The Rhetoric of Desire in the Courtly Lyric

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investment; there's no other way.

—Hélène Cixous

Woman is never anything more than the scene of more or less rival exchange between two men.

—Luce Irigaray

This book attempts to rethink the concept of the woman writer as it was theorized by feminism during the 1980s by looking at the so-called feminine text as the noise of culture, uncovering the dialogically agitated contexts of its utterance. The texts I have chosen for this task are those that expose discontinuities—ruptures and gaps—within a literary history that has, since the eighteenth century, been characterized as linear and progressive. Thus, if the Middle Ages seems an unpromising place to begin a study of the “feminine” text, a forbiddingly masculine territory, with its glorification of warfare, jousting, and hunting; its homosocial feudal ties that bound man to man, vassal to lord; and its institutionalized clerical misogyny, it also provides an opportunity to challenge traditional literary histories that filter out the anomalies in their narratives as irrelevant noise, thereby reproducing the cultural biases they purport to document. The term “Middle Ages”—itself an invention of the eighteenth century—marks the period as an interruption of progressive history, a gap between classical Rome and the enlightenment of the Renaissance. Because feminist literary histories have, for the most part, reproduced conventional historical periodization and, with it, conventional platitudes about progress and enlightenment, the rupture signified by the term “Middle Ages” provides a starting point for a revisionary investigation of feminist theories of writing.
To challenge the view of medieval Europe as a benighted and masculinist culture, we need to locate and tease out the cultural spaces for the “feminine.” In doing so, it is critical to distinguish the cultural representations of “woman” available at any given time—discourse about women—from those individuals who might represent themselves as women both in conformity and in opposition to those cultural representations. Any theory of women’s writing must position itself somewhere in the gap between cultural representations of Woman and the self-representations of individual, historical women (de Lauretis 1987). One such space for the feminine is marked out by the development in the twelfth century in the area of southern France known as Occitania or Provence of a set of attitudes toward love and women known as fin’ amor or, more popularly, courtly love.¹ “Farai chansoneta nueva,” “I shall make a new song,” writes the first troubadour, Guillaume, ninth duke of Aquitaine, at the beginning of the twelfth century. In the poetry of the troubadours who followed Guillaume, and later in that of the trouveres of France, the poets of the dolce stil novo of Italy, and the minnesingers of Germany, woman becomes the object of the poet’s adoration; the noblewoman, or “lady,” becomes the recipient of the poet’s homage and obedience. But whereas some have claimed that the ideals articulated in these erotic lyrics suggest a “feminization” of medieval culture, which expressed, as Meg Bogen says, a “deep psychological need left unmet by the unrelenting masculinism of feudal culture” (1980, 44–45), others, such as Jacques Lacan, suggest that it is “truly the most staggering thing that has ever been tried,” a “fraud,” and the “only way of coming off elegantly from the absence of sexual relations” in medieval society (1982, 141). Lacan argues that fin’ amor has nothing whatever to do with women—at least not with women as subjects—and everything to do with women’s subjugation. The poetry that articulated fin’ amor remained primarily a vehicle for the expression of masculine desire, a means of articulating the relationships between men at a time when the old feudal ties were being undermined by new economic, social, and political developments.

¹Gaston Paris in 1883 gave this name to the system of manners articulated by the troubadour lyric; see Romania 12 (1883): 519.
While fin’ amor, with its veneration of women, spread widely throughout Europe in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, reaching northern France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, England, and even Germany, only in Provençal were the lyrical forms of troubadour poetry adapted to allow women to express their own desire. The poems of some twenty Occitan noblewomen who wrote between 1150 and 1250 survive. Until recently, the existence of these women troubadours, called the trobairitz, was known only to a handful of specialized scholars who wrote on relatively technical and largely linguistic features of their poetry. The appearance in 1976 of Meg Bogin’s edition of the trobairitz, with facing-page translations, made their lyrics accessible for the first time to a much wider audience and sparked new interest in these medieval women poets.2

The tone of much recent writing on the trobairitz has been set by the introduction to Bogin’s book. She writes: “Unlike the men, who created a complex poetic vision, the women wrote about their own intimate feelings. . . . This gives the women’s poems a sense of urgency that makes them more like journals than like carefully constructed works of art” (67–68). Recent criticism of the individual poets characteristically focuses on the emotional, subjective aspects of their work—their joy and suffering in love—at the expense of their “art.” They are denied a complex “poetic vision.” Their works, too often, have been treated as ideologically over-determined by the gender of their creators and as therapeutic outbursts rather than “carefully constructed works of art.” For Peter Dronke, the countess of Dia, the only regularly anthologized trobairitz, is “Cleopatra-like in her variety of attitudes toward love” (in Wilson 1984, 131–32). Another, Castelloza, is no virtuoso: “Her language is narrowly concentrated; she does not create dazzling forms in the way, for instance, of her somewhat older contemporary Raimbaut de Vaqueiras” (in Wilson 1984, 144). William Paden

2Before 1970, the only complete study of all twenty trobairitz was Schultz-Gora’s monograph from 1888, Die Provenzialen Dichterinnen. Since the appearance of Bogin’s book, the complete poems of Castelloza have been edited by William Paden (1981) and translated by Peter Dronke in Wilson 1984. Dronke also devotes a chapter to the trobairitz in Women Writers in the Middle Ages (1984), Marianne Shapiro has written about them for Signs (1978), and Paden has edited an anthology of essays on the trobairitz (1989).
writes that “the songs of Castelloza concentrate on feelings of melancholy and affliction with a single-mindedness that borders on masochism—not masochism in a narrow sense as sexual perversion, but the derivative form in which satisfaction comes from suffering or humiliation apart from any sexual pleasure” (Paden et al. 1981, 165). This emphasis on the emotional, subjective, and therapeutic aspects of these women’s poetry miniaturizes it, perpetuating even in feminist criticism a literary double standard by which male poets’ works are judged and canonized by so-called objective artistic criteria, while women’s poetry is deemed emotional and personal, more like a diary than poetry.

To challenge this double standard it will be necessary to explore more fully the operations of gender in the courtly lyric. My interest in the trobairitz, about whom virtually nothing is known beyond their names and poems, lies less in what they might say about the “experience” of being a woman in twelfth-century France than in the complex ways in which the symbolic representations of gender which figure in the rhetoric of courtly love interact with, shape, and are shaped by the social institutions that organized gender roles among the aristocracy of twelfth-century Europe. In short, I want to know how sexuality, what Georges Duby has called “those fundamentally important mechanisms that ensure the reproduction of any society and the perpetuation of its structures,” is discursively encoded in the courtly lyric as a genre (1983, xvii). The “subjects” created and displayed in the lyrics produced by the troubadours and trobairitz are constructed by the dialogical languages of feudalism and a newly emerging economics, as well as by the languages of sexual passion. They provide a grid of intelligibility through which to examine the exchanges between discourses about desire and those about politics, economics, and genealogy. The “intimate feelings” given form in the courtly lyric present desire not simply as a “natural” psychological state but as a form of ideology, one that both sustains and subverts hegemonic social relations.

All courtly poets—whether male or female—shared and contested the same cultural representations, the same language, the same forms. It is this interplay among representation, language, and form that creates genres, understood not merely as formal,
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aesthetic systems of classification but as agents of social and cultural behaviors—producers as well as products of social meanings. The forms within which poets can express themselves are as ideologically determined, and as ideologically significant, as their subject matter. The courtly lyric’s forms were determined by culturally articulated relations between the sexes, conceived not as biological givens but as historically specific constructions. Women’s self-representations in twelfth-century France, no less than men’s, had to emerge from within a genre that promoted a very narrow range of social relations between the sexes. In claiming the power to speak—to represent themselves—the trobairitz created noise; they put into discourse what had remained outside the discourse of courtliness, which required the silence of the beloved. This rupture of feminine noise into the homosocial relations of the courtly lyric constituted a potential threat to the ideological project of fin’amor.

