



ERİL TOPLUMDA KADIN SESLERİ: AMASYALI KADIN ŞAİRLER VE  
OKSİTAN'DAKİ KADIN TRUBADURLAR ÜZERİNE MUKAYESELİ BİR ÇALIŞMA

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ÖZ

Amasya'da 15. ve 16. Yüzyıla ait tezkireler incelendiğinde önemli dört kadın şaire yer verildiği görülmektedir: Zeynep, Nisayi, Ayşe ve Mihri Hatun. Mihri Hatun'un divanının dört nüshasının bulunmasına rağmen bahsi geçen diğer kadın şairlerin eserlerine sadece tezkire ve yazışmalar üzerinden ulaşabiliyoruz. Bu şairelerin tamamı erkek şairler tarafından erkek okurlar için tasarlanmış divan edebiyatı sınırları içinde eser vermiştir. Buna benzer bir örneği on iki ve on üçüncü yüzyılda Oksitan edebi muhitlerinde de görüyoruz. 1150-1250 yılları arasında bir grup kadın, troyador erkeği merkeze alan kendi klasik edebiyatlarının sınırları içinde şiirler üretmiştir.

Bu mukayeseli çalışma yukarıda belirtilen kadın yazarların eserlerinde kadınlık ve seslerin çokluğu kavramına odaklanmaktadır. Oksitan bölgesinden (Fransa'nın güney kesiminden) ve Amasya'dan (Anadolu'nun kuzey kesiminden) kadın yazarların kimliğini inşa eden sosyal koşulları daha iyi anlamak ve ilerlemelerinde önemli olup olmadığını araştırmak için inceleniyor. Ele alınan üç karşılaştırma hususu söz konusudur: birincisi, cinsiyet söylemi sorunu, farklı konular hakkında çoklu sesler kullanarak yazmak ve bu iki durumun kadın yazarların edebi tarzlarını ne ölçüde etkilediğidir. İkinci olarak, kadın yazarlar arasındaki mektup yazışmaları veya şiir üzerinden ne gibi etkileşimler olduğu da bu araştırmanın konusudur. Bu çalışma, dönemin kadın ve erkek şairleri arasındaki etkileşime de odaklanmaktadır. Her iki durumda da kadın yazarlar, söz konusu teknikleri erkek hegemonyası sınırları içindeki edebi dünyada statü kazanmak için bir müzakere aracı olarak kullanmışlardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Erken modern, orta çağ, tezkire, kadın şair, Amasya,

FEMININE VOICES WITHIN MASCULINE BOUNDARIES: A COMPARISON OF THE  
FEMALE POETS OF AMASYA AND THE WOMEN TROUBADOURS OF OCCITANIA

ABSTRACT

In Amasya during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, four female poets appear in *tezkires*, a collection of short biographies of notable figures: Zeynep, Nisayi, Ayşe, and Mihri Hatun. While Mihri Hatun's *divan*, collection of poems, remains entirely intact with four manuscript copies, we find the remaining poets' works either from correspondences or *tezkires*. Both these poets wrote within the boundaries of divan literature, which is created by male for the male. We find a similar example in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries Occitan literary culture. Troubadours, woman troubadours, whose lives spanned the period between approximately 1150 and 1250, appeared as a literary group in Occitania and produced poems of courtly love. Like in the case of women poets from Amasya, women troubadours were also in the boundaries of a literary system that men created with the dreams of men in mind.

This comparative study explores the concept of femaleness and the notion of multiplicity of voices in these women writers' works. The historical setting of women writers from Occitania (in the southern part of France) and Amasya (in the northern part of Anatolia) is given to have a better understanding of the urban centers, as well as to investigate whether they are significant in the advancement of women poets or not. There are three points of comparison addressed:

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first, the question of gender discourse, writing about different topics by using multiple voices, and to what extent it affected these writers' literary styles. Secondly, the interactions between women writers, such as letter correspondences and/or poem exchanges are discussed. The scope of this study also focuses on the interaction between male and female poets – if there is any. Finally, in both cases, the women writers used the aforementioned techniques as a negotiation tool to earn status in a literary world within the borders of male hegemony.

