

How are medieval Welsh women depicted in poetry?
Analyse a range of medieval poems in your response.

The medieval Welsh poetic tradition was fundamentally an elite, male-dominated industry that systematically marginalised female voices. Consequently, the portrayal of Welsh women in medieval poetry can be divided into two broad categories: poetry written by men and poetry written by women. The extensive body of poetry composed by men reveals how a patriarchal society might categorise women to reinforce domestic and social passivity. However, when female poets engaged with the tradition, they actively disrupted this system of objectification. By examining a handful of archetypes employed by men to depict women, and comparing Dafydd ap Gwilym's *Cywydd y Gal* with Gwerful Mechain's subversive response, *Cywydd y Cedor*, this essay will argue that medieval Welsh poetry simultaneously functioned as a tool for female marginalisation and, conversely, as a radical site for female agency and physical reclamation.

While research into the access Welsh women in particular might have had to literature and poetry in the Middle Ages has only gained traction in recent years, and is consequently still evolving, supplementary evidence from other Western European countries, such as England, France, or Germany, suggests that such access was rare, and that, for those women who were afforded the opportunity, they would likely have been within "the most privileged social groups."¹ However, such trends in these countries should not lead to the assumption that this also occurred in Wales. Instead, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan argues that this should prompt further consideration of the absence of such evidence itself. Furthermore, she urges her readers to consider the more readily available literary format for medieval women: the oral. Research conducted by Lesley Smith and Jane Taylor suggests that English and European medieval women

¹ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'More written about than writing?: Welsh writing and the written word', in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. by Huw Pryce (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.149-165 (p.149), <<https://contentstore-cla-co-uk.uwtsd.idm.oclc.org/anon/e-reader/98a43fb8-cd5c-eb11-b9ed-281878520afa>> [accessed 11 May 2026].

engaged with and understood the world in ways that differed markedly from those of medieval men. In this context, women had very little or no access to developing literary traditions and were instead expected to operate orally, in which they “listened rather than read, heard rather than preached.”² However, this perceived limited access does not mean that Welsh women were absent from medieval literature. Rather, their presence is limited to characters or subjects. Lloyd-Morgan notes that, while strong and independent women appear in native prose such as the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, they are fictional. In contrast, when real women are depicted, they are predominantly portrayed in relation to men, namely as lovers, wives, or mothers.³ Ultimately, we must consider that women were repeatedly excluded from the creation of material culture in the Middle Ages and were often reduced to stereotypical supporting roles, which were “mediated by male perceptions and assumptions.”⁴ While Lloyd-Morgan establishes the concept that not all literature must be written word, and that it is entirely plausible that women produced a rich oral culture of equal worth to any written literature, the inherent fragility of oral tradition means these perspectives have been largely lost to time. Consequently, modern understanding of the depiction of Welsh women in poetry is ultimately restricted to the extant yet potentially biased works of medieval men.

Any examination of the portrayal of women in poetry, in which they are actively excluded and marginalised, necessitates an understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the Middle Ages, a period when society was shaped by conflict, resulting in an environment “particularly hostile to the exercise of female initiative and power.”⁵ While men’s power lay in physical action, women were confined to verbal influence. This is not to say that women did not perform great physical acts, but that those who did so transcended the boundaries of their gender entirely. This required particular conditions,

² Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor, ‘Introduction’, in *Women, the Book, and the Godly: Selected Proceedings of the St. Hilda’s Conference, 1993*, ed. by Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor (D.S. Brewer, 1995), pp.ix-xiii (p.xi), <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=0yiBNOCs83QC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> [accessed 11 May 2026].

³ Lloyd-Morgan, ‘More written’, in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. by Pryce, pp.149-150.

⁴ Ibid, p.163.

⁵ K.R.L. Kappahn, ‘Constructions of Gender in Medieval Welsh Literature’ (unpublished masters thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2009) <https://research.aber.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/constructions-of-gender-in-medieval-welsh-literature/> [accessed 7 May 2026] p.3.

such as noble lineage. Here, Jo Ann McNamara notes that if a noble woman were required to act as a prince, she was allowed to, as her lineage took precedence over her “female weakness.”⁶ In this context, a woman would effectively erase her womanhood so that she could temporarily occupy a position of masculine power. Since a woman’s value was intrinsically tied to her bloodline rather than her individual autonomy, it is common in Welsh medieval poetry to see women mentioned merely as a means of establishing and authenticating the lineage of their male counterparts.