The rhetoric of desire in the tradition of the courtly lyric worked to legitimate the interests of a ruling aristocracy, which, during a period of rapid and disturbing change, was concerned to consolidate its power and limit its membership. The poetry of the trobairitz represents a potential challenge to this hegemony by giving voice to the unspoken understandings that structured social relations under feudalism, especially those of kinship and patronage. The trobairitz’s poetry, then, illustrates how women’s writing both encodes and resists cultural representations of femininity. But before turning to women’s self-representations, it is necessary first to unpack the intricate web of social relationships that constituted fin’amor as a discourse about desire in twelfth-century France, the different ideological positions occupied by aristocratic men and women within that network, and the different rhetorical strategies occasioned by those positions.

Patronage and the Biopolitics of Lineage

The conventions of fin’amor were articulated in the first years of the twelfth century in the erotic lyrics of Guillaume IX. Whether or not the themes of courtly love were a “revolution in sentiment” or as old as the relations between men and women, they were the
inspiration for a “new poetry” and for the creation of a poetic diction in the vernacular (Bogin 1980, 44). As even he seemed to recognize, Guillaume’s songs were startlingly new, both formally and ideologically.

Farai cahsoneta nueva
ans que vent ni gel ni plueva;
ma dona m’assai’ e.m prueva,
quossi de qual guiza l’am;
e ja per plag que m’en nueva
no.m solvera de son liam.

Q’ans mi rent a lieys e.m liure,
qu’en sa carta.m pot escriure. . . .

Que plus etz blanca qu’evori,
per qu’ieu autra non azori.
Si.m breu non ai ajutori,
cum ma bona dompna m’am,
morrai, pel cap sanh Gregori,
si no.m bayz’ en cambr’ o sotz ram.

[I shall make a new song
before the wind blows and it freezes and rains.
My lady is trying me, putting me to the test
to find out how I love her.
Well now, no matter what quarrel she moves for that reason,
She shall not loose me from her bond.

Instead, I become her man, deliver myself up to her,
And she can write my name down in her charter . . . .

For you are whiter than ivory,
I worship no other woman.
If I do not get help soon
and my good lady does not give me love,
by Saint Gregory’s holy head I’ll die
if she doesn’t kiss me in a chamber or under a tree.]³

³Goldin 1973, 40–43; unless noted otherwise, all troubadour poems and translations cited here are from this edition. Page numbers will be noted parenthetically in the text.
Fin' amor celebrates and objectifies women extravagantly. The songs through which these ideals spread have as their principal subject the dompna (the term of address directed to the married noblewoman). She is the most virtuous ("bona") and beautiful woman in the world: "plus etz blanca qu'evori." The lover serves and worships his beloved, while she tests him ("prueba"). His joy and pain equally proceed from her. When she is kind, he is joyful: "Tant ai mo cor ple de joya, / tot me desnatura," writes Bernart de Ventadorn ["My heart is so full of joy / it changes every nature"] (128–29). When she is cold, he suffers, even to the point of death, as Guillaume's song suggests. But his love for her is ennobling; it makes him a better man. Arnaut Daniel writes, "Tot iorn meillur et esmeri / car la gensor serv e coli [Each day I am a better man and purer, / for I serve and celebrate the noblest lady]" (216–17).

This sudden appearance of poetry celebrating women and granting them absolute power in love coincides with a period of material changes in the social and economic life of twelfth-century Occitania. The sparse historical records from this period suggest an economic revolution that produced what Marc Bloch has called the second feudal age. He points to a combination of factors between 1050 and 1250, including a possible change in weather patterns, technological improvements in agriculture, and a steady extension of agricultural lands, which resulted in an increase in population throughout Europe, accompanied by increased urbanization, the expansion of trade, and the discovery of new sources of wealth. Although these developments were unevenly distributed throughout Europe, in the north and south of France the higher aristocracy—the kings, great nobles, and manorial lords—began to amass great fortunes (M. Bloch 1961, 69). The Church also continued to grow more wealthy and influential as it extended its hegemony over more and more of Europe. Accompanying this new wealth was a desire for increased political stability.

Prior to the twelfth century, feudalism in the south of France was characterized by decentralized social and political relationships. The political structure was marked by multiple centers of power dominated by local strongmen. Politics was local and alliances

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4Duby argues that the Church's wealth grew in proportion to its ability to persuade those it converted not to bury their wealth with their dead but to keep it in circulation by donating it to the Church (1974, 54–55).
could shift quickly. Because power was disseminated among several powerful magnates rather than concentrated in a single monarch, no one ruler or family could hope to maintain control indefinitely. Order in this region was perceived as an "ever-shifting configuration of competing forces," and stability as a "temporary balance of conflicting forces" (Kendrick 1988, 7–8). Such a political structure favors instability, a reasonable response to an unstable and hostile environment. The exercise of power under these conditions required the physical presence of the ruler. A lord could control and effectively administer only those holdings he could personally inhabit. Distant holdings that could not be visited frequently were easily lost to those who administered them on a day-to-day basis. Guillaume IX’s attempts to occupy the Toulousain after his marriage in 1094 to Philippa, widow of the king of Aragon and heir to the Toulousain, suggests how difficult it was for even a very powerful duke to extend his power beyond the territories he could physically occupy. Leaving his wife to govern both her lands and Aquitaine, Guillaume went off to fight in Normandy and then Jerusalem. By 1113 he had forfeited his wife’s rights in the Toulousain, and he spent the rest of his life fighting his own vassals in Aquitaine (Topsfield 1975, 13).

Instability and decentralization also marked kinship structures. The most powerful families in the region might best be described, in Howard Bloch’s terms, as “a loosely defined grouping of relatives and retainers, ‘friends’ and neighbors [who] gravitated around the residence of a lord who was, above all, a patron, a distributor of gifts and lands, the spoils of war or exchange” (1983, 65). Kinship was calculated horizontally, and little distinction was made between the lineage of the husband and that of the wife. Marital alliances were often temporary. When property was passed on, inheritance might be shared among brothers and even sisters.5 Noblewomen in southern France, then, occupied a more complex and ambiguous position within the feudal hierarchy than their counterparts in the north. If they were not exactly powerful, they were, at least, less absolutely disempowered. Women appear as

5Women could inherit land in the absence of male heirs. Eleanor of Aquitaine, Ermengarde of Narbonne, and Marie of Montpellier were among the prominent Occitan women who inherited and managed large estates (Paden 1989, 9).
landowners and land managers more frequently in southern France than anywhere else in medieval Europe. They frequently function as the heads of families, at least in name, as evidenced by the increasing use of the matronymic in place of the patronymic in charters between the tenth and twelfth centuries. The matronymic her son bore would be a sign of the woman’s duties and privileges which would give her prominence within the community (Herlihy 1976, 18–21). Inheritance laws did not restrict a woman’s freedom to administer family property (as they did, for instance, in northern France and Italy) either jointly with her husband or by herself as a widow. By the twelfth century, the political and social structures that organized the aristocracy in the south of France were coming into conflict with attempts by both the Church and the monarchies of France and England to extend their sphere of influence into that region and impose upon it a new vision of feudalism dominated by order, hierarchy, and centralization. The concentration of wealth and power in fewer and fewer hands created the need for new technologies of control. To limit both the growth of the aristocracy and the dilution of feudal holdings through partition among multiple heirs, the aristocratic family came increasingly to calculate lineage vertically, based on descent from a single male founder; to practice strict primogeniture; and to privilege blood ties over marital ties. The family estate was to be passed on intact from eldest son to eldest son.6

As primogeniture and the resulting control of marriage and female sexuality enabled the aristocracy to concentrate larger and larger estates among fewer and fewer aristocratic families, effective governance required the development of administrative bureaucracies that could exercise executive and judicial power in the absence of the ruler. One of the most basic technologies of this new political order was writing—an order of representation without which neither primogeniture nor monarchial rule could long survive. Writing enabled the ruler to delegate power in his absence and so to rule from a distance. But it required the stabilization and

6For discussions of this transformation, see H. Bloch 1983, 64–75; Duby 1983, 16–19, 250; and Herlihy 1985, 79–111.
regulation of the vernacular, so that such elementary administrative tasks as executing contracts, recording debts and payments, and preserving judicial testimony would be possible. This new deployment of writing as a technology for political control in the service of the centralization and hierarchization of church and state, required a new class of administrators. The “new men” who filled these administrative positions often came from outside the aristocracy (Green 1986, 139–57). They needed to bring to their new positions skill in language and writing which they could then use to advance in the administrative service of their patron.

