mentioned above, women were not educated and almost held no rights of education, all they had to do was to stay home, take care of their children, do the housework and help their husbands in the farm work. Even religion, it placed them in secondary position after men, and they were seen as agents of evil although they were the ones who raised children.

Some women exercised some jobs, and others went to the nunneries where they learned and could express themselves and write a useful works although their topics were limited. However, it was not that easy for women to publish their works and most of texts were anonymous especially in the misogynistic society. Women who took pens and started calling for their rights were known as precursors and they received huge kinds of criticism, and those women had really helped other women to feel safe and to realize that they have rights that they must enjoy.

In spite of all the obstacles the women passed through, some of them succeeded in writing and showing their capacities and that they are not as people



## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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think and whatever the topics of medieval females were, they participated in reinforcing the idea of Feminism and gender equality.

The next chapter will be dealing with the new world that came after the Dark Ages and the Emancipation Movement of women and how did the book of Mary Wollstonecraft “A Vindication of Rights of Women” helped women to revolt and emancipate calling for their equal rights and achievements that women achieved after the Middle Ages.

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*Chapter Three*

*The Impact of Medieval Feminism on Current  
Society*

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**Chapter three: The Impact of Medieval Feminism on Current  
Society**

3.1 Introduction.....	55
3.2 The Post Medieval Period.....	56
3.3 The Greatest Feminist Work after the Renaissance.....	58
3.3.1 Mary Wollstonecraft’s Biography.....	59
3.3.2 A Vindication of the Rights of Women.....	59
3.4 Women’s Emancipation Movement.....	61
3.5 How did Feminist Literature Influence Gender Theory?.....	64
3.6 Conclusion.....	65

### 3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the Middle Ages were a conservative era, socially based on the Feudal System and the Catholic Church.

During the Medieval Era, it was common for women to belong to their home and accept to be controlled and totally dominated. However, there was a kind of awareness in women's thinking and some of them started trying to have control over themselves and to break up the social common traditions that made women inferior to men in every aspect of life. They escaped from the male-domination and refused marriage in order to prove themselves as equal human-beings who should be respected in society and should receive equal rights that men had.

Through time and by the end of the Middle Ages women started to think and to realize that their life is getting worst and that they have to call for their rights and to stand against misogyny, they started to learn in the convents, then write about the society they were living in, their personal visions, their autobiographies and especially started to write about their feeling and emotions and their misery and pain they felt from being seen and evil and the cause of men's fall.

This chapter will be dealing with the post medieval period, and how women started to be strong and strong and prove themselves as cultivated social members. This chapter will also deal with the way women called for their rights illustrating Mary Wollstonecraft's book "A Vindication of Rights of Women", and it will show women of the post medieval era and their works and the topics they dealt with, in addition to our personal views on medieval and post medieval women and their rights, and by the end we will make a difference between feminism of the middle ages and nowadays feminism, and how medieval feminism impacted the new feminism and nowadays people's thinking about women.

### 3.2 The Post Medieval Period

The period that came following the Middle Ages is called the “Renaissance”, or in other words the “Re-birth” or the “Revival”. This period started from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (date is uncertain, but probably from 1500 till 1688). Its origins can be traced to Italy from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and was known as “Proto-Renaissance” period (1280-1400) when the Italian experts and artists started reawakening the ideals and accomplishments of the classical Roman culture.

The Renaissance is the period making the transition from medieval to modern times and it is known sometimes as the early modern period. It was a kind of renewal and awakening from the lethargy of the middle ages. It was a time of great social and cultural changes, and the basic characteristic of the Renaissance was humanism<sup>21</sup>; which was a way to see the world differently, affirming the importance of human beings, their nature and their standing in the world, and the main goal of humanistic view was for people to be educated and to the ideal gentlemen. In addition to humanism, there were other reasons for the Renaissance making people change their view of life, these are; trade and exploration, scientific development, reformation, and the printing press which helped decreasing the hand written books which were very expensive and rare, and by the invention of the printing press, books became available and cheaper and more people read than before. The Renaissance was an epoch of innovation and creativity where almost everything was changed, revisited and renewed breaking away from the conformist medieval society. It brought notable changes in terms of art and architecture dissimilar with the artistic style of the Middle Ages playing importance on symbolism more than reality.