To elaborate on the notion that the portrayal of women in medieval poetry was filtered through a male lens, we can examine the biases that may have arisen from this dynamic. The poets of the late Middle Ages operated within a “hierarchical triad of patron, poet, and scribe,”⁷ whereby the poet was subordinate to a superior authority responsible for determining the content of the work and to a scribe who could possibly influence it during manuscript creation, for example, through marginalia or selective editing. In this triad, each member is almost exclusively male. Furthermore, the Welsh bardic tradition, dating back to the sixth century, is characterised as “male-dominated.”⁸ In this context, it is reasonable to presume that, within the depiction of female figures in medieval Welsh poetry, no woman is ever consulted. Instead, a system of exclusively male authors employs the woman as a structural device. Furthermore, K.R.L. Kappahn suggests that women in Welsh medieval poetry are subjected to ‘othering’ based on their gender, with their representation confined to their role as ‘females’ rather than as fully developed characters with individual agency. Crucially, such othering can only be effectuated by first positioning the male perspective as the normative standard.⁹ When we consider that men were both the creators, editors, and curators of medieval literature, which further exacerbated male influence by implicitly assuming a male

⁶ Jo Ann McNamara, ‘The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150’, in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Clare A. Lees (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 3-29 (p.4).

⁷ Cynthia J. Brown, *Poets, Patrons, and Printers: Crisis of Authority in Late Medieval France*, (Cornell University Press, 2019), p.3.

⁸ E. Wyn James, ‘Cushions, Copy-books and Computers: Ann Griffiths (1776-1805), her Hymns and Letters and their Transmission’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 90 (2014), pp.162-183 (p.163), doi: 10.7227/BJRL.90.2.10

⁹ Kappahn, ‘Constructions of Gender in Medieval Welsh Literature’, p.2.

perspective, it is little surprise that women were greatly misunderstood and therefore constrained by biased stereotypes in medieval poetry.

A common stereotype of women in medieval Welsh poetry is the passive ideal of femininity, often used to reflect male status. In this context, women are cast as wives, noble hostesses, or simply beautiful girls. This ideal appears in a poem by Iolo Goch, likely written in the 1390s and believed to have been composed to celebrate the completion of a new building at Sycharth. While the poem's main subject is Owain Glyndŵr, his wife, Margaret Hanmer, is briefly featured. Gruffydd Aled Williams describes Hanmer as a "fleeting female presence"¹⁰ in an "unremittingly male world."¹¹ While Sycharth might be her home, she is of secondary status to her male counterparts and is only mentioned to validate the quality of the hospitality. She serves the poet with "wine and mead"¹² and is explicitly hailed as the "best woman of all women."¹³ While her husband is portrayed through praise of his martial prowess, Hanmer is relegated to the domestic sphere, where she serves the men in her company. Moreover, Goch describes Sycharth as using neither "a bolt or a lock,"¹⁴ symbolising a court in which everyone is welcome and will not experience "lack nor hunger nor shame, nor thirst ever."¹⁵ In this context, Hanmer is portrayed as the facilitator of this openness, expected to serve all guests' needs. Ultimately, Hanmer's domestic duties allow her husband to maintain his lifestyle while simultaneously bolstering his own narrative of success by presenting her as a successful wife, in line with medieval standards. Furthermore, in his poem, Goch discusses Hanmer's lineage and the role that she plays in securing the dynastic future. The poem praises her ability to bear several children who possess her husband's martial qualities, emphasising her role as a biological vessel for Glyndŵr's dynasty. Hanmer's labour, both in her hospitality and her motherhood, is framed within this poem as an innate quality of her gender rather than as an active choice made by her.

¹⁰ Gruffydd Aled Williams, 'The medieval Welsh poetry associated with Owain Glyndŵr', *British Academy Review*, 2011, pp.18-22 (p.21), <<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/778/BAR17-08-Williams.pdf>> [accessed 15 May 2026].