**Keywords:** Early modern medieval tezkire woman poet Amasya

### Introduction

Even in the corpus of female literary works, both in the East and the West, the unwritten rules of male dominance are apparent. Although women writers are in the same competitive lane as male writers, according to the rules of classical structure, the beloved is a female symbol while active love is a masculine role, suggesting that the voice of poetry was expected to be that of a man. In such male-dominated societies discomfort with the idea of woman writing poetry continued to be widely shared even among early-modern male writers, with the result that women poets left few surviving records. In the case of both *trobairitz* and especially the first Ottoman women writers, very limited numbers of manuscripts remain today. Bearing in mind that the only sources about female writers that have reached us those that were written by men, this scarcity of the work of women writers may reasonably attributed to a communal structure in which the concept of women writing was perceived as socially inappropriate and even offensive. To understand these urban centers as well the extent to which they were significant in the advancement of women poets or not, the historical setting of both groups will be investigated. Also, concepts of femaleness and the notion of multiplicity of voices will provide a conceptual framework within which to address issues concerning the legitimacy and acceptance of women writers at the time. To narrow down the research, I will focus on the specific works of Lombarda (born c.1190) and Castelloza (born c.1200); Zeynep Hatun (d. 1474), and Mihri Hatun<sup>1</sup> (d.1512), entering the discussion on three points of comparison. First, I will address the question of gender discourse and the use of multiple voices in writing about different topics, and the extent to which it affected these writers' literary styles. Secondly, I will investigate interactions, if any, between male and female poets. Finally, I will argue that the female writers used techniques of multiple voices as negotiation tools to achieve status in a literary domain that lay within the borders of male hegemony.

### Historical Setting

Ottoman sultans valued literary and visual arts as most of them were either poets or artisans themselves. One of the most significant features of Ottoman art was that being promoted and supported by the Ottoman rulers, and sheltered by Ottoman patronage, the very nature of art was shaped according to the preferences of the Ottoman court (İnalçık, 2003: 10). As artists themselves, these members of the ruling class embraced the role of patrons of the arts and provided many benefits to artist such as employment, housing, and money. Because the Ottoman elite were passionately devoted to poetry, literary circles gathered mostly in the imperial palace, the mansions of grand vizier and *sheikh ul-Islam* (chief judge), and *şehzade sanjaks*.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to

<sup>1</sup> *Hatun* was a female title of nobility in the first Turkic empires. It is equivalent to queen or empress. Later in the Ottoman period, it was used after a given name as an honorific title.

<sup>2</sup> *Sanjaks* were the administrative divisions of the Ottoman Empire.

Ottoman princes who were also the patrons of arts and poetry, Amasya, as a *sanjak*, served as a center for literary gatherings till the execution of Şehzade Mustafa (d.1553) by order of his father, Suleiman the Magnificent. Amasya, *lit.* Amasis – the queen of Amazons-, is a city close to the Black Sea region of Turkey. It is known for its tradition of hosting Ottoman *şehzades* (princes) as they practiced their statecraft, prepare themselves for the sultanate, and keep their eyes on possible attacks so they could join the troops of the sultan in case of an emergency.<sup>3</sup> Amasya adopted the title “*Şehzadeler Şehri*” (the city of the crown princes) and Beyazid I, Mehmed the Conqueror, Selim I and many other less famous princes who could not accede to the throne were schooled here and held the position of governor in their youth. Amasya was already the capital of Pontus Kingdom (281 BC – 63 BC), and, especially in the early years of Ottoman rule, this city was endowed with mosques and *medreses* (educational centers).

In Amasya during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, four female poets were featured in *tezkires*<sup>4</sup>, massive collections of short biographies of notable figures: Zeynep, Nisayi, Ayşe, and Mihri Hatun. While Mihri Hatun’s *divan*, a collection of poems, remains entirely intact with four manuscript copies, we find the remaining works of the other poets in either correspondences or *tezkires* (Havlioglu 2010: 25-54). All these poets wrote within the conventions of *divan* literature, which was created by males for the male poet. A closer look will reveal the reason for such a flourishing of female poets in Amasya, which challenges the assumption that female poets were inactive during those centuries. The historical accounts indicate that these female poets were in contact with each other, corresponding with letters and poems. However, especially after the death of *Şehzade Mustafa*, we do not find further indication of the presence of female writers in Amasya.

