

## **Masculine, feminine in medieval Occitan women's poetry**

### **Doctoral dissertation summary**

The doctoral dissertation ‘Masculine, Feminine in Medieval Occitan Women's Poetry’ is the result of research conducted as part of a doctoral project carried out in the Doctoral School of Humanities at the Jagiellonian University.

The aim of the dissertation is to synthesise the social history of women in the literary world of the Occitan linguistic domain in the 12th and 13th centuries. The object of the study is thus the so-called *trobairitz* – women troubadours, their texts and the social environment accompanying the emergence and circulation of this literature. On the basis of previous critical editions, a corpus of 46 works, created by 36 female authors, some of them anonymous, was selected. In addition, literary works written by male troubadours, medieval treatises theorising the literature and courtly love, as well as the law censuses in operation at the time in question were also used as source texts. In terms of methodology, the dissertation refers in its nature to the literary history and thus seeks to treat literary works as historical sources, while the literary phenomena are explained through their historical conditions.

Chapter II of the dissertation discusses the social conditions for the emergence and functioning of *trobairitz*’ poetry in southern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. On the basis of a comparison between the legal systems operating in the south (based on Visigothic Roman law) and in the north (referring to Germanic customary law), it is shown that the extent of women's rights, in particular concerning their economic and political situation, which in the South had a decisive influence on the development of women's literature, was considerable. The practical realisation of the power deriving from women's position in law, as well as its relationship to the literary world, is discussed using the example of three female rulers who ruled the southern regions in the 12th and 13th centuries: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Ermengard of Narbonne and Marie of Montpellier. The chapter closes, however, with an analysis of feudal language in *trobairitz*’ poetry as a reflection of legal and social reality.

Chapter III is focused on the interpretation of the phenomenon of courtly love (*fin'amor*) and the gender roles played by troubadours and *trobairitz* within it. The phenomenon is framed doubly: in discursive terms, as a system of power relations and language rationing; and in dialogical terms, as an emotional community in which the needs of its individual participants are realised. Particular attention is given to the *tenso*, a dialogic literary form that reflects these dimensions of *fin'amor*.

Chapter IV of the work is dedicated to the most individual level of the lyric in question, which is the poetic voice. It elaborates on the problem of the status of the subject in *trobairitz*' texts, and then discusses the concepts of poetic voice presented so far. The research adopted a new understanding of the term, based on six levels of voice: pretextual, textual, individual, dialogical, discursive and social. Subsequently, these categories were applied to the practical interpretation of *trobairitz*' poetry.

Chapter V discusses the problematic nature of the particular type of lyric represented by the collection of *chansons de femme*: texts with a female subject that were most likely written by men. It challenges previous categorisations based on the analysis of the genre of *chansons de femme* and adopts the poetics of the text as the dominant feature of the works, making it possible to distinguish between texts written by women and those written by men.

Chapter VI is devoted to the issue of the troubadours' model of masculinity, as expressed in their texts, and women's perspectives on this model. The elements of the model that distinguish it from traditional chivalric masculinities were pointed out. At the same time, the significant role of women in the co-creation of the image of troubadour masculinity was highlighted, and attention was drawn to the important place that gender issues occupy in *trobairitz*' texts.

The paper concludes by pointing out that the role of women in the co-creation of troubadour poetry, as well as their participation in the social life of southern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was much greater than is usually recognised in the research literature. The works of the *trobairitz* were characterised by a poetics that cannot be fully identified with those of men's texts. Moreover, this poetics influenced male authors and shaped the poetic discourse of Occitan *chansons de femme*. The presence of women in the literary and social world was therefore not a marginal phenomenon, but a fact that affected the shape of medieval poetry, not only in the Occitan linguistic domain, but also beyond its borders.