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, p.22.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Another notable stereotype of women in Welsh poetry is the grieving woman. To understand this archetype, we can explore *Canu Heledd*, a saga-englyn poem dating to around the 9th or 10th century. In this poem, Heledd, the narrator, is the sole survivor of the royal house of Powys and mourns her brothers and the Anglo-Saxon destruction of her kingdom.¹⁶ In stanzas 83-86, Heledd recounts the deaths of her three brothers, who died defending Tren. While the men in Welsh poetry might die heroic deaths, the women they leave behind inherit the consequences of war. For Heledd, the consequences are not only the loss of her brothers but also the destruction of her home. Moreover, given that a woman's value was tied to her kin and lineage, the deaths of her brothers displace Heledd within a medieval framework, leaving her vulnerable both physically and socially. In stanzas 78-79, it is stated that Heledd is otherwise known as “wandering Heledd”¹⁷ following the disaster. Heledd fiercely defends her brother's honour, stating that he “never retreated a foot”¹⁸ and was not “feeble.”¹⁹ Interestingly, she invokes his mother to validate his strength. In this context, the value of the mother and her success in raising a son might be considered determined by his valour. The tragedy is that, in successfully raising her son, the mother ultimately dooms him to die in battle. Heledd places the blame for her brothers' deaths on herself, stating, “My misfortune caused it.”²⁰ Here, she internalises the catastrophe as a personal, moral failure. It is possible to argue that Heledd, who regards her brothers as illustrious warriors devoid of cowardice, might assume responsibility for what could have been a military defeat in order to preserve their reputations. In this context, her brothers were not defeated for lack of martial prowess but because they were cursed by her, by proxy.

Llywelyn Goch ap Meurig Hen's '*Marwnad Lleucu Llwyd*' depicts a prevalent stereotype of women as silent, stylised symbols of perfection rather than as active

¹⁶ BBC, 'Llywarch Hen and Heledd', BBC Wales Arts, 20 October 2009

<<https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/arts/sites/early-welsh-literature/pages/llywarch-hen.shtml>> [accessed 15 May 2026].

¹⁷ Jenny Rowland, 'Translations: Canu Heledd', in *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the Englynion* (D.S. Brewer, 1990), pp.482-496 (p.490).

¹⁸ Ibid, p.491.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

agents in their own history. Composed in the mid to late 14th century, the poem narrates the death of the poet's lover, Lleucu Llwyd.²¹ In this work, she is portrayed as celestial through imagery, as exemplified by her being described as "the moon's beauty."²² Moreover, the poet places great emphasis on the colour white, as when she is described as "of driven-snow colour."²³ In this context, describing Lleucu Llwyd as both white and celestial aligns her particularly with light. Further, the repetition of such a description suggests that she exemplifies a concentrated expression of the associated values, wherein she demonstrates "the absolute purity of light."²⁴ By reducing her to an abstract beacon of pure light, she is essentially othered, transforming her from a woman into a theological concept. Given that Lleucu Llwyd, in this poem, has died, the focus on her whiteness might represent her spiritual purity. Her whiteness, which stands as a metaphor for the purity of her soul, prepares her for God and the day of judgment.²⁵ However, it simultaneously alienates her from her lover, the poet. To further 'other' her, the poet contrasts his emphasised portrayal of Lleucu Llwyd as a bright, white form, with heavy, dark, and suffocating barriers. This can be observed as he describes her as being buried, with a "hard oak case"²⁶ between them, as though it was a "heavy door, a heavy barrier"²⁷ or a "black steel lock"²⁸ keeping him away from her. This poem ultimately depicts women as highly aestheticized, silent symbols, paradoxically elevating them to the divine while concurrently confining them to a state of powerlessness. Regarding Lleucu Llwyd, her beauty condemns her to a legacy of objectification following her death. In this context, her demise serves to reinforce the ideal of the beautiful woman as a mute object of desire and mourning.

