
TRIBUNE: *WOMEN'S SONGS AND MEDIEVAL LYRIC POETRY: WOMEN'S VOICES AND FIGURES, MENTAL REPRESENTATIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE***Meritxell Simó**

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It is well known that, largely driven by the feminist movements of the late 1960s, women's historical studies underwent a major development in the second half of the twentieth century. The construction of 'gender' as a hermeneutic category by English-speaking academia and the development of Gender Studies, which led to the creation of new departments and areas of study first in American and then in European universities, also had a significant impact on scholarship, especially in the 1980s. The notion of 'gender', championed by Joan Scott in a celebrated 1986 article as a critical paradigm for the study of the past,¹ has been since successively and constantly rethought, nuanced, diversified, and broadened. Acquiring a multifaceted scope, this concept has made it possible to construct a theoretical framework that has contributed decisively to the renewal of studies in the Humanities. Both the understanding of gender as a cultural construction that involves the dynamics of the whole social fabric, and the achievements of studies devoted to women's history have not only highlighted the trivialisations, mystifications, and distortions characteristic of traditional interpretive paradigms, but also promoted the articulation of a complex historiographical discourse that is informed by interdisciplinary dialogue. In other words, nowadays, the gender perspective, far from necessarily involving thematic, methodological and / or academic boundaries, cuts across profoundly diverse disciplinary fields. Moreover, talking about women—in our case, medieval women—naturally leads to interdisciplinarity.

It is within this epistemological framework that we must consider the five articles included in this issue of SVMMA, which results from a research project coordinated by the UB and the USC, devoted to the study of the role of women in medieval European lyric poetry and its artistic, historical, and social projections.² The project aims to understand medieval European, Romance and Germanic lyric poetry and its relationship with the mental frameworks and social

¹ Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1076.

² *Estudio de la canción de mujer en la lírica galorrománica y germánica y de la figura femenina como constructora del espacio sociopoético trovadoresco* (PID2019-108910GB-C21) / *Voces, espacios y representaciones femeninas en la lírica gallego-potuguesa* (PID2019-108910GB-C22) <https://www.ub.edu/womenandmedievalsong>

transformations of Western culture through an interdisciplinary and pragmatic approach to female figures. This ranges from the study of artistic representations to the stylistic and cognitive analysis of the different modulations of the female lyrical voice, and the identification and historiographical study of female dedicators, authors and promoters of medieval poetry. The comprehensive study of the different facets that connect the feminine and medieval lyric poetry, often considered in a fragmented or subordinate way (by linguistic areas, by disciplines or by generic or stylistic registers), should allow a better understanding of the real scope of phenomena such as female patronage and female authorship in the different European regions. It will also lead to a better understanding of the artistic and poetic discourse of and about women. The ultimate goal of this holistic approach is not only to rethink the role of women in medieval culture, but also to reconsider social and mental transformations in the West, given the great impact that the discourse on women and love elaborated by European courts had on the culture and emotional education of the period. The results of such a study cannot be limited to the juxtaposition of data referring to different linguistic and cultural traditions, but must make it possible to visualise the dialogue between these traditions as well as their complex interplay. To this end, a large part of our research outputs will be conveyed through digital products such as databases and deep-mapping. The objective of the project is the creation of an online platform that integrates the digitised corpus of medieval lyric poetry expressing the female voice. By bringing together various databases, this platform will allow the lexicographic and discursive study of that voice, register and catalogue the artistic representations related to the studied corpus, and enable the elaboration of a European map of female patronage and poetic production, contextualising and mapping the circulation of compositions, troubadours, and minstrels.

These preliminary remarks make it clear that the present issue of SVMMA does not match the standard model of a monograph that gathers the research results of a team project. Neither the timetable of the project, nor the format or the space available here, would allow for the holistic approach to medieval lyric poetry described above. Instead, our sole aim is to present a selection of samples that gives an idea of the different models of analysis that an approach to medieval lyric poetry articulated around the female figure calls for.