Troubadour poetry, some scholars have maintained, became a contested ground between the centripetal forces of feudal society—those that sought to hierarchize, order, and centralize political and economic life through the skillful deployment of representation—and the centrifugal forces of resistance that impelled it toward heterogeneity, complexity, and change. In resisting the push toward centralization, the decentralized and dispersed aristocracy of Occitania, whose power derived from their physical presence, rejected the most basic principle of representation: that there can be authority in absence and that representations are signs of that authority. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the first troubadour, Guillaume IX, was one of the most powerful of the lords of Occitania. For the male poet of the aristocracy, this new poetry of sexual desire became a means of challenging the power of representation and, with it, the “centered, hierarchizing moral and social order” of lineage and primogeniture (Kendrick 1988, 15). It became a means of creating a poetry out of the linguistic noise of Occitan culture, out of the “foolishness” that resists being coerced into meaning. “Farai un vers de dreyt nien,” writes Guillaume [“I will make a verse out of strictly nothing”] (24–25).

Guillaume IX, however, was a notable exception; most of the troubadours were of modest origins and depended for their livelihood on the patronage of the lords of Occitan.7 The creation of a new, less rigidly defined administrative class, which negotiated its relationship to the aristocracy through patronage and which

7My own informal survey of the vídas of the troubadours turned up some thirteen troubadours of modest origins and only three—Guillaume, Raimbaut d’Aurenga, and Jaufre Rudel—of aristocratic origins.
served the new order of representation, may be reflected in this poem by Arnaut Daniel:

En cest sonet coind’ e leri
fauc motz e capuig e doli,
que serant verai e cert
qan n’aurai passat la lima;
q’Amors marves plan’e daura
mon chantar, que de liei mou
qui pretz manten e governa.

[To this sweet and pretty air
I set words that I plane and finish;
and every word will fit well,
once I have passed the file there,
for at once Love polishes and aureates
my song, which proceeds from her,
ruler and guardian of merit.]

(216–17)

The new poetry of sexual desire emerged from within the same cultural matrix that demanded the regularization of the vernacular for administrative purposes; both the rhetoric of desire and that of government service are aspects of the same technology of hegemonic abstraction. The distant love for the idealized lady stands in a metonymic relation to service to the absent ruler. The metaphor structuring this *cloba* (strophe) is that of the poet as artisan. Daniel compares his craft to the planing and polishing (“capuig e doli”) the artisan requires to finish his work of art. Like the artisan with his file (“la lima”), the poet too has his tools—the tools of representation, words. The metaphor suggests an awareness that art is a commodity, which might structure relations of patronage between individuals through the mediation of representations. The poet and artisan seem to have more in common than the poet and his beloved, the patron who “rules and maintains

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8Kendrick makes the stronger argument that the troubadours were in fact informal language teachers for the lay public. They traveled from court to court teaching the most basic skills of vernacular grammar: reading, writing, composition, and interpretation (1988, 72).
worth” (“qui pretz manten e governa”). Daniel’s language suggests the extent to which money by the twelfth century has also become a representational medium of exchange, functioning to establish relative value among commodities, including art and poetry, and, by extension, relations between individuals (M. Bloch 1961, 71). The value of the poet’s love is measured by a gold standard; it is gilded (“daura”). Its worth is monetary. The lover hopes to receive from his beloved not only value or merit but, perhaps implicitly, rewards or even wages.

What troubadour poetry contests, then, is nothing less than the power of representations—of language, of economics, of kinship, of lineage, of desire—to replace the “real” and to construct a new order of feudalism. This reading of the courtly lyric has been persuasively argued by Howard Bloch (1983) and Laura Kendrick (1988). But their readings fail to explain why, far from being explicitly political, courtly poetry is in fact explicitly erotic and why the object of that eroticism is most often the lord’s wife, the dompna. They fail to suggest why representations of women and sexuality figure so prominently in this new poetry. To understand the place of desire in the courtly lyric, we must examine how social relations of gender were represented within this new feudal order. If writing and representation were necessary for the success of political centralization, so was the control of women. Fin’ amor functioned as an ideology that smoothed over the contradictions brought about by homosocial competition to control women as resources. It provided the means to negotiate between the contradictory demands of marriage, which required the control of women’s sexuality, and patronage, which demanded its exploitation. It represented aristocratic women as simultaneously on display and inaccessible.

The transformation of the medieval aristocracy into a “closed and patroclinous caste,” to use Bloch’s words, required a marital strategy based on monogamy, exogamy, and the repression of pleasure (1983, 68). It required that families marry off all daughters but only the eldest son in order to protect the family estate. Paden and other commentators have tried to locate the freedom of aristocratic women in southern France to participate in the extramarital liaisons described by fin’ amor within the institution of marriage (1989, 4–
13), but the politics of marriage did not work to women’s advantage. Within marriage a woman’s sexuality would have to be strictly controlled to assure the legitimacy of any heirs produced. She must be a virgin upon marriage and after marriage must have no other sexual partner besides her husband. If women in twelfth-century Occitania enjoyed a somewhat more privileged position than women elsewhere in Europe, they were still pawns in a patrilineal culture, sacrificed to the need to assure the “legitimate” succession of a male line through monogamy and to achieve the widest dispersion of family influence and power through exogamy. Marriage became an affair between families, negotiated by male heads; women were merely tokens of that exchange.9

Although such an arrangement would tend to foster dependency in women and domination in men, the position of aristocratic women in feudal society was not defined exclusively by their marriages. They were also required to establish relations of patronage with their “vassals” as a means of promoting solidarity among the men at court. The twentieth century has tended to romanticize fin’amor as offering romantic and sexual fulfillment as a reasonable alternative to marriages that were primarily economic and political affairs. But such a characterization, it seems to me, ignores the material status of the mostly male poets who created this illusion. Marriage was primarily the means by which men at the apex of the feudal hierarchy defined their relations with one another, through political alliances or through the orderly succession of the patrimony from father to eldest son. But the disinherited second sons and other members of the lower nobility, who were often unable to marry, were largely excluded from these means of establishing social identity. They depended on the patronage of their feudal overlords, and the women worshiped in their lyrics were most likely the wives of their patrons and thus themselves powerful patronesses. While the medieval aristocracy was evolving toward a kinship system of ascribed status, the patronage networks that marked feudal relations, dominated by the exchange of “gifts,” were still everywhere in evidence. These patronage networks were

9In an earlier essay, I deal with the politics of medieval marriage in terms of the courtly romance (1989, 114–15).
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the primary means by which those outside the aristocracy negotiated their relations with it.¹⁰

Patronage is an informal means of structuring social relations. Patron-client relations, according to S. N. Eisenstadt and Luis Roniger (1984), are particularistic and diffuse, rather than legal or contractual. They are highly interpersonal relationships established between individuals or networks of individuals rather than between organized corporate groups. Yet these relations are defined within a system of finely articulated symbolic and institutional terms, involving elaborate rituals, codes, and rules. These rules are almost always unspoken or spoken only in an elaborately codified language that functions to disguise as personal and private the economic or political nature of the transactions taking place, transactions that, in a precapitalist economy, are required to keep the economy or the government functioning and to ensure the domination of the ruling class. The “euphemization of economic power” (the words are James Scott’s [1985, 307]) which marks patronage networks is required when direct physical coercion is not possible and yet the indirect domination of capitalist markets is insufficient to ensure the consolidation and circulation of wealth.