*“The Renaissance became synonymous with the artistic expression, rapid scientific advances (especially in astronomy), a love of intellectual freedom, and a strong interest in the commonality of human nature across cultures”* (Sabuco,

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<sup>21</sup> Humanism is a belief that stresses the potential value and goodness of human beings. The Renaissance passion for what was human, that’s why it is called the rediscovery of humanism.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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Waithe, Vintro, Zorita, Sabuco de, 2007: 02). Philosophy of the Renaissance also differed from that of the middle ages. New ways of thinking and seeing life emerged in a philosophy known as Humanism dealing with the way people thought about human beings and the universe. During the middle ages, it was the Catholic Church that influenced and guided people's beliefs and way of thinking. However, in the Renaissance Humanism didn't support the notion that humans are naturally sinful; by contrast it was a philosophy focusing most on the physical characteristics of humans, it was also for the favor of all humans to be educated.

Even Science was among the fields that saw great changes and development by the Renaissance period, especially in anatomy<sup>22</sup>, astronomy<sup>23</sup> and physics. So during the Rebirth, Science knew considerable inventions such as telescopes, clocks and glasses.

There was a huge difference between the Medieval and the Rebirth period; the middle ages were considered as a period of ignorance and where little or no progress had emerged and were an epoch of little education and innovation, while in the Renaissance there was advancement concerning education, arts, science and philosophy. Another fact about the middle ages is that medieval people were dependent to their lords, their work and to religion, but the Renaissance insisted on individualism and individual talents, and while the medieval scholars learned the Greek and Roman documents, they did so to know about God and Christianity, however, the Renaissance scholars learned them in order to discover more about human nature.

By the Renaissance people no longer focused on the Church, they started questioning and the secular world, and one of the most well known figures of the Renaissance in "Leonardo da Vinci" who is famous for his paintings such as; The Last Supper, and The Mona Lisa, he also experienced philosophy, science and math.

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<sup>22</sup> Anatomy ; the branch of science concerned with the bodily structure of humans, animals, and other living organisms, especially as revealed by dissection and the separation of parts.

<sup>23</sup> Astronomy; is the branch of science that deals with celestial objects, space, and the physical universe as a whole.

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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The Renaissance was a majestic period which saw a number of great minded and intelligent people who appeared with knowledge and explored their creativity and talents.

The following table contains the major differences between the middle ages and the Renaissance.

<b>The Middle Ages</b>	<b>The Renaissance</b>
Period of slowness and lack of education and culture.	Cultural movement involving a renewal of learning, development of infrastructure, and a gradual reform in education.
Epoch of the handwritten literary works which were expensive and rarely read.	Time of the invention of the printing press which made it easy for people to buy and read books.
Medieval literature faced a dark phase, it was based on Courtly Love and Chivalry and always glorifying knights and king.	The Renaissance literature reached its heights (Elizabethan literature), and it focused on Humanism.
Medieval arts taught lessons such as; the Bible story.	Renaissance arts reflected Humanism and glorified human beings.
Medieval people were strongly related to the Ancient Greek and Roman documents to learn about God and Christianity.	People were related to the Ancient Greek and Roman documents to discover more about the human nature.
In the middle ages were dependent to the Church and to work.	Renaissance supported individual freedom and the importance of individual talents.

**Figure 3.1 Differences between the Medieval and the Renaissance Periods**

### **3.3 The Greatest Feminist Work after the Renaissance**

Although feminism has its roots from the middle ages, it continued to the Renaissance and after the renaissance, and the most famous feminist work that

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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happened in 1792 was Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of Rights of Women" which played an important role in helping women's to emancipate.

### **3.3.1 Mary Wollstonecraft's Biography**

An English writer, philosopher, historian, and advocate to the rights of women, she is known as the mother of Feminism. Mary was born in 27<sup>th</sup> of April, 1759 in London; she had a tough childhood because of her violent father who used to beat her mother when he was drunk, so May played a maternal role for her sisters and experienced a kind of responsibility.

In 1784, because the universal lack of professional opportunity for women, Mary and her sister Eliza and her best friend Fanny established a school in Newington Green; and in 1787 she wrote her pamphlet "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters". After the death of her friend Fanny, Mary came back to London and became a translator then a contributor, and after few years (1792) she published her famous work "A Vindication of Rights of Women".

