The commonly cited maxim, "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is often traced incorrectly back to the biblical book of Proverbs when its point of origin lies instead first in Langland’s Piers Plowman and then, in the highly satirical and sexualized text of Samuel Butler’s Hudibras. Thus, from a religious origin, it has metamorphosed into a woman-man relationship. Indeed to follow the evolution of this phrase is to uncover the extent to which the disciplining impulses of religious rhetoric are eroticized in one Western European literary theme, that of feminine dominance, from the tenth century when the word Dominatrix appeared in the writings of Hroswitha of Gandersheim. The period leading up to the 1650s, when Butler turned the phrase into one line of a heroic iambic couplet in the middle of a stanza on an amorous jaileress, was also a time when medical research on human and animal anatomy and physiology had unravelled the pathways of libido-lifting buttock-beating. Far from demonizing woman the literary image of the whip-wielding mistress did not degrade the female sex but instead apotheosized the dominatrix as a major erotic image of the twentieth century.

Feminine Domination in the Middle Ages

Canoness Hroswitha lived from 935 to 975 in Gandersheim, Saxony. In a late tenth-century manuscript of her first legend, Maria, she used the Latin word Dominatrix, and claimed in the
preface that her object was to show a “fragile woman who is victorious and a strong man who is routed with confusion” (Haight, 1965).

There is an almost inexhaustible medieval literature on the theme of courtly love for an unattainable Lady, which evolved gradually into putting the woman dominating the man. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries French romances re-worked cycles of King Arthur (Loomis, 1949; 1956), Lancelot (Troyes, 1987; Zatzikhoven, 1951; Cross & Nitze, 1970; Troyes, 1997) and Tristan (Thomas, 1923). The romances of Chrétien de Troyes were dedicated to Marie, countess of Champagne (Troyes, 1987; 1997) The writers of these chivalric sophisticated stories placed the gallant knight, such as Lancelot, as a humble, submissive lover to his queenly mistress (such as Queen Guinevere). In many stories the knight is imprisoned by what scholars have called “an amorous jaileress” from whom he escapes (Loomis, 1956; Zatzikhoven, 1951; Troyes, 1997). However in later centuries the man is not merely imprisoned by the Lady; he is also bound and beaten, and both he and the Lady take (sexual) pleasure in the transaction.

Renaissance

One of the earliest sixteenth-century romances of chivalry, *Amadis of Gaul*, was published by Montalvo in 1508 (Montalvo, 1974–75). Amadis, son of the King of Gaul, is a composite of Lancelot and Tristan, and loves Oriana, daughter of a pre-Arthurian king. In 1560 the Italian-Portuguese musician Jorge de Montemar (Montemajor) wrote in both Spanish and Portuguese *La Diana* (Montemajor, 1738); the shepherd Sirenus loves the shepherdess Diana, who spurns both him and his rival Sylvanus, “scorned when we receive the yoke.”

In 1578 John Lyly published *Eupheus; the Analysis of Wit* (Lyly, 1916), in which Eupheus, besotted by Lucilla asks himself: ‘Wilt thou resemble the kind spaniel which the more often he is beaten the fonder he is?’ Thus the man, bound in *La Diana*, is now whipped. Lyly was one of the earliest English prose stylists, and his romantic intrigues of love and religion led to the eponym