I suggest that fin’ amor offers a codified language for “euphemizing” the economic exchanges that take place in patron-client networks. An example from the vida of the troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn suggests how well feudalism accords with the descriptions of sociologists and anthropologists who study patron-client networks.¹¹

Bernart de Ventadorn was from Limousin, from the castle of Ventadour. He was a man of humble origins, the son of a servant who was a baker, and who heated the oven to bake the bread of the castle. And he became a handsome and an able man, and he

¹⁰Eisenstadt and Roniger discuss social systems that combine elements of patronage with those of ascribed status (1984, 176–84).
¹¹I should point out that I am concerned here with more than simply literary patronage. Literary patronage was a special case of a social structure that organized social, political, and economic relations at every level of society. I am grateful to my colleague Deborah Heath, who first pointed out to me the possibility of reading courtly love as a patron-client relationship.
knew how to sing and how to invent poetry well, and he became courtly and learned.

And the Viscount of Ventadour, his lord, grew very fond of him and of his inventing and his singing, and greatly honored him. And the Viscount of Ventadour had a wife who was young, noble, and lively. And she grew fond of Bernart and of his songs, and fell in love with him. And he fell in love with the lady, and composed his songs and his poems about her, about the love which he had for her, and about her merit. Their love lasted a long time before the viscount or other people became aware of it. (Egan 1984, 11–12)

The relationships described here, including the “love” between Bernart and his patron’s wife, might easily be described as part of a highly elaborate code for describing relations of patronage. Bernart’s relationship with the viscount of Ventadorn enables him to rise from relative obscurity to some prominence, to become “courtly and learned,” simply because his lord “grew very fond of him,” a situation that would be impossible under “official” conditions that dictated the ascribed status of members of the community under feudalism. He is a valued client of the lord of Ventadorn not for his ability to bake bread—an economically “productive” role that would have been his hereditary function but would never have won him recognition—but for his ability to sing and invent poetry, a singularly nonproductive talent in purely economic terms. But in a culture in which economic activity must be disguised through the exchange of gifts and must be represented as personal and voluntary rather than impersonal and calculating, poetry itself may become a valuable medium of exchange.

A patron-client relationship such as this one is not based on a onetime exchange; rather it entails long-term obligations and credit, which also function to disguise the fundamentally economic nature of the relationship as a personal one. There is a great enough temporal gap between each “gift” to preserve at least the appearance of reciprocal generosity. Furthermore, the relationship is entered into voluntarily by both parties and can be terminated voluntarily by either. Yet, in spite of this reciprocal element of voluntarism, the relationship is nonetheless marked by extreme
inequality. The distance between Bernart and his lord is great enough that when the viscount discovers the relation between his wife and Bernart he "banished Bernart from him and had his wife locked up" (Egan, 12). As the furor of Ventadorn's reaction suggests, this mutual dependency tended to promote feelings of both security and insecurity.

The diffusion of patron-client relationships was so great under feudalism that all but the most powerful men would be simultaneously both patrons and clients. The *vida* of the troubadour Bertran de Born provides a case in point. Bertran was the castellan of Hautefort and, according to one manuscript version, the patron—overlord—of one thousand men. But his fortune was uncertain enough that he found himself in the service at one time or another of Henry II, the Plantagenet king of England; his eldest son, Henry Court Mantel; and Richard the Lionhearted and on different sides of the civil strife among them. This diffusion of patronage networks created a web of alliances quite daunting in their complexity. Just how impossibly complex divided loyalties might become is suggested by this medieval charter, which defines the obligations of a vassal to his patron:

> I, John of Toul, affirm that I am the vassal of the Lady Beatrice, countess of Troyes, and of her son Theobald, count of Champagne, against every creature living or dead, excepting my allegiance to Lord Enjourand of Coucy, Lord John of Arcis, and the count of Grandpré. If it should happen that the count of Grandpré should be at war with the countess and count of Champagne in his own quarrel, I will aid the count of Grandpré in my own person, and will aid the count and countess of Champagne by sending them the knights whose service I owe them from the fief which I hold of them. (Hollister 1971, 95)

Perhaps the most important feature of patron-client relationships is that they involve exchanges of different types of resources,

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12My remarks do not depend on the historical accuracy of the information contained in the *vidas*, which are highly fanciful accounts of the lives of the troubadours. What interests me here are the social relations that organized medieval feudalism, and these would undoubtedly be revealed even in the most outrageous narrative.

13For having promoted civil strife, he appears in Dante's *Inferno* (28.113–42) with his head separated from his body.
which are perceived as interchangeable. These resources may be economic and material (the fief); often they are political and military (support, loyalty); but they are also quite often intangible but no less vital resources such as power, influence, prestige, and status. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu uses the term “symbolic capital” to describe the means by which the wealthy convert some of their disproportionate wealth into forms of prestige, status, and social control through what are understood as voluntary acts of generosity or charity (1977, 178). This symbolic capital would be convertible into labor and services, which, in turn, would generate even more material wealth (Scott 1985, 307). In warning against an anachronistic distinction between economics and “culture,” Bourdieu argues that analyses of precapitalist economies, including the feudal economy, must “extend economic calculation to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation—which may be ‘fair words’ or smiles, handshakes or shrugs, compliments or attention, challenges or insults, honors or honours, powers or pleasures, gossip or scientific information, distinction or distinctions” (Bourdieu 1977, 178). Symbolic capital, which is convertible into material wealth, may indeed be the most valuable form of accumulation in a precapitalist economy that relies on cooperation and reciprocity and yet promotes extreme social inequality, in which public transactions—both political and economic—can be understood only as private transactions between individuals (Duby 1988, 3–8).

One outcome of this need to disguise economic relations as generosity or charity is that this “euphemization” is always the focus of symbolic manipulation, struggle, and conflict (Scott 1985, 308). *Fin’amor* may be described as one strategy by which men belonging to the lower nobility, the so-called new men who provided administrative services for a newly emerging state, could articulate their relations of patronage to their feudal overlords, using women as a medium of exchange.14 In many troubadour lyrics, as in the

14Eugene Vance has located in the poetry of the trouvère Gace Brulé just such an impulse: “These texts have little to do with the delineation of individual erotic impulses, but involve, on the contrary, the attempt of someone belonging to a restricted social group to elaborate, by writing texts ‘about’ erotic desire, some kind of performative epistemic model—one fashioned in a code conforming to the decorum of the noble rank—by which members of that group could perceive and
poem by Guillaume quoted earlier, the poet’s relationship to his lady is figured as the relationship between a vassal and a lord, that is, as a patron-client relationship. The language of the feudal hierarchy is everywhere prominent; she will not free the lover from her bond, “son liam.” She will write his name down in her charter; he will become her man, her vassal. Given his position as one of the most powerful lords of Occitania, Guillaume’s claim to vassalage strikes a deliberately ironic tone. He exploits the disparity between his own position and the pose of lover/client he adopts. In “Com­panho, faray un vers . . . covinen,” Guillaume handles the language of feudalism to much different effect, making explicit his own power as feudal overlord. Unable to decide between two lovers, na Agnes or na Arsen, he writes

De Gimel ai lo castel el mandamen,
   E per Niol fauc ergueil a tota gen,
   C’ambedui me son jurat e plevit per sagramen.