*Trobairitz*, woman troubadours, whose lives spanned the period between approximately 1150 and 1250, appeared as a literary group in the region of France where Occitan was the medium of language and culture. Occitania lies south of the Loire Valley and extends to the Mediterranean Sea. (Fraser, 1997: 24) Although the number is still unknown, about twenty women poets produced works of courtly love (Bogin 1980: 22). There is a problem in verifying the classification of these women poets as *trobairitz*. Comparing the *trobairitz* canon with the troubadour songs in the manuscript for similarities makes the designation of these two corpuses and identification of troubadours and *trobairitz* difficult by raising such questions as who are said to be the authors, what types of fictionalities are created, and whether there are differences and in terms of love discourse. Meg Bogin includes eighteen names listed in chronological order in her book. However, Bruckner adds three more names to that list, suggesting that this number of twenty-one may by no means be final (Bruckner 1992: 870). This uncertainty leads to the question of whether or not the songs of troubadours and *trobairitz* can be classified within the same corpus and is why we cannot definitively combine these two groups under one category. The answer to this

<sup>3</sup> Apart from Amasya, there were two other cities, Trabzon and Manisa, where Ottoman princes resided as a part of fulfillment of their service.

<sup>4</sup> In my analysis, I used four *tezkires* as primary sources in the Ottoman case. I digitalized three of them and put them in the Notes section. Since there is a translation of Latifi’s *tezkire* in Turkish, I used the translation.

problematic issue might require an exploration of the distinction between poet and voice, for which there are currently not enough critical editions of the troubairitz poems available to investigate this phenomenon in detail. Bruckner addresses the question of the poets' gender as follows: "if we cannot determine the gender of the poets with absolute certainty, and even if we may assume the rarity of a coincidence, it does not seem reasonable to suppose that some of these unknowns are women, especially in a corpus like the troubadours' where a not inconsiderable group of women poets can be documented" (Bruckner 1992: 873).

We know that from the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> century, there was rapid change in the poetic flourishing; however, it was still the age of inequality in both legal rights and social attitudes (Bogin 1980: 24). So how did these female poets of Occitania appear and survive in such an environment? And what was the nature of the society in which these women lived? These are salient points of curiosity. There are two major changes between 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries: a new moneyed class arose, stimulating a renewal of the commercial system, and the great mass male movement that was the Crusades took place. The 12<sup>th</sup> century was when the bourgeoisie started to make economic inroads into the domain of the upper class. The old feudal system gave way to the bourgeoisie as nobles selling their lands to *bourgs*. According to Bogin, with the rise of the bourgeoisie, a new set of values came to center stage: equality and citizenship (Bogin 1980: 29). The Crusades (1096-1291) resulted in a drastic decrease in male population, which led women having more power specifically in Occitania. Meg Bogin states that "the most immediate effect of the drastic reduction in the male population was to place women in direct control of fiefs that had previously been run by men" (Bogin 1980: 35). This situation led to women being in direct control of lands, vassals, and businesses previously run by their husbands. This was the period when women started to play more active roles in politics, religion, economics, and arts. So basically, in Occitania, women took up the reins of power.

There are two opposing ideas regarding the freedom of women writers during this period. On one hand, some insist that the patriarchal system of male dominated cultural codes was still intact, while on the other hand, some claim that because of the economic and cultural expansion, Occitanian society's climate of tolerance fostered a kind of renaissance for women. Bruckner attributes this climate to Occitanian society's "preference for peacetime enjoyment of wealth and acts of largesse over more warlike pursuits, the persistence of codes of law that allowed women a more privileged status (especially in relation to inheriting property), and the effect of crusades that sent men off to war and left noblewomen at home with great administrative responsibilities" (Bruckner 1992: 868).

As did the women poets from Amasya, women troubadours also produced works of courtly love, which, according to Bogin, was essentially a system that men created with the dreams of men in mind (Bogin 1980: 57). Indeed, according to Valency, "The literature of *fin amor* may thus be properly considered a phenomenon of the decline of feudalism, a system in which the new chivalric class had actually no great stake" (Valency 1958: 84). Both the women writers of Amasya and Occitania emerged and produced works during their lifetimes and then disappeared from the stage. Although these two groups came from different centuries and backgrounds, their similarities indicate that both poetic groups can be considered representatives of the

first female voices to appear, however briefly, in a literary culture that was dominated by the male voice.