The first two articles are devoted to the Galician-Portuguese tradition, which is extremely rich both in terms of the polyphonic nature of the female image that pervades the surviving lyrical corpus, and in terms of the abundance of documents that directly or indirectly inform us of the participation of women in the cultural circuits linked to the production and dissemination of these texts. In fact, these two articles illustrate the need to read the Galician-Portuguese reception of the Occitan troubadour tradition through an interpretive lens tailored around the historical backdrop of the Iberian kingdoms. The reconstruction of such scene involves very diverse yet deeply related fields of study, such as the historical context of patronage, artistic representations, and the mental frameworks constructed by the sociological context.

V. Nodar Fernández's study of the female figure in the iconographic programme of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela does not merely identify its themes and possible models, but explores the social and cultural universe in which it was embedded and the role women played in that domain, questioning the message the programme conveyed and the audience for whom it was meant. This rich social fabric undoubtedly fostered the diversity of female figures in Galician-Portuguese lyric poetry, where the aristocratically haughty *senhor* coexists with the *dona virgo* of the *cantiga de amigo*, and with the *soldadeiras* who accompanied the minstrels. In turn, the article by Y. Frateschi Vieira considers this diversity from the perspective of ethnic minorities. Focusing on the poetic production of the troubadour known as Vidal the Jew, Frateschi Vieira uses the background of the complex relations between the Hebrew, Muslim, and Christian worlds to contextualise and explain the nuances of the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion revealed by the preservation of Vidal's work under the rubric *As cantigas de Vidal, Judeu d'Elvas, a uma judia*.

The small corpus of the *trobairitz* is one of the most obvious examples of the need for an epistemological renewal aimed at overcoming the tendency to study it in isolation, through the lens of inherited critical prejudices and very limiting and often exclusionary methodological pretences. In this sense, and without underestimating the important contribution of English-speaking gender scholars to the rediscovery and appreciation of the works of the *trobairitz*, it must be noted that the reading of the female lyrical production of the period only makes sense when it is situated within the troubadour corpus as a whole. As is apparent from the significance of dialogical genres in this production, the poetic subjectivity of the *trobairitz* was constructed in a dialectical relationship with the masculine code of *fin'amors*, and therefore cannot be studied in isolation from it. The analysis of the reconfiguration of the poetic and discursive system brought about by the always destabilising irruption of the female lyric self—regardless of whether this femininity is real or merely textual—must also be completed with the study of the reception of the female lyric corpus and the perception of these women by their contemporaries and, later, by modern readers and scholars. The articles by W. Pfeffer and I. de Riquer provide us with two interesting examples of this long and complicated journey from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century. The former, focused on the *vidas* and *razos*, analyses the representation of women in this corpus, paying particular attention to the features that differentiate the description of the *trobairitz* from that of their troubadour counterparts; the latter deals with the reception of the *trobairitz* in Catalan literature between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Finally, the study of female authorial voices must also be completed with the study of fictional voices recorded in other textual discourses. This is the background of the article by Inés García, who studies the poetic work of the female skald Áslaug Sigurðardóttir in the context of the *Ragnars saga*. The scarcity of documented women authors in medieval literature contrasts with the abundance of female 'authorial figures' that we find in narrative texts presented as poetesses, female minstrels, and patronesses, among others. This topic—which provides the basis for

a doctoral dissertation currently being developed within the framework of the project— is of twofold interest, as these authorial masks, characteristic of anonymous and often male-authored texts, not only provide us with information about the literary activity of medieval women, but also inform us about the medieval imaginary on female poetic composition and performance.

To conclude, by exploring the discourse of artistic and literary creation, but also the phenomena of reception, and the changes in courtly culture and its ability to transform social and mental structures, we aim to show just a few pieces of an interdisciplinary research that finds in the female figure a solid anchor point from which to build a dialogue between very different methodological approaches.