[Of Gimel I have the castle and the fief,
and with Niol I show myself proud to everyone,
for both are sworn to me and bound by oath.]

(22–23)

Guillaume’s monopoly on the most important economic resources, the castle and the fief, protects his interests in the exchange of women, which are at once legal (“jurat,” “sagramen”), amorous, and ironic.

But more often, the erotic relationship between the poet and his beloved repeats the participants’ political relationship, as for instance in this poem by Bernart de Ventadorn.

Bona domna, re no.us deman
   mas que.m prendatz per servidor,
   qu’e.us servirai com bo senhor,
   cossi que del gazardo m’an.
Ve.us m’al vostre comandamen,  
francs cors umil, gais e cortes!

[Good lady, I ask you for nothing
but to take me for your servant,
for I will serve you as my good lord,
whatever wages come my way.
Behold me at your command, a man to rely on,
before you, o noble, gentle, courteous, and gay.]

(128–29)

The lover here asks for his lady’s patronage, promising to serve her
in exchange for a reward, for “whatever wages come my way.” The
discourse of economic exchange (service, wages) structures the
erotic exchange, but the direction of the metaphor is ambiguous. It
may be that economics is simply being evoked as a metaphor for
love, but it is just as likely that courtly love is a highly codified way
of talking about economic exchanges and the investment of sym­

dolic capital. It may be more productive to talk about a dialogical
exchange or a circulation (as money is allowed to circulate) be­
tween the discourses of desire and those of economics. Like all
patron-client relations, this one contains a strong element of inter­
personal obligation, expressed in terms of reciprocity. The repeti­
tion of the grammatically derived “servidor”/“servirai” under­
scores this element of reciprocity and exchange, while the rhyme
“servidor”/“senhor” emphasizes the inequality of the relationship.
The dompna’s feudal privilege enables her to confer status, even
nobility, upon her lover/vassal, while she receives in return public
affirmation of her own courtly status and prestige—her nobility,
gentility, and courtesy (her “francs cors umil, gais e cortes”).

That the beloved was the poet’s superior by class is suggested by
such senhals (code names) as La Bel Senher and Midons, which
frequently appear in troubadour lyrics. Such androgynous terms—
the first composed of the feminine article and adjective and the
masculine noun for lord or master, the latter of the feminine pos­
sessive mi and the masculine dominus or lord [Bogin 1980, 50]—
locate in the lady the absolute power that was her privilege as a
patron within the feudal hierarchy. The coupling of male and
female in androgynous terms of address suggests the ambiguity of the noblewoman’s position as a patron. Midons was, in effect, caught between contradictory ideologies of class and gender, of patronage and kinship. The feudal hierarchy granted her absolute power over the poet who sang her praises, but the sexual hierarchy, the patriarchy, limited her exercise of that power both within and outside of marriage. Patriarchy required women to be the property of their husbands, to be kept chaste to assure the legitimacy of heirs. Yet the demands of patronage required the continuing circulation of women as patrons and as markers of status. The woman’s sex precluded the expression of her own desire, and in fact, her desire is beside the point precisely because it is in the withholding of her favors, in her silence, that she exercises her power. In the poem she remains a silent and passive object, represented as a thing (res), the object of the poet’s desire. She becomes, in effect, a medium of exchange through which some of her husband’s status can be transferred to the poet. That the dompna could be used by the poet to define his position within the feudal hierarchy explains why the object of the troubadour poets’ desire was always a married woman rather than a donzella. The unmarried woman lacked identity and status within the feudal hierarchy, but a married woman participated in her husband’s.

Entrebescar les Motz

Courtly poetry and the sentiments it conveys may strike the modern reader as clichéd, repetitive, even hackneyed, especially to the post-Romantic phenomenological sensibility, which views poetry as an expression of an individual great mind conversing with other minds. Fin’amor expressed itself through an elaborate and ritualized literary language and constituted one means by which members of the medieval aristocracy could articulate their relations of patronage to one another. Central to the courtly poem’s function as a mode of expression is its formal construction. In challenging the formalists’ claim that poetic form can be studied apart from social life, Vološinov/Bakhtin argues that the formal elements that make up a particular genre—sound, word, image, rhythm,
composition—carry social and ideological meanings of their own (1976). The form of a poem is itself a complex system of signs. We cannot claim to have fully historicized the courtly lyric without understanding the kinds of meanings encoded in the elaborate forms of the courtly lyric.

Raimbaut d’Aurenga refers to the art of the troubadour as the art of entrebescar les motz, intertwining, entangling words. The languages of poetry and of sexual desire existed in a dialogic relationship—entangled—with the languages of economics, warfare, and politics. Both troubadours and trobairitz shared—and contested—a common language, a set of themes, vocabulary, and elaborate verse forms that required the interweaving of sounds, grammatical forms, words, images, and rhymes in ever more complicated patterns. In the courtly lyric, the sign becomes a site of ambiguous meanings that are further undermined at the level of form, where the use of homophones, repetitive voicing, and reduplication, as Julia Kristeva says, “throws doubt on meaning at its very core” (1987, 282). The polysemanticy of the sign repeats at the level of the utterance what amounts to a kind of resource polygamy. What is at stake in the courtly lyric is the power to control words and women as resources.\textsuperscript{15}

What differences exist in the rhetorical strategies of troubadours or trobairitz in the deployment of theme, vocabulary, and form result from their different investments in the social relations of fin’ amor, their different social positions, which are ideologically determined by the social construction of gender. Because she is positioned differently within the networks of patronage and kinship relationships that created the courtly lyric, the twelfth-century noblewoman’s poetic explorations of her own subjectivity within that genre are necessarily different from those of her male worshiper. What is at stake in the substitution of a female poet for a male one in the fin’ amor tradition is not simply a reversal of a paradigm, because, as I have suggested, the “paradigm” or hierarchy of courtly love is itself contradictory. The trobairitz’s adaptations of the conventions of a genre designed to serve masculine interests—

\textsuperscript{15}Bloch’s analysis of medieval misogyny (1987) suggests some tantalizing links between linguistic promiscuity and sexual promiscuity.
in effect the displacement of the male subject by the female subject—as Marianne Shapiro argues, generates within the genre a whole series of displacements, both paradigmatic and syntagmatic, that threaten to reveal the power struggles the conventions of fin’amor were designed to repress (1978, 562). A closer examination of these displacements reveals the social dynamics of gender and class which must remain unspoken in the troubadour lyric but which are always lurking just beneath the surface.

To examine these displacements in more detail, I would like to turn now to a comparison of two lyrics—“Domna, puois de me no.us chal” by Bertran de Born, and “A chantar m’er de so qu’ieu non volria” by the countess of Dia. Inasmuch as the two poets are approximate contemporaries, both writing toward the end of the twelfth century, this comparison should reveal some of the differences between the styles of the troubadours and trobairitz. Joan Ferrante has found distinctive male and female rhetorics in the courtly lyric, which, she says, extend beyond subject matter to encompass such formal aspects of style as vocabulary, imagery, grammatical form, rhyme scheme, and sound play. Because her study is necessarily preliminary and her conclusions guarded, she does not attempt to account for these differences. I believe they arise not from some essential psychological difference between men and women, or between male and female rhetorical styles, but from specific historical conditions, from the different gender roles assigned to men and women within the social systems of patronage and of courtly love. The formal differences in their poetry suggest the extent to which genre participates in the ideological making of meaning.

The poem by Bertran de Born is a virtuoso performance by one of the most colorful of the troubadours (as attested by his striking appearance in Dante’s Inferno as a talking head). It is a tour de force of the conventional client-patron relations between the lover and his dompna. The poet manages to appear at one and the same time both abject and disinterested. He attempts to neutralize the power of his patron, deftly positioning her as the object of his desire by

16Joan Ferrante, “Notes toward the Study of a Female Rhetoric in the Trobairitz,” in Paden 1989, 63; Shapiro has also noted some of the formal characteristics of trobairitz verse (1978, 565).
scattering her body into text, reincarnating her as a kind of currency by which he can purchase his desire.

