



# TESTED WOMAN PLOT: WOMEN'S CHOICES, MEN'S JUDGMENTS, AND TH

*LOIS E. BUELER*

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In this provocative study, Lois E. Bueler examines in broad literary historical terms what she calls the Tested Woman Plot, a "story-machine" that originated in the ancient Mediterranean world (as in the stories of Eve and Lucretia), flourished in English Renaissance drama (as in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *The Changeling*), and continued into the novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (as in *Clarissa*, *Adam Bede*, and *The Scarlet Letter*).

This plot structure is not simply any story of women undergoing tests, Bueler argues, but rather a codified narrative type that at base is concerned with the assertion of patriarchal order and is therefore as much about men as about its tested women. Key structural elements of this narrative are the test itself (the woman's moment of choice) and the trial (a retrospective scrutiny from the perspective of male authorities). Bueler maintains that the tested woman, originally a vehicle for exercising competing, stereotypically characterized power relationships among male authority figures, becomes in the modern novel a locus for portraying developing concepts of the self.

Encyclopedic in scope, *The Tested Woman Plot* is a provocative look at a key narrative tradition that spans many genres and should appeal to all serious students of literature.

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