Her feminist works had to wait for the 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist movement to get a deserved attention, and Mary became famous for being the first feminist philosopher. She published many other interesting works such as; "A Vindication of Rights of Men" (1790) and "Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution" (1794), she died in September 10, 1797 in London.

### **3.3.2 A Vindication of the Rights of Women**

Considered as the great feminist treatise, "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" was written by Mary Wollstonecraft and published in 1792, it was written in the classical liberal tradition promoting individual rights.

"A Vindication of the Rights of Women" called for revolution in female manners, and the main reason behind Wollstonecraft's writing such a work was to respond to Jean-Jacques Rousseau whose desire was for women to remain virtual slaves; and his book "Emile" which relegated the education of girls and supported the one of only boys and men. Wollstonecraft's wish was to defend the



## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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right of women and their need to be educated in the same way as men as mentioned in her writing; “*A profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of misery I deplore*” (Ross, 1988: 40).

Mary showed that the neglected and careless education of women makes them feel the misery of being illiterate and ignored inferior creatures; she believed that girls and boys should receive the same education and have the same educational opportunities. Wollstonecraft’s “*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*” was dedicated to Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord; whose views on female education were hateful and unacceptable to her. She asked men and society to grant women the possibility to prove themselves as individuals blessed with positive reasoning and independent thoughts; “*It is time to effect a revolution in female manners, time to restore to them their lost dignity, and make them, as part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world*”. (Wollstonecraft. Barnard. Shapiro, 2013: 31)

According to Wollstonecraft, if women had opportunities to be educated and use their knowledge, they could change the world and produce great achievements in positive ways.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s treatise contains thirteen chapters, and they all end up with the same goal which is defending women’s rights of education; the first chapter, Wollstonecraft discusses the harmful effect of the arbitrary political power. Chapters two and three detail the different forms in which women are inferior to men and how they have learned that their main role is to appear in the best way and please others, especially their husbands without participating in the public sphere, and this fact pushed Wollstonecraft to arouse a revolution in a female manners. In the fourth chapter, she confirms that marriage should be like a friendship where a woman and her man should be companions and should complete each other. In the fifth chapter, Wollstonecraft blames writers who favour women’s inferiority such as Talleyrand and Rousseau, and the sixth chapter; she explains the importance of the early associations for the development of character of women. In the seventh and eighth chapters; she the

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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writer addresses the matter of modesty, and asserts that women who exercise the most reason are the most modest, and this modesty gets strong when women's minds are enlarged by active exertions; "*Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end of blind obedience*".(Wollstonecraft, 2008: 34)

In chapter nine, Wollstonecraft calls for more financial independence for women and depicts the diverse occupations which women might take on in society. Chapters ten and eleven; concern the duties of parents, where Mary insists that there must be repairs in terms of education for women to be good mothers, because they are the ones who raise children, and they can't offer a good education if they are not educated; "*It is vain to expect virtue from women till they are in some degree independent of men*". (Ibid: 150)

To be independent has a strong relation with being educated, and if women become educated they will show things that were not shown by men. She asserts that; "*Virtue can only flourish amongst equals*". (Ibid: 92).

Chapter twelve contains Wollstonecraft's ideas for education reform, while the last chapter sums up the whole arguments about women's rights in education, repeating that men and women should have things in common in order to get a successful life.

All what Mary Wollstonecraft wanted from her vindication was for men and women to be equal, she didn't want women to be superior or to take men's position, she wanted them to be companions holding the same rights and duties; "*I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves*". (Ibid: 71)

### **2.4 Women's Emancipation Movement**

Women's Emancipation movement is also known as Women's Liberation Movement, Women's Movement or simply Feminism. It refers to the social struggle which aimed to dissolve the problem of women's oppression and help them gain equal economic and social conditions and rights in order to determine

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

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their lives; “*Women’s emancipation movement is understood to mean the fight for self-determination and improvements in the legal, social, cultural and political positions of women*”. (Paletschek, 2004: 06)

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were still playing secondary roles and still considered as inferiors. However, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of great cultural, political, social and economic conversion in Europe. This period brought major changes in the roles of women who had fought for long time calling for their rights in terms of legal, political and economic domains.