### **Multiplicity of voices: is there a female rhetoric?**

The social climate in which our women poets flourished was heavily influenced by the male elite. In order to gain a status in this hegemonic literary world, women had to engage intellectual pursuits usually reserved for male writers. Bearing in mind that being a woman writer was already an anomaly in the medieval ages, revealing one's identity as such or being visible by producing literary works was sometimes considered socially improper. Andrews and Kalpaklı, in *The Age of Beloveds*, characterize perceptions of women's visibility at the time by saying: "the problem women's visibility presents for early-modern culture stems in part from the widespread notion that a woman's virtue resides precisely in her invisibility and silence, expressed as modesty" (Andrews and Kalpakli, 2005: 194). So basically, the issue of representation is a twofold issue that amounts to a double bind. On one hand, when women write, they take an active role in representing themselves and make their voices heard. On the other hand, when women write to make their voices heard, they become visible to other gazes, which damages the virtue. The greatest obstacle that women writers had to face was to decide whether to create a language or to adopt the male-created language, which already had a female component in it. There are three questions to be addressed while discussing our writers: Does gender have a poetics? What difference does gender make? How does it affect writing, reading, and the functions of text in society? (Miller, 1986: 200)

Our writers Zeynep Hatun and Mihri Hatun took different approaches. Mihri Hatun tried to invent a woman's language by challenging the patriarchal values of the literary tradition. In fact, throughout her life she never married, a problematic case in the eyes of *tezkire* writers. Again, we must remember that the stories we read of women poets were written, delivered and employed by men. According to Lemaire on the interpretation of the female subject, women have been explained away as actively desiring subjects, formulating and realizing their own "demande" in love poetry (Lemaire, 1986: 733). A detailed analysis of these stories will be a necessary step of this research in order to understand and contextualize the women's writing. The main reason of the marginalization process of women poets is at the very core of the classical literature, in which love, as the main poetic theme, combines physical, religious and political dimensions. As the active participants in all these domains were men, it was considered inappropriate for women to be openly engage in them. When women crossed that gender line and made their voices heard, this was perceived as an invasion of male territory. In this situation, *tezkire* writers not only wrote the history of Ottoman literature but also had the power to set the rules for women poets to be "appropriate" female writers.

Sehi Beg, in his *tezkire Heşt Bihişt* (Eight Heavens), which was written in the first half of 16th century, gives glimpses into such domination by acknowledging only two women poets - Zeynep Hatun and Mihri Hatun- in his extensive book: "In this age there are two women poets. Because their poems are beautiful, their couplets are

matchless, their gazels are popular, and their fame considerable, they have been included in this biographical collection.”<sup>5</sup>

Although he praises the quality of the works of these women writers in his *tezkire*, Sehi Beg categorized them as a separate group. In fact, Sehi Beg organized the entries in the eight chapters of his *tezkire* according to the writers' occupations, so in one sense, this scheme was not applicable to the Ottoman women as they had no professions. However, there was only place our female poets appeared in the collection, a subcategory in the seventh chapter entitled *zıkrü'n nısa* (mention of the women), clearly indicating their marginalization. Further evidence of this marginalization is that between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the works of only about 11 women poets were collected and studied in limited numbers compared to more than 400 male poets (Havlioglu 2010: 28). The identification of a special category, indeed only a sub-category, enabled male writers to create a different discourse for discussing women poets.

One of Sehi Beg's successors, poet 'Aşık Paşa, who included gossip in the form of anecdotes in his *tezkire* *Meş'a'ir üş-şu'ara* (Stations of the Poets), allocated space for an extensive entry on Mihri Hatun. He starts the section by relating Mihri's name to natural phenomena:

Her name and pen name were both Mihri. The sun [mıhr] of her appearance was [in] the sky of Amasya; for that reason, she was compatriot of Afitabi [of the sun]. Although she is a woman, that unmanly [*na-merd*] person gave a mule's kick to ever so many men of war (Andrews and Kalpaklı 2005: 202).

As this excerpt indicates, *tezkire* writers paid most attention to the private lives of Zeynep Hatun and Mihri Hatun. They questioned Mihri Hatun's marital status (single) comparing her unfavorably with Zeynep Hatun, whom they perceived as a symbol of virtue, because she fulfilled a woman's primary duty, which was marriage. 'Aşık Paşa implies that Mihri had relations with men since she continued to write poetry in her unmarried state, whereas Zeynep stopped writing after she got married:

Mihri shied away from marriage and spent her life unmarried until she died. [However] Zeynep married, lived under her husband's command and she quit poetry, and did not have contact with men (Meredith-Owens 1971: 83b)<sup>6</sup>

Zeynep Hatun, encouraged to continue her education by her father, took a path different from Mihri's, accepting the masculine mode and praising male values such as courage in her poems. This strategy of praising male hegemony won her status in the men's club and accolades from *tezkire* writers. Her embrace of the male perspective is apparent in the lines below:

Remove your veil and illuminate the earth and skies  
Make this elemental world more brilliant than any paradise

<sup>5</sup> Translation of the original poem is taken from Andrews, G. Walter and Mehmet Kalpaklı 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Mihri izdivacdan ar idup ölünce tecerrüd ile geçinmiş, Zeynep ere varıp eri hükminde olup şiiirden ve rical ile munasebetten çekinmiş.

