

The widow of ephesus by gaius petronius arbiter

Literature



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The Widow of Ephesus: Sympathetic Characterization. The Widow of Ephesus is a Latin folktale by Gaius PetroniusArbiter. It recounts the story of a virtuous widow who uses the corpse of her dead husband to safeguard her new lover from death. This story is the forerunner of several stories of this genre, with similar storylines. Here it is Told of a Gentleman who the Emperor had Hanged , The Perfidious Widow and A Widow Digs up her Deceased Husband and Hangs him on the Gallows, all deal with almost identical characters and content. However, although The Widow of Ephesus too connotes the fickleness of a woman's love, it differs from its' imitations in its' characterization. With its' compassionate portrayal of the widow, the resoluteness of the soldier and the respectful treatment of the corpse, The Widow of Ephesus is the only tale which engages our sympathy.

The widow of Ephesus is portrayed in a manner which arouses our sympathy. She is a woman of well-established virtue who mourns her dead husband for five days without food and water (Petronius, Paragraph 2), which none of the other widows do. She does not immediately capitulate to the soldier's advances. It takes a lot of persuasion on his part, in conjunction with the maid's pleading, to make her accept him as her lover. In contrast, the widow who digs up her dead husband blatantly proposes marriage to her soldier. Likewise, the perfidious widow is the one who first professes her love for her captain. Again, the lady in Here it is Told ---- opportunistically accepts the knight's offer of marriage as a bargain for her aid. It is only the widow of Ephesus whose love verges on the credible.

The soldier in The Widow of Ephesus is the only male protagonist in the four tales under study who displays resoluteness. He persists in his efforts to make the grieving widow break her fast. He woos her and then does <https://assignbuster.com/the-widow-of-ephesus-by-gaius-petronius-arbiter/>

everything in his power to give her pleasure (Petronius, Para. 10). On facing the death penalty, he resolves to end his own life. Contrary to this, the soldier in *A Widow Digs* --- and the knight in *Here it is Told* --- both manipulate their women to secure their aid in evading death, but later renege on their promises of marriage. While the captain in *The Perfidious Widow* is less ruthless, he plans to abandon the widow and run away to escape death. Despite his seduction of the widow of Ephesus, the soldier differs from the men in the other tales in his comparatively chivalrous behavior.

The treatment of the corpse of the deceased husband in *The Widow of Ephesus* is markedly opposed to the callousness exhibited in the other tales. Even when the widow of Ephesus proposes to hang her husband's corpse on the cross, she professes her love for him (Petronius, Para 12). Her action comes across as clear-sighted and practical, but not cruel. On the other hand, in *A Widow Digs* ---, the widow has no qualms in cold bloodedly knocking out the dead mans' teeth with a stone. The perfidious widow is equally eager to pluck out the hairs from her dead husbands' head. Likewise, the widow in *Here it is Told* -has no hesitation in breaking her dead husbands' tooth.

The Widow of Ephesus is the only tale in which the lady emerges as a virtuous widow, who may have credibly fallen in love. The soldier in *The Widow of Ephesus* is again the only male protagonist among the four to exhibit a degree of resolve. The treatment of the corpse in *The Widow of Ephesus* is portrayed as a necessary device rather than a ruthless desecration, as in the other three stories. *The Widow of Ephesus* differs from its' later imitations in its' comparatively sympathetic portrayal of its'

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characters.

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