²¹ *Gwaith Llywelyn Goch ap Meurig Hen*, ed. by Dafydd Johnston (Prifysgol Cymru, 2023), p.92, <<https://repository.uwtsd.ac.uk/id/eprint/2545>> [accessed 16 May 2026].

²² Llywelyn Goch, 'The Death of Lleucu Llwyd', in *Welsh Poems: Sixth Century to 1600*, ed. by Gwyn Williams (Faber and Faber, 1973) pp.56-68 (p.56).

²³ *Ibid.*, p.58.

²⁴ M.J. Huxtable, 'Colour, Seeing, and Seeing Colour in Medieval Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2008) <https://etheses.durham.ac.uk/id/eprint/2175/1/2175_183.pdf> [accessed 16 May 2026] p.116.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.197.

²⁶ Goch, 'The Death of Lleucu Llwyd', in *Welsh Poems*, ed. by Williams, p.58.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Although rare, women were not always merely the subjects of poetry, but the creators. While E. Wyn James suggests that Ann Williams is the greatest, or perhaps the only, prominent Welsh female poet, her legacy is inextricably linked to her medieval predecessor, Gwerful Mechain. In fact, Williams herself might have been inspired by Mechain's work, as a copy of a poem by Mechain was discovered among Williams's belongings at her home.²⁹ However, if we evaluate significance by the foundational impact on our modern understanding of female poetry, Mechain emerges as the primary figure. It is essential to recognise that Mechain was active in the 15th century, nearly three hundred years prior to Williams, and most likely paved the way for subsequent Welsh women to engage in the field of poetry. Her technical writing is regarded as equivalent to that of her male counterparts, highlighting her role within a male bardic tradition rather than serving as an effort to establish a distinct female tradition. This unique position allowed her to question male poets through the very medium they used to establish and uphold hegemony.³⁰ Although Mechain's access to poetry and her role in its creation may appear unconventional within Welsh medieval society, it is essential to acknowledge her high social status. Her father was Hywel Fychan of Llanfechain, Powys, and she maintained numerous connections with poets and patrons associated with the Welsh bardic guild. This ultimately afforded her the privilege of agency and allowed her to surpass the "boundaries of the male-dominated bardic cultures"³¹ to become a poet herself.

A poem that warranted a response from Mechain was Dafydd ap Gwilym's *Cywydd Y Gal*, or 'The Penis' in English. Dating to the mid-14th century, it is generally regarded as one of the most notable Welsh erotic poems, in which ap Gwilym presents his penis as "a weird creature with an independent existence"³² through expressive

²⁹ E. Wyn James, 'Cushions, Copy-books and Computers: Ann Griffiths (1776-1805), her Hymns and Letters and their Transmission', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 90 (2014), pp.162-183 (p.172), doi: 10.7227/BJRL.90.2.10

³⁰ Katie Grammich and Catherine Brennan, *Welsh Women's Poetry 1460-2001: An Anthology* (Honno, 2003), pp.xvii-xviii.

³¹ Cathryn A. Charnell-White, 'Beyond Borders: Women Poets in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales up to c. 1500', in *Women and Medieval Literary Culture: From the Early Middle Ages to the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Corinne Saunders and Diane Watt (Cambridge University Press, 2023) pp.457-476 (p.458).

³² Dafydd Johnston, 'Erotica and Satire in Medieval Welsh Poetry', in *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Jan M. Ziolkowski (Brill, 1998), pp.60-72 (p.63).