When your lips stir, the rivers of Paradise come to boil  
Uncover your curls of ambergris, so the entire world may be  
perfumed

The black down of your cheek wrote a royal command to the east wind  
It said – go quickly to Cathay and captivate all of China, with your sweet  
scent!

Oh heart, the water of life is not your lot, nor sadly is the kiss of your  
beloved  
Even if you wait one thousand years searching like Alexander in the  
darkness

Oh Zeynep, go simply, go bravely, surrender all decoration  
Abandon your love for this adorned and deceiving world (Silay 1997: 210)<sup>7</sup>

As a confident poet, Mihri did not maintain silence in the gender politics of Ottoman culture. She reveals her gender by praising womanhood in these lines, which can be regarded as the early seeds of feminist activities in the Ottoman society.

Since they say women lack reason. All their words should be excused. An efficient woman is much better than A thousand inefficient men (Havlioglu 2010: 43).<sup>8</sup>

In her article “On the margins and between the lines: Ottoman women poets from the fifteenth to twentieth centuries” Didem Havlioglu argues that being accepted in the male dominated literary circle “allowed some women poets to raise their voices from the margins and that is the very reason why their voice is very distinct” (Havlioglu 2010: 31). This statement is applicable to the question of whether there was a female rhetoric in the poetry of the trobairitz. Joan M. Ferrante, in “Notes toward the Study of a Female Rhetoric in the Trobairitz,” finds evidence of a distinctive rhetoric among the women writers in her comparison of the style and techniques of a small group of troubadours’ and trobairitz poems. In this rhetoric she sees “a much greater tendency to address the lover directly, to refer to a past state that no longer obtains, a more negative expression of feeling, if not attitude, through both the persistent use of negatives and the greater use of contrary- to-fact verb forms, and at

<sup>7</sup> Keşf it nikabun yiri gögi münevver it / Bu ‘alem-i ‘anasırı firdevs-i enver it.  
Depret lebüni cuşa getir Hamz-ı Kevseri / ‘Anber saçını çöz bu cihanı mu’attar it.  
Hattun berat yazdı sbaya didi ki tiz / Var milket-i Hita ile Çini musahhar it  
Ab-ı hayat olmayacak kismet iy gönül / Bin yıl gerekse Hızrıla seyr-i Sikender it  
Zeyneb ko meyli zinet-i dünyaya zen gibi / Merdane var sade-dil ol terk-i ziver it.  
(İsen, Mustafa. (1990). *Latifi Tezkiresi*. Ankara, Kültür Bakanlığı: 178-179)

<sup>8</sup> Bir müennes yegdurur kim ehl ola / Bin müzekkerden kı ol na-ehl ola  
Bir müennes yeg ki zihni pak ola / Bin müzekkerden ki bi-idrak ola  
(Havlioglu, Didem. (2010). "On the Margins and Between the Lines: Ottoman Women Poets from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Centuries." *Turkish Historical Review* 25(54): 43)

the same time an assertion of the female voice in wordplay and rhymes, and in the attacks on the conventions of the courtly game.” (Paden 1989: 63-65).

Lady Castelloza, in her *chanson*, took an active role in articulating the tension between conditional and unconditional love by expressing her pain and suffering. This situation led a reinvention of troubadour lyrics, because she revealed her female identity. Van Vleck, in her work on Castelloza, states “she finds herself facing a widely held view that it is inappropriate in another way – simply because she is a lady, and ladies should not compose poems presenting love-arguments to men.” (Van Vleck 1989: 97) Castelloza uses feudal symbols such as fidelity and trust, the uniqueness being that she blends these with straightforward statements. In the first part of her *chanson*, she imagines whether a cruel heart might not be effective in securing the affections of her lover or would just give him a weapon if he ever thought she had wronged him:

I won't consider you a decent man, nor love you fully nor with trust until I  
see if it would help me more to make my heart turn mean or treacherous.  
But I don't want to give you an excuse for saying I was ever devious with  
you; something you could keep in store in case I never did you wrong.<sup>9</sup>