Puois no.us puosc trobar engal,
que fos tan bela ni pros,
ni sos rics cors tan joios,
de tan bela tieira
ni tan gais
ni sos rics pretz tan verais,
irai per tot achaptan
de chascuna un bel semblan
per far domna soisseubuda,
tro vos mi siatz renduda. (236)

[And since I can find none your equal, none so beautiful and
noble, or of her aristocratic body so joyful, so graceful, or so gay (courtly) or of her noble worth so true, I shall go everywhere
purchasing of each lady one beautiful image, in order to make one
beautiful lady until you are returned to me.] 17

In this poem Bertran “creates” his beloved as a set of precious
objects literally interchangeable with one another, symbolic capital
that passes from the patron to the poet and from there circulates
throughout the court. The poet will “purchase” (“achaptan”) from
one lady her “color natural,” from another “son adrech parlar gaban [her adroit and frolicsome speech],” from another her throat
and hands. He will take one lady’s hair, another’s demeanor. He
will get a “glorious young body” and beautiful teeth from still
others. After creating this composite woman, this idealized fetish,
the poet contemplates the enjoyment of her/it as a symbolic sub-
stitute for the woman he cannot possess.

Bel Senher, ieu no.us quier al
Mas que fos tan cobeitos
d’aquesta com sui de vos; (238)

[Bel-Senher, I ask nothing of you except that I desire this assem-
bled lady as I desire you.]

17To emphasize Bertran’s deployment of the courtly vocabulary, I have used my
own translation of this lyric.
La Bel Senher—the powerful patron—has been dispersed into words. She has been reduced to a series of signs, to “flesh made words,” so that the poet can create the constant and idealized object of his desires, a woman who, unlike the real thing, will never disappoint him (Vickers, 1981; Finke, 1984). In one sense, the poem reveals the poet’s painful awareness of language as a representation. It reveals the emptiness of signs, their continual deferral of presence. His verses attempt to overcome this emptiness, even as they speak to his failure. The poet cannot have the bodily woman, but he can have the textual one. Bertran de Born attempts to recreate his beloved’s presence through a verbal “engine.” But, at the same time, his witty manipulation of language testifies all the more poignantly to La Bel Senher’s absence. It defers his enjoyment at the same time that it enables him to create, and hence possess, the image of his desire. The poet’s strategy thus allows him to attain his desires at the same time as it voices his frustration.

Even as it marks one kind of failure, however, the poem creates a compensatory status for the poet which he might not acquire even if he were to possess his dompna. The poem allows him to accumulate symbolic capital from several patrons at once. Thus, his words contain an implicit threat. The laundry list of the names of ladies from whom he will cull the various body parts to create his beautiful composition—Cembelis, Aelis de Montfort, the vicomtesse of Chalais, Agnes de Rouchechouard, Audiart of Malamort, na Faidida—carries the warning that there are others from whom the poet might seek patronage with more success. In such a diffuse network of social relations, patronage may be sought in many quarters, multiple alliances might form, break apart, and re-form. Service without the expected reward need not continue indefinitely. The patron, the poet warns, also relies on the exchange of symbolic capital—on the accumulation of such intangible assets as prestige and “courtliness”—which drives the symbolic economy of patronage relationships and courtly love.

The countess of Dia’s poem, “A chantar m’er de so qu’ieu non volria,” touches on many of these same themes, but with some important differences. In Bertran’s poem, the male poet wields words as a form of power. It is the poem itself, and not so much the actual woman, that becomes the means of establishing his status
among his contemporaries and challenging his relationship to his lover, to whom the poem is directly addressed. What characterizes the trobairitz lyric is its reticence, its reluctance to speak for fear that the speech act itself, far from being a source of power, might constitute or signal some sort of failure. The opening line—"I must sing of things I’d rather not"—captures metonymically the sexual and political ideologies in conflict in the courtly lyric. Under patriarchy women are silenced, disempowered. To speak, to give voice to one’s wrongs is a form of empowerment. This feminist view of the power of speech makes the countess’s reluctance to speak seem puzzling; surely it is something more than feminine reticence. But silence is not always a sign of weakness. In the courtly lyric, the domn’s silence may signify her power as a patroness. In a patronage relationship, one expects the client to address—to entreat favors from—the powerful patron and not the reverse. For the patron to dispense largess and have it refused would constitute a loss of face; to complain about it would expose the ideological contradictions not only between class and gender hierarchies but between the ideologies of reciprocal exchange and extreme social inequality as well.

This poem differs from Bertran’s primarily by highlighting the unspoken vulnerability of the patron rather than that of the client. It stresses the speaker’s sense of betrayal, her loss of face when her freely given gifts are rejected. That this is as much an offense against her class and status as against her person is suggested by the poet’s deployment of the courtly vocabulary.

A chantar m’er de so qu’ieu non volria,
tant me rancur de lui cui sui amia,
car l’am mais que nuilla ren que sia;
vas lui no.m val merces ni cortesia,
ni ma baltatz ni mos pretz no mos sens,
c’atressi.m sui enganad’ e trahia
com degr’ esser, s’ieu fos desavinens. (2.1–7)18

18Bogin 1980, 84–86; all trobairitz poems cited here are from this edition unless otherwise noted; translations are my own. I cite Bogin’s numbering and lineation of the poems.
[I must sing of things which I'd rather not: so bitter do I feel toward him whose love I am because I love him more than anything. With him my mercy and courtesy are in vain, my beauty, virtue, and intelligence. For I've been tricked and cheated as if I were completely loathsome.]

The patron must devote considerable labor to the acquisition of clientele, to making and maintaining relationships (Bourdieu 1977, 180). In these lines, the poet reminds her lover/client of her investments in the relationship. The symbolic capital she brings to the relationship includes her mercy (“merces”), her “cortesia,” her beauty (“beltatz”), her virtue (“pretz”), and her intelligence (“sens”). These are many of the same qualities which Bourdieu recognizes as symbolic capital and which Bertran builds into his idealized “lady.” That these words appear with an almost monotonous frequency in the courtly lyric points to their important function in the exchange of symbolic capital. These are the dompna’s chief resources, her accumulation of marketable assets. They are no less significant for being intangible. Even if she is a married woman, perhaps even because she is a married woman who can use the assets that come to her through marriage to confer status on other men, these assets must be kept in circulation. When they are refused by a potential client, the poet feels cheated “as if I were completely loathsome.” Her disadvantage is as great as it would be if she did not possess any significant assets whatsoever.

At several junctures in the poem the countess reminds her lover of the investments, both symbolic and temporal, she has made in their relationship. She has to remind him of the rules of a game, which are, by definition, supposed to remain unspoken, undeclared.

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e membre vos cals fol comenssamens
de nostr' amor! ja Dompnedieus non vuolla
qu'en ma colpa sia l departimens. (2.19–21)
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[Remember how it was in the beginning of our love! May God not bring to pass that my fault should part us.]

Chief among these investments is the exchange of gifts: “e membre vos de nostres partimens” [ And remember the stanzas we ex-
changed] (2.28). A partimen is a particular verse form structured as a debate between two persons in which the adversary is offered a choice of sides, with the proposer accepting the choice that is rejected (Topsfield 1975, 256). Poems like this might become capital, circulating within the symbolic economy of gift giving that is governed by unspoken rules. But gift giving, as Bourdieu reminds us, is slippery; it must always “retrospectively project” into its calculations the return gift (1977, 171). The giver of the gift must take into account and hence satisfy the expectations of the recipient without appearing to know what these expectations are. It is the function of the gift to cover over the elements of economic obligation involved in such transactions, to make relations of economic necessity appear elective and based on reciprocal devotion. Such a relationship will fail, as it does in this poem, when either party fails to recognize and take into account the investments of the other party, when the parties misunderstand the social meanings of the exchanges.

