

THE WOMAN IN
PSYCHOLOGY AND LITERATURE:
IMAGES AND ROLES

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Both psychology and literature can be seen as an attempt to order and interpret existing reality and to explain the nature and meaning of man's (and woman's) place in that reality. Both require a delicate combination of imagination and craft. Literature is a symbolic and personal rendering of experience which has more to do with images than with reality, with metaphor than with direct statement. ^{* Yet it contains an element of discipline and selectivity which separates it from the intensely private, erratic and aberrant visions of the insane (cf. F. Barron, 1971). Psychology strives after the (perhaps illusory) objective precision and rigor of a physical science, and in the past has attempted to assimilate some of its immutable laws. However, the practice of psychotherapy demands an intuitive, personal quality which makes its successful execution as much art as science.}

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Both disciplines have applied both their craft and their intuition to the interpretation of woman, in a way which has simultaneously reflected and helped shape her reality. Women conflicted over identity seek out answers in psychotherapy and, more informally, in literature. An examination of the last fifty years reveals that American psychology and literature have responded by creating an image which alternately condemns woman as inferior, passive, even evil and glorifies her as the embodiment of compassion, nurturance, and all the better virtues.

Each model finds expression in psychological theory, which has tended to regard woman as characterized by certain personality traits which extend cross-situationally over long periods of time. Classical Freudians, whose influence, while particularly strong during the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's, is still substantial, became spokesmen for the first model. They saw woman as a "castrated man," (Greer, 1971, p. 92), therefore a mutilated man, an inferior man.

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