In the genre of the *chanson*, the poet addresses the reader in a direct voice but does not reveal the love object even to his close friend. Considering that the poet is creating such drama in the poems, one might reasonably assume that the aim of such an artistic convention is the song, not the love. However, by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the term *chanson*, referred in most cases to a love song, for which a new melody had specifically been composed. Maurice Valency, in “In Praise of Love”, states:

In reality, the *chanson* is an *aria*, a stage monologue, the attitudes, moods, and emotions of which are derived from a dramatic fable of invariable design; and the poet, while seemingly he confronts us in every line, remains anonymous up to the point where he emerges in his own proper person at the end in the *envoi*, the *tornada* (Valency 1958: 117).

What Castelloza repeatedly does is to juxtapose different paradoxical images or opposite ideas in each of her *chanson*. Bruckner considers this approach as process of reinvention of the troubadour song: “There is, too, a certain strength expressed in her generally humble stance, to the extent that she claims her position with a polemical tone, anticipating and at the same time parrying the social criticism she expects to receive as a result of her song” (Bruckner 1992: 885) The opening stanza of Castelloza's first song is an example of such critique of the social structure:

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<sup>9</sup> Jamais no.us tenrai per valen  
Mi.us amarai de bon cor e de fe,  
Tro que veirai si ja.m valria re  
Si.us mostrava cor felon ni enic;  
Non faraj ja, car non vuoill poscatz dir  
Qu'ieu and vas vos agues cor de faillir  
Qu'auriatz pois qualche razonamen,  
S'ieu fazia vas vos nuill faillimen. (Bogin 1980:119)



Friend, if you had shown consideration, meekness, candor and humanity, I'd have loved you without hesitation; but you were mean and sly and villainous. Still, I make this song to spread your praises wide; for I can't bear to let your name go on unsung and unrenowned, no matter how much worse you treat me now.<sup>10</sup>

We find implications of self-reference in Castelloza's songs in which she praises women's virtue and faithfulness while speaking in a gentle voice with a bold tone:

All other love's worth naught, and every joy is meaningless to me. But yours, which gladdens and restores me, in which there is not a trace of pain or of distress.<sup>11</sup>

Lombarda's *tenson*, a style of troubadour song that takes the form of a debate, is unique in that it presents voices of both genders in one poem. The *tensons* appears as a continuing point-counterpoint by contrasting different points of view and different ideals. In the *tenson* tradition, the second poet's stanzas reflect the form of the first poet's stanzas. About a third of the poems by *trobairitz* appear in the form of *tensons*: some of these present debates or dialogues between a man and a woman, while others present debates between women. In the case of Lombarda, her *tenson* reveals a feminine voice that challenges the categorization of woman as mirror to man. Lombarda split the poem into two, using a male voice in the first section and a female voice in the latter to create a cross-gender debate that reveals the problems of patriarchal logic within the boundaries of patriarchal language. Comparing the traditional approach, which characterizes Lombarda's poem is a dialogue between a man and a woman, to Labbie's interpretation changes the overall picture in multiple ways, beginning with the poet's reason for writing this. Secondly, although in both cases we witness a female identity construction by giving the female a poetic voice, in Labbie's argument the creation of the male voice is for representation of the male gaze. Labbie states that "Lombarda questions the blind acceptance of the mirror's significance, challenging her listener to express the self through specific language" (Lebbie 1995: 14) Lombarda tries to define the male gaze by questioning Bernart's reference to a mirror: "what's the mirror into which you stare?" (Bogin 1980: 117). The mirror does not reveal the truth; instead, the truth can be expressed only in feminine language. Lombarda's approach raises the question of the significance of language in

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<sup>10</sup> Amics, s'ie.us trobes avinen,  
humil e franc e de bona merce,  
be.us amera, quan era m'en sove  
que.us trob vas mi mal e fellon e tric;  
e fauc chansoss per tal qu'ieu fass' auzir  
vostre bon pretz; don ieu non puosc sofrir  
que no.us fasa lauzar a tota gen  
on plus mi faitz mal et adiramen. (Bogin, 1980: 118-119)