*“The Feminist movement emerged in around the late 19 century, with the first wave of feminism. Feminism as a whole came in three ‘waves’, each dealing with different aspects of the same issue; the first wave being the feminist movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which dealt mainly with the suffrage movement. The second wave (1960s- 1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as unofficial inequalities. The third wave of feminism (1990s- current) arose from the perceived failures of the second wave”*

(Tandon, 2008: 01)

So, Women’s Liberation Movement knew three main waves; the first wave took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when a group of upper class white women replied to the injustice they were living, this wave aimed to open up opportunities for women, especially concerning suffrage<sup>24</sup>, and to bring professions to women. Although a number of individual feminists called for women’s rights from the medieval world such as; Hildegard of Bingen, Christine de Pizan, Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft, it was until the 1850s that an organized feminist movement evolved in Britain, and the interests of the first wave of feminism were; education, employment and vote, and among its achievements was the opening of higher education for women, repair of the girls’ secondary schools system including participation in formal national examinations, in addition to some ameliorations in divorced women’s child keeping rights.

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<sup>24</sup> Suffrage is the right to vote in political elections.

## The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature

The second wave of feminism refers to the emergence between the late 1960s and the early 1980s which was marked by the raising awareness about sexism and patriarchy; this wave was based on the working class, it aimed to attain equal rights in social, political and economic domains, and to open social and cultural opportunities that help women change their domestic lives, it had an important role to inspire the struggle for women's right across the whole world.

The third wave of feminism was an expansion of the second wave with the focus on new directions. It was supported by middle-class women focusing on issues of race and sexuality.

Each wave of Feminism had specific requirements and was in a specific period of time. However, all these three waves had the same goal and objective which was attain women's rights and equality.

The following table sums up the three waves of feminism

<b>Waves</b>	<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Achievements</b>
<b>first wave (19<sup>th</sup>- early 20<sup>th</sup>)</b>	Political equality, suffrage, employment.	Voting rights, improvements in divorced women's child keeping rights.
<b>Second wave (1960-1980)</b>	Social, political and economic rights for women, educational and cultural equality.	Higher education for women, this wave inspired women's struggle all around the world.
<b>Third wave (1990-current)</b>	Race equality and sexual liberty.	Attaining social and legal protections that women need to function on equal basis in contemporary society.

**Figure 3.2 Women's Movement**

### 3.5 How did Feminist Literature Influence Gender Theory?

Feminist literature's impact had developed since the medieval era, and this literature had resulted in great movements and ideologies sharing the same objective which is establishing equal political, economic, cultural, personal and social rights for women.

*“Feminist theory seeks to analyze the conditions which shape women's lives and to explore cultural understanding of what it means to be a woman. It was initially guided by the political aims of the Women's Movement- the need to understand women's subordination and our exclusion from, or marginalization within, a variety of cultural and social arenas”*

(Jackson. Jones, 1998: 01)

Feminist theory and literature aimed to focus on analyzing gender inequality (oppression, patriarchy, male-dominated society and misogyny), and feminists had worked hard to protect women and to provide them with equal rights to men.

From the very beginning, men were the only ones to write, to discuss and to negotiate in anything they wanted, even literature was mostly dominated by them, and women were totally refused and punished if they try to be liberal; *“Much of the world's literature has been dominated by a canon that dismissed women's writing”* (Sree, 2008: 14).

However, through time, literature became the track chosen and used by women to express themselves when there was no other way to do so. The very few lucky women, who had opportunities of education, were blessed and benefited with some knowledge which was later shown in their feminist works, so thanks to the medieval Catholic Church women could get pen in their hands and write their feelings, complaining and thoughts. Literature had always helped women to enter the world of writing and in all its fields whether political, economic, cultural or medical. Medieval women writers started to write about their domestic lives, families and about their limited rights, then, they gradually turned to serious subjects such as; asking society to give them rights for education, equality and

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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sexual freedom; *“Women’s literature has evolved to show common experiences, a sense of sisterhood that questions the recurring face of patriarchy”* (Ibid: 14).