Such misunderstandings seem almost inevitable given the ambiguity of a courtly vocabulary that oscillates between connotations of economic and social behavior. Words such as merces and pretz, common enough in troubadour poetry, still carry their primary connotations of “payment” and “value, worth.” The word pretz, for instance, carries a fiscal connotation that by this time had already become part of the feudal vocabulary. The word derives from the Latin pretium for worth or value, but also wages or reward.19 In the fourth stanza of this poem, the countess refers to her lover’s “rics pretz” which might be translated “rich worth.” Such a phrase might easily refer either to his material wealth or to his great virtue. It probably must refer to both, since wealth and virtue seem virtually inseparable in the world of the courtly lyric. In the final stanza, the countess articulates the unspoken contract that underlies the courtly relationship:

Valer mi deu mos pretz e mos paratges,
e ma beltatz e plus mos fis coratges, (2.29–30)

[My worth and noble birth should have some weight, my beauty and especially my loyal heart.]

19Merces also carries the notions of salary and price; see Vance 1975, 48; and Shapiro 1978, 569.
The alliteration connecting the poet’s “pretz” and her “paratges” and the rhyme linking her “paratges” with her “coratges” formally weave together into a single tissue the accident of being born into a class that controls the economic means of production and the virtues valued by that class; birth becomes worth, as wealth becomes virtue.

These two poems illustrate what other critics have observed about formal differences between troubadour and trobairitz poetry. The countess of Dia’s poem makes use of a much less complex verse form than Bertran de Born’s. Bertran’s *canso* contains seven *coblas unissonans* of ten lines.\(^{20}\) The poem has an elaborate strophic form in which the lines vary in length, to create the rhyme scheme and syllabic formula \(a_8 b_7 c_7 d_3 d_7 e_7 e_8 f_8 f_8\). The lines decrease in length through the midpoint of the stanza, after which they become increasingly longer. The Countess’s *canso* consists of five *coblas singulars* of seven 9-syllable lines, rhyming *aaaabab*. The rhymes differ for each *cobla*. Most critics have commented on the relative simplicity of the trobairitz poetic forms, suggesting that the trobairitz poetry is more direct, more like “natural” speech; its appeal is supposedly more to the emotions than the intellect.\(^{21}\) The troubadour poem, with its elaborate intertwining of rhyme, line length, homonyms, and other sound repetition, appeals to the intellect. Complexity, then, becomes a signifier of artifice. It marks the courtly lyric as an elaborate game played in front of a sophisticated and discerning audience for the sake of publicly displaying the poet’s wit, winning him preferment.

These differences illuminate the different rhetorical strategies of each poem. Note, for instance, the deployment of direct address. Both poems address the lover throughout, but the effect of direct address in each poem differs significantly. Ferrante notes that troubadour poetry uses direct address much less frequently and when it does the address is not restricted to the poet’s love (Paden 1989, 201n...\(^{20}\)In *coblas unissonans* the same sounds are repeated in the same patterns of rhyme throughout each cobla. In Bertran’s poem the rhymes are on -al, -os, -ra, -ais, -an, and -uda throughout all seven strophes.

\(^{21}\)Bogin 1980, Dronke in Wilson 1984, and Ferrante in Paden 1989; the huge disparity between the number of troubadour and trobairitz poems surviving makes such comparisons shaky at best.
In this respect Bertran’s poem is unusual in employing direct address. Yet, in conjunction with the elaborate verse form and the long list of ladies’ names that occupies stanzas 3–6, Bertran’s direct address gives the appearance of widening to include a larger and larger audience. There is an element of public display, of performance, in Bertran’s address which is lacking in the countess’s. Her address to the lover vacillates between revelation and denial, wishing to speak and, at the same time, fearing to. These differences, I would argue, result less from a difference in emotional commitment to the relationship than from the two poet’s different subject positions under a male-dominated patronage system. The male poet, occupying the position of a client among many potential clients, must orient his address in at least two directions—toward the lady and toward other men with whom he must both compete and form alliances. In this regard, the poem is a homosocial exchange in which men vie with one another for status. That status derives only from the poem, from the public display of the relationship with the beloved. The male poet has everything to gain from this display because it publicizes his gift and lays an obligation upon the recipient. The female poet has everything to lose, which suggests why trobairitz poetry is marked by the poet’s reluctance to speak. The shift from male subject to female subject—from client to patron—exposes yet another contradiction within the ideology of fin’amor. For the female poet, her public display of betrayal is a signifier of her failure as a patron to cultivate a clientele, at the same time as it affords her a means of self-representation.

Desire and Representation

The trobairitz’s poetry effectively illustrates the process Louis Althusser has called interpellation, by which subjectivity is created as individuals internalize historically specific cultural representations as their own self-representation. In the slippage between the two—in the différence between cultural representation and self-representation—feminists can begin to uncover the cracks in the ideological facade of gender relations, the local resistances to the oppressive hierarchies of feudal patronage and kinship systems, in
short, the poaching of those silenced by official histories (de Lauretis 1987, 10). Of all the trobairitz, the countess of Dia seems to have internalized the ideology of fin’ amor most thoroughly. Perhaps that is the reason why her poems are most frequently anthologized. “Ab joï et ab joves m’apais” demonstrates her commitment to the ideals articulated by the courtly lyric.

Ab joï et ab joves m’apais,
e joïs e joves m’apaia,
que mos amics e lo plus gais,
per qu’ieu sui coindet’ e guaia;
e pois ieu li sui veraia,
bei.s taing qu’el me sia verais:
qu’anc de lui amar non m’estrais,
ni ai cor que m’en estraià. (i. 1–8)

[I am nourished on joy and youth, and joy and youth nourish me, because my lover is the very gayest, therefore I am charming and and since I am true to him, it is proper that he be true to me; never has my love for him strayed, nor do I have a heart that strays.]

This lyric celebrates all the qualities of the courtly lover: youth and joy, courtesy and valor, intelligence and wisdom. Far from depicting the cold, haughty lady with power over life and death suggested by many troubadour lyrics, this poem calls on the dompna to give her affection freely to “un pro cavallier valen” (i. 19), a courteous and worthy knight. Once she is sure of his merit she should dare to love openly and faithfully (as if jealous husbands and lauzengiers did not exist). This poem’s concern with the reciprocities of patronage, which the courtly lyric was designed both to facilitate and to conceal, is underscored by its rhyme scheme. The two coblas doblas of sixteen lines each are structured around two rhymes on -ais/-aia and -en/-essa in a scheme ababbaab.22 In addition, the poem employs derived rhyme (rims derivatius), in which the ab lines in each pair of verses end on a grammatical variation of the same word. This pattern of grammatical repetition (apais/apaia,

22Coblas doblas refers to two stanzas linked by the repetition of the same rhymes.
gais/guaia, veraia/verais, estrais, estraia) runs against the rhyme scheme and is used to create a variety of effects.²³

The most consistent effect produced by derived rhyme in this poem is to generate the theme of reciprocity—the cornerstone of the patronage system—which runs throughout the poem. This reciprocity takes two forms, although the two are inextricably linked. The first is the reciprocity between the lovers or, if you will, between the patron and her client. The woman confers status on her male admirer who, on the basis of her song, becomes “un pro cavallier valen,” while, in turn, the male’s admiration establishes the woman’s courtliness.²⁴ This reciprocity is reflected in the inner rhymes. Because her lover is gay, she is gay, and because she is true, her lover in turn should be true. But as in all troubadour poetry, there is an awareness that the dance being enacted between the lovers takes place within a wider social context that always dictates the participants’ movements. The individual’s experiences of fin’ amor make sense only within a set of social expectations that regulate individuals’ behavior. This reciprocity between individual experience and social expectation, between self-representation and cultural representation, is carried in the first and last rhymes of the stanzas, which serve as a kind of envelope for the reciprocities between individuals. The poet’s joy and youth are themselves the product of a culture that values joy and youth, in which these commodities circulate and are exchanged as a means of accumulating status. The poem speaks of love not as a purely psychological state of mind but as a social institution whose function it is to facilitate transfers of power and status while concealing the true nature of those transfers. The poem exposes and enacts the repression of politics into desire.