<sup>11</sup> Tot' autr' amor teing a nien  
e sapchatz ben que mai jois no.m soste  
mas lo vostre que m'alegr' e.m reve.  
on mais en sent d'afan e de destric; (Bogin, 1980: 120-21)

understanding Bernart's intentions. The process of identification is "the play of the self in reflection with other, as the self-searches for the Self, the self being the internalized *imago*" (Labbie 1995: 17). In other words, *imago* is a model of identity that can be imitated but never accomplished. In Lombarda's conception, Bernart's mirror with no image, Bernart's blindness in other words, is so disruptive that she cannot continue her poem. Actually, in the *tenson* tradition, stanzas in one poem are supposed to rhyme with those of the other poem. However, as an innovative approach, Lombarda destroys the mirror metaphor by not responding to the final quatrain of Bernart's poem. To the reader it may seem like Lombarda ignores the issue of the mirror, looking more closely at Lombarda's response, we can see that the mirror metaphor is dealt with in detail in the second and third quatrains of her poem.

Bernart's attitude in his poem can be related to some scholars' view on the significance of beauty in courtly love, by which woman becomes a fictive image and is under the dominance of the viewer. In this poem, Bernart's urge to dominate the female appears in the very first lines, in which Bernart talks about the masculine/feminine distinction after getting married:

I'd like to be a Lombard for Lombarda

For I like her more than Alamanda or Giscarda. (Bogin 1980: 115)

In response, Lombarda assigns Bernart wives with fictional names, asserting that she does not want to be a mere figure of the male gaze.

I'm glad I wasn't called Bernarda for Bernart,

And that I wasn't named Arnauda for Arnaut. (Labbie 1995: 21)

Hence, Lombarda's search for authentic meaning in language results in presenting voices of both genders in one poem. She employs both feminine and masculine perspectives and tries to evade patriarchal logic. The reader witnesses a dialogue between man and woman in which Lombarda attempts to reveal the problems of male dominance by crossing the borders of this patriarchal logic. That is to say, the ultimate goal in creating a feminine voice is to defeat the narcissistic role assumed by the male troubadours.

### **Women writers in the male club: negotiation tools**

In the previous section, the presence of two entirely different registers in the female representation of male discourse is discussed: one expresses veneration of woman, and the other extols earthly love, including the metaphors for sexual desire. The question to be addressed in this section is what criteria, if any, had to be met by women poets in order to be accepted in the male club.

In the case of Ottoman women poets, a woman had to belong to upper social classes in order to receive education. Our poets Zeynep Hatun and Mihri Hatun enjoyed the quality of being literate which was a rare status for women in their time. As the next step, they had to employ all their knowledge to their poetry, such as their familiarity with Persian literature and Islamic texts. Zeynep Hatun did not hesitate to use the male discourse by "singing his words", expressing male fantasies, and praise being *merdane* (like a man). (Silay 1997: 210). Her decision to marry, which was regarded not only as a natural phase in the life cycle, but even more as an appropriate protection from male gaze, destroys the negative attitude of Ottoman biographers towards her. In other words, she borrowed some power and prestige from the male elite.

In Mihri Hatun's case, she was perceived as a disturbance in the domain of classical poetry dominated by men writers. Silay and Havlioglu agree that male writers had no idea how to deal with a distinctly female voice. However, Mihri shows no hesitation at all, and she criticizes the Islamic view of women as lacking reason in her lines in opposition of male discourse:

Since they say women lack reason, all their words should be excused.

An efficient woman is much better than a thousand inefficient men.<sup>12</sup>

Mihri's attempt to earn status in this elitist club is also evident in her *nazires* (parallels), a genre that flourished in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and became a tradition over time. Influenced by Necati Beg, Mihri wrote parallels to his poems, but her attempt to use parallels as a negotiation tool worsened her situation, and she was marginalized for this effort:

Oh you who would write parallels to my poems, do not stray from the path of courtesy. Do not say "my poems in rhyme and rhythm, are as good as Necati's" (Silay 1997: 212).<sup>13</sup>

Looking at the works of Lombarda and Castelloza, we find that these poets also tried different styles as negotiation tools. Lombarda used tenson, a genre in dialogue that could be fictitious, to negotiate with men. She expressed her feminine ideas by putting the lady on the stage and expressed generally accepted male values in the voice of men. On the other hand, Castelloza represented her ideas with her songs. Doris Earnshaw's brief examination of some of the tenses and chansons support our argument that these literary forms provided some individuality within the limits of current climate. She continues her argument by saying: "In the poems we have, they use no archaic speech, foreign language, or dialectal variant, three speech styles frequent in the female speech persona in lyrics by troubadours" (Earnshaw 1988: 153). According to Earnshaw, Castelloza "projects a strong female persona which firmly holds the reins of her relationships by using the carnival values in the female voice" (Earnshaw 1988: 150).