Despite all the difficulties and obstacles that women faced in their way to emancipation, they succeeded in breaking the barriers and making everybody realize their strength and showed society that they are as equal and free as men, and they gained respect.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter we have dealt with the period that came after the middle ages, it was kind of a new world and where society came out from the dark of the medieval era to a world of great changes in almost all fields of life, women in the renaissance started to realize that they have to be free and exercise normally their rights without being blamed for trying to emancipate. Mary Wollstonecraft’s massive work had a strong influence on women, and helped them to keep on asking for equality which took a long time from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the current time and they did so through literature and through writing although few who were educated. Women had never stopped fighting for gaining rights and for being free, they were strong enough to be what they are now, they are nearly like men, and the feminist literature played a major role in facing misogyny and proving that women are not what people thought of them. It helped also society to re-think about the notion of women and to change their views about them, because women are the ones who give birth and educate their children, and they can’t do so if they are not good.

As researchers, we think that women did never deserve to be treated the way they were treated in the ancient times, especially in the medieval period, they had really suffered from inferiority and from losing their rights and being humiliated because they are human being, and they were created the same way men were created, God made both men and women free and asked them to be companions and to respect each other, that’s why women have to be respected and people have to realize the importance of women in society, they educate,

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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teach and help men, and men are nothing without the help of women. Even that woman are free nowadays and share the same rights with men, there still some few number of women who are still suffering, so the struggle of feminism will be always the goal that women want to reach everywhere.

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*General Conclusion*

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### **General Conclusion**

The issue of Feminism is one of the most important matters that have to be discussed and it is a target which women had been trying to reach since the very ancient times.

In this dissertation, we have discussed first the medieval social structure where women lived and mostly suffered from the misogynistic thinking and live under the control of men, the Dark Ages were epoch of inferiority and Feudalism where total domination was practiced by the male members of the society. Education in that time was rare even for men, people were generally uneducated, and the literary works of that period were limited and mostly to glorify Kings, Knights and Feudal leaders, in addition to religion which affected people's thinking toward women in a negative way, they believed that women are agent of evil and it was a women who caused the fall of a man from heaven, this was the main reason for the misogynistic attack against women.

We have mentioned also the whole cultural climate of the Middle Ages which was based only on male intellectuality, while women were just to stay home, do the housework and raise children and sometimes help their husbands doing the hard works. Women, who didn't accept this social humiliation, had chosen the convents as a way out, they escaped to the convents and lived there. Fortunately they had opportunities of education, they learned how to read and write; this education played an important role in changing their lives and helping them to take pens and express their thoughts responding to the misogynistic and anti-feminist works and writers. The precursor writers complained from being inferior and asked society to give them little rights at least to have the ability to read and write, and to share equal rights with men.

Finally, a new world of knowledge, culture and more freedom for both men and women came after the Middle Ages, in the Renaissance there was a kind of awakening in the minds of women, most of them started to feel that they have

## **The Early Rise of Feminism Post Medieval Literature**

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to be equal to men in every aspect of life, feminist literature also helped them to emancipate and to call for their rights, for instance; the book of Mary Wollstonecraft “A Vindication of Rights of Women” had a great influence in enhancing women to get over their fear and made them feeling strong enough to start a great movement that would change their lives. Effectively, the Emancipation Movement was a great movement where women appear as very strong, intellectual and well-mannered, women called for their rights in a very just way, they didn’t ask for priority or dominance over men, on the contrary, all they wanted is to be equal to men, to receive the same education, to participate both in social and economic sectors and to be companions to each other, because women didn’t want to stay inferior and to keep mistreated and portrayed as evil, deceitful, manipulators and descents of the mistaken Eve.

Gender equality is not a woman’s issue, it is a human issue because it affects both man and woman, and literature had played a major role in making people realize that women are free and equal humans who can be active members as men and the feminist literary works had shown the real image of the strong and well-educated women.

We personally believe that women and men were both created by God to complete each other; each one of them has to respect the other one and no one has the right to dominate his partner. Unfortunately; medieval women were humiliated and exploited, but thanks to the Liberation Movement done by women, women today are freer than they used to be, they have plenty of equal rights that men have, and they are respected by the whole society because they have shown their abilities and capacities in every aspects of life, that is why for the time being there is a great member of female writers, authors, doctors, actresses and directors.

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