imagery. Drawing on the technical terms of the Welsh poetic tradition, ap Gwilym utilises the structural device known as *dyfalu*, meaning riddling in English, in which a poet uses a plethora of imagery to describe a single object.³³ For example, in this poem, ap Gwilym describes the phallus as a crowbar, a pestle, and a gun, among others. However, to analyse the portrayal of women in this poem, it is imperative to first examine the poet himself. Dafydd ap Gwilym was a renowned Welsh poet of the 14th century, highly esteemed for his craft. He was a nobleman, and through discriminatory language in his work, such as employing the term ‘farm labourer’ to describe the “crude and the evil,”³⁴ he evidenced the prejudices that seemed to accompany his privileged status. Regarding his perceived attitude towards women, Richard Morgan Loomis describes ap Gwilym as adhering to traditional standards, in which the poet might regard being of “good lineage”³⁵ as of great importance to women. Furthermore, Loomis notes that ap Gwilym had been described as the “hawk of the girls of Deheubarth”³⁶ by fellow poet Iolo Goch. This description delineates ap Gwilym’s perceptions of and attitudes towards women, as it implies a predator-prey dynamic between the poet and the girls. In this context, ap Gwilym perceives women as prizes to be won, rather than as social peers. In this context, the poet attempts to disguise his pursuit of women and their explicit sexualisation as inevitable, natural necessities. The poet’s perspectives on women likely influence their depiction in his works. Considering that ap Gwilym was also an exceedingly esteemed Welsh poet, his poetry was broadly circulated, and these values may have been propagated to his readership, thereby perpetuating simplistic stereotypes of women.

Though the *Cywydd Y Gal* ultimately both boasts of his sexual prowess and undermines any sexual transgressions he might have committed by blaming his penis for being unruly, it lends itself to a rather pervasive portrayal of women. His language is crude and reductive, and his limited depiction of women is restricted to their genitals or to his desire to engage in sexual relations with them. Moreover, the women whom ap

³³ Ibid, p.62.

³⁴ Richard Morgan Loomis, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: The Poems* (Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), p.16, <<https://archive.org/details/dafyddapgwilympo00dafyuoft/page/2/mode/1up>> [accessed 13 May 2026].

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Gwilym desires appear to be voiceless objects serving his gratification rather than active participants in mutual desire; they are reduced to descriptions of their “bare arse”³⁷ or their “small cunt”³⁸ and are effectively deprived of agency. Additionally, ap Gwilym asserts that his penis “finds every woman fair.”³⁹ In this context, women are perceived as interchangeable, or perhaps even infinite, with their sole function being to serve the poet’s sexual desires. Given that the poem is titled ‘The Penis’, it is not surprising that it is male-centric. Furthermore, ap Gwilym performs masculinity by conforming to societal roles, delineating the male role within the martial masculine domain and the female role within the domestic feminine domain.⁴⁰ Here, ap Gwilym subverts the martial battlefield, instead making it a metaphorical battleground in which he confronts his lust. Alternatively, his target is subverted, with ap Gwilym instead aiming to conquer women sexually. In this context, his reputation as a ‘hawk’ might elucidate the perspective that a woman is to be subdued in combat, analogous to a predator successfully apprehending its prey. However, these concepts are steeped in violent connotations, equating sexual triumph with the slaughter of enemies. Ultimately, *Cywydd Y Gal* depicts medieval Welsh women as defined by their relationship to men and the masculine domain, reducing them to sexual objects and stripping them of bodily autonomy. Although it is possible that ap Gwilym is depicting a character in this poem, or rather a satirical representation of a sexually frustrated man, the character remains fundamentally rooted in the systemic biases against women in the Welsh medieval society.

Given the analysis of *Cywydd Y Gal*, it is understandable that Gwerful Mechain felt compelled to compose her own poem in reply. Mechain’s *Cywydd y Cedor*, which translates as ‘The Female Genitals’, concentrates exclusively on depicting the female anatomy. Its frankness is notably contemporary, prompting Katie Gramich to liken the poem to the works of modern female poets, such as Sharon Olds, whose themes remain taboo today. In fact, Gramich observes that, as with Olds’ philosophical perspective on

³⁷ Dafydd ap Gwilym, ‘85 – Y Gal’, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, 2007
<<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 13 May 2026].