It is a fact that both European and Ottoman literary scenes were dominated by men, and the role of female poetry was either dismissed or consigned to a minimal role. Male troubadours' poetry exerted a great influence on the mindsets of women troubadours. However, their uniqueness arose from their search for negotiation tools. They used their own voices, and they had the advantage of writing not for professional reasons. As Bolton suggests "the fictional characters do not 'create' their speech acts but the other way around: the author creates the fictional character, in large measure, by the speech acts assigned to that character" (Bolton 1980: 54).

Lastly, Lombarda's and Castelloza's attempts to disseminate the cultural construction of gender politics by using different poetic techniques can be understood as powerful tools for negotiation. As Sarah Key, suggests in her article, "Derivation,

<sup>12</sup> Çünkü nakıs akl olur dirler nisa / Her sözün mazur tutmatır reva

Bir müennes yeg durur kim ehl ola / Bin müzekkerden ki ol na-ehl ola  
(Havlioglu 2010: 43)

<sup>13</sup> Ey benim şi'rime nazire deyen / Çıkma rah-ı edebden eyle hazer

Deme kim işte vezn ü kafiyede / Şi'rim oldu Necati'ye hemser (Isen 1990: 317)

Derived Rhyme, and the Trobairitz”, these writers chose “the difficult medium of derived rhyme with its ritualization of male-female boundaries, and transgressed those boundaries while respecting the medium” (Paden 1989: 173).

### **Conclusion**

Coming to us from different centuries, different literary traditions, and different mindsets, both groups of these humble women poets have much to teach us about the male dominated traditional poetic system. In the early modern world, women’s anxiety about their social position as writers is closely linked with the culture where women as secondary to men and this situation excludes women from the intellectual world (Reis, 2008: 1) I began this article by illustrating a fundamental change in the female discourse. Their works demonstrate the social and literary definitions of both men and women, and at the same time they provide explanations of how to avoid generalizations regarding women. These two groups felt the need to negotiate with male writers to gain status in the domain of poetic tradition. These negotiation tools varied – from using male discourse to writing parallels to men writers’ poems, and from writing debate poems representing male-female exchanges to creating stage monologues by using direct voices.

The social climate of the Middle Ages was heavily influenced by the patrimonial structure composed largely if not entirely of men. Within such boundaries, the female writers sometimes had to conceal themselves, their names, and their writings by using different pen names. In the Ottoman case, marriage was also a woman’s accepted legitimization as an adult, a female gender role that prescribed she disappear from the stage forever. However, some women poets preferred to unmask their identities, and they became the target of harsh criticisms from their male colleagues. In rare cases – such as Mihri’s -, their works were praised, they were canonized by time and were supported by patrons of arts.

The greatest obstacle to deeper understanding of these woman poets is the limited number of manuscripts and dearth of information available today. Also, most of the information we receive is from the perspectives of male writers. Even with such restrictions, we can say that these writers’ efforts to make their name in the male-dominated world of poetry is admirable. It is not too much to say that these women poets challenged the categories of sex in politics and literature by changing the gender bias in their language.

In my analysis, I focused on the unique works of particular women poets who tried to establish their identities as lyric poets, and through their singing we hear the voices of other women poets of their time and gain clearer perspectives on the social and communal climate in which they worked. It is justified, therefore, to state that their works are not merely echoes of other poets. In fact, their unique voices appear in a new form within the boundaries of classical literary traditions. As Bruckner suggests: “We are obliged to listen to what they repeat and do not repeat from that larger system, to the pattern of gaps, new combinations, and variations, as each poem reinvents the abstract ‘already said’ through its own particular manifestations.” (Bruckner 1992: 890) In examining both groups’ poetry, there is a reversal of the traditional power structure present in troubadour and Ottoman classical poetries. These women writers did not ignore hierarchical power structures, rather they addressed them openly.

Finally, from the male perspective, the female character appears as an abstract object and represents the masculine ideal of womanhood. Our women poets appear either as a threatening presence in men's playground or a projection of manly sexual desires. I use the term "projection" partly because woman was treated as an object of desire, not as a fully realized person in the world. Therefore, in the opaque context woven of male desires, male writers did not know how to deal with the transparent image of the female. Yet the fact that women did continue to write gained some independence away from male writers who had long controlled literary aesthetics.

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