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kapphahn, ‘Constructions of Gender in Medieval Welsh Literature’, p.3.

her poetry, Mechain addressed topics typically overlooked by other poets.⁴¹ This is particularly significant considering the dominance of male poets in the Welsh poetic landscape, who, as previously explored, presumably held conventional and subjective views of women. Indeed, Mechain was incredibly candid and explored female sexuality in unprecedentedly unreserved ways. Her language, in particular, was considered exceptionally unseemly, despite it being no worse than the crude language used by other male poets.⁴²

Compared to ap Gwilym's *Cywydd Y Gal*, Mechain's *Cywydd y Cedor* is entirely devoid of boastfulness. While ap Gwilym employs the female form to bolster his self-importance, or more precisely, his assertions regarding the grandeur of his penis, Mechain seeks to deliver a critique of the male portrayal of women in literary works. In the initial lines of the poem, she ridicules the "boorish vanity" of the men who compose "fruitless praise."⁴³ Notably, although Mechain provides an imaginative description of the vagina, she explicitly rejects the use of euphemisms. Instead, she employs direct, anatomical terminology, such as 'cedor.' In this context, she implies that the female body does not require transformation or metaphorical description to merit admiration. Furthermore, Mechain critically examines the censorship she has observed in men's poetry, where the vagina, and particularly the biological capacity conferred upon women to create and sustain life, are often neglected. Instead, the focus is placed on aspects of a woman's body that may serve to enhance male pleasure. She refutes the depiction of women as mere collections of body parts and instead portrays them as autonomous beings. Moreover, Mechain describes the female body as possessing "boundless strength."⁴⁴ Here, she rejects medieval societal expectations, instead depicting the female body as possessing great physical strength without sacrificing its gender or its gender expression. Alternatively, this could be read as a symbolic strength.

⁴¹ Katie Gramich, *The Works of Gwerful Mechain* (Broadview Press, 2018), p.17.

⁴² Lloyd-Morgan, 'More written about than writing', in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. by Pryce, p.197.

⁴³ G. Mechain, 'Cywydd y Cedor/The Female Genitals', in *Canu Maswedd yr Oesoedd Canol/Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry*, ed. by Dafydd Johnston (Seren, 1998), pp.36-39 (p.37), <<https://archive.org/details/canumasweddyroes0000unse/page/140/mode/1up>> [accessed 13 May 2026].

⁴⁴ Ibid.

She elaborates on this perspective by portraying female anatomy as a divine creation by God. In doing so, she ultimately sanctifies the female body by aligning it with the divine. Additionally, Mechain invokes St Beuno and other clergymen to imply that attraction to women is an intrinsic aspect of the human experience, so profound that it surpasses ecclesiastical vows. This argument emphasises her disapproval of male poets' depictions of the female body, whose sanitised verses fail to recognise its full potential. Ultimately, contrasting with ap Gwilym's boastful portrayal of his penis as a gift to women, Mechain contends that the female form is, in reality, the true gift.

In summary, the portrayal of medieval Welsh women was largely shaped by contemporary male perspectives. Given that women and men in the Middle Ages engaged with the world in distinct ways, it is not surprising that women were occasionally depicted inaccurately in poetry, often as superficial figures. Within this context, the extant medieval Welsh poetry available to us suggests that women were expected to conform to specific, restrictive classifications. Moreover, numerous stereotypes of women were employed to advance particular narratives or to mirror societal expectations of women. For example, the passive conception of femininity could reinforce the expectation that a woman should serve her husband and other men in her life. In this framework, a woman is reduced to her relationships with men, entirely disconnected from her own identity. This idea is further accentuated by her role as a mother and the expectation that she promote her husband's legacy and lineage. Conversely, the archetype of the grieving woman bears the repercussions of actions that result in the deaths of her loved ones, despite likely having no direct involvement. Alternatively, the ideal of the beautiful yet silent woman effectively diminishes her agency, thereby condemning her to a legacy of objectification. In this context, a woman is rendered essentially powerless, without a voice, and her legacy depends on the poet, presumably male, who chooses to document it. However, while very rare, there exist particular instances of female medieval poets whose compositions contest those of their male contemporaries. Gwerful Mechain's poetry, especially *Cywydd y Cedor*, examines the female form in a manner that diverges from the typical approach of male poets. In this context, Mechain defies prevalent stereotypes of women

within poetic works and further disputes the idea that a woman's value is linked to men or to male perceptions of her. Ultimately, the portrayal of Welsh women in medieval poetry was shaped by a prejudiced system that intentionally marginalised them. Consequently, this led to biased conventions that effectively confined women to their societal roles, discouraging them from transcending boundaries and contesting these norms.

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