The second set of coblas doblas reinforces the connection between individual and public values. Stanza 3 reads

²⁴In “A chantar” when the poet’s offers are refused she complains that her courtly qualities are worthless and that she has been treated “as if I were completely loathsome” (“s’ieu fos desavinen s”). In another lyric she offers her lover “mon cor e m’amor, / mon sen, mos huoills e ma vida [my heart and love, my mind, my eyes, and my life].”
Dompna que en bon pretz s'enten
deu ben pausar s'entendenssa
en un pro cavallier valen
pois qu'ill conois sa valenssa,
que l'aus amar a presensssa;
que dompna, pois am'a presen,
ja pois li pro ni li valen
no.n dirant mas avinenssa. (i.17–24)

[The dompna who knows about worth ought to place her affection in a courteous and worthy knight as soon as she knows his worth, and she should dare to love him openly as a dompna who loves openly, always those who are courteous and worthy will speak nothing but praise.]

In these lines, the derived rhymes tend to pair nouns with either verbs or adjectives. Sarah Kay has noted that medieval philosophical analyses of grammatical categories, such as those of Bernard of Chartres and John of Salisbury, describe the relation of noun to other parts of speech as that of substance to accident: “The noun contains the real substance, the adjective and the verb being subsequent attenuations of that substance through conmixture with accidental elements such as the ‘person’” (Paden 1989, 160). Derived pairs like “enten”/“entendenssa,” “valen”/“valenssa,” “presenssa”/“presen,” which set the noun against its verb or adjective, play on these philosophic beliefs. The lover’s possession of such courtly values as nobility and understanding (“valen,” “enten”) are embedded within the public validation of “valenssa” and “entendenssa.” Because of such validation, the lovers can afford to love “openly,” publicly (“presenssa”). The expression of personal virtue cannot, in this poem, be separated from these public values.

The beginning of the second stanza contains a striking departure from the derived rhyme used so consistently elsewhere, drawing our attention to these two lines.

Mout mi plai, quar sai que val mais
cel qu’ieu plus desir que m’afia (i.9–10)

[It pleases me because I know he is the best, him whom I most desire to have me.]
Despite her position and power, the countess, even as a poet, conceives of herself primarily as an object of desire: she can only desire “him whom I most desire to have me.” In these lines, the poet illustrates what John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* has described as a central component of a woman’s interpellation of cultural representations of the feminine. Woman’s “own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another” (1972, 46). Because her success is socially defined by how she appears to men, the power of vision—of the gaze—splits her in two: “She comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman” (46).

But the situation created by *fin’ amor* is, from the woman’s perspective, far trickier than Berger’s account can suggest. Because the relationship she courts is both sexual and political, she must successfully balance more contradictions than just that between surveyor and surveyed. In the lyrics of the countess of Dia, the force of the poet’s technical mastery holds together and balances all the contradictions. To balance the politics of marriage and primogeniture with the politics of patronage, she must remain at the same time both sexually available and chaste. She must act without appearing to act. She must be aggressive while appearing passive. The countess has mastered the technique of a sexual aggression that remains entirely passive. In another lyric, “Estat ai en greu cossirier,” she fantasizes about an encounter with her lover.

*Ben volria mon cavallier*
*tener un ser en mos bratz nut,*
*qu’el s’en tengra per ereubut*
*sol qu’a lui fezes cesseillier; . . .*

*Bels amics avinens e bos,*
cora.us tenrai en mon poder?
e que jagues ab vos un ser
e qu’ie.us. des un bais amoros;
sapchatz, gran talan n’auria
qu’ie.us tengues en luoc del marit,
ab so que m’aguessetz pleuit
de far tot so qu’ieu volria. (3.9–12, 17–24)*
[I wish just once I could hold my knight with my bare arms, for he would be in ecstasy if I’d just let him lean his head against my breast. . . . Handsome friend, charming and kind, when shall I have you in my power? If only I could lie beside you for an hour and embrace you lovingly—know this, I’d give almost anything to have you in my husband’s place, but only under one condition, that you swear to do my bidding.]

The countess insists in both of these sexual fantasies on maintaining the power to direct the relationship. Yet in both she remains traditionally passive. He would lean his head upon her breast. Her very stillness is a sign of her power. He would take her husband’s position, but with one crucial difference: in marriage a woman cedes power to her husband; here the countess insists that she maintain the power that belongs to a patron.

The reference to her husband reminds us that within the system of fin’amor the woman must manage not only her lover/client but also a potentially jealous husband (in “Fin ioi me don alegranssa” she refers to him as “gelos mal parlan” [“evil-speaking jealous one”]) and the “nasty-worded lauzengiers” (called “lauzengier mal dizen” in the same poem), spies who attempt to destroy her reputation. The husband may require his wife to be sexually available to other men and yet be jealous, and the lauzengiers may be competing for the same symbolic capital fin’amor keeps in circulation. All are implicated in the same system of social relations. The kind of reciprocities achieved in “Ab joie ab jovens m’apais” or fantasized in “Estat ai en greu cossirier” can be at best unstable poetic moments forged and held together by the poet’s technical mastery. They are finally too subversive of the social and sexual hierarchies of medieval feudalism to survive, at least in institutional form, outside of the rarefied environment of the courtly lyric. The lovers are not private, cloistered individuals; they are social creatures who live in a world not only of lauzengiers and jealous husbands (see 4.4–11, 17–20) but of social hierarchies and economic priorities that must intrude upon and shape their private world. Poems by other trobairitz confront this fact, effectively dismantling many of the balances and reciprocities achieved in this poem. Indeed, the frequent betrayals they most often recount reveal that the private
relationships between men and women in this culture remain secondary—instrumental—to the homosocial ties between men which occasion the poetry.

Only one canso attributed to Azalais de Porcairages survives. Unlike the countess of Dia’s, her first name seems to have survived with her poem, but as with the countess, we know little more about her than the name of the town in which she lived. Yet her single poem and the impossible situation it documents is even more revealing of the contradictory ideologies—sexual, political, economic—that drove fin’amor.

The canso begins with a conventional topos of the courtly lyric

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ar em al freg temps vengut} \\
\text{quel gels el neus e la faingna} \\
e.l \text{ aucellet estan mut,} \\
c’us de chantar non s’afraininha; \\
e son sec li ram pels plais— \\
\text{que flors ni foilla noi nais,} \\
\text{ni rossignols noi crida,} \\
\text{que l’am e mai me reissida. (ll. 1–8)}
\end{align*}
\]

[Now we are come to the cold time when the ice and the snow and the mud and the birds’ beaks are mute (for not one inclines to sing); and the hedge-branches are dry—no leaf or bud sprouts up, nor cries the nightingale whose song awakens me in May.]

This winter topos, which appears in the poetry of several troubadours, including Guillaume (see Goldin 1973, 6), Bernart de Ventadorn, Cercamon, and Giraut de Bornelh, provides an emotional counterpoint to the classical spring landscape (locus amoenus) that provides the other setting for the courtly lyric. Through the winter topos, the poet’s unhappiness is projected onto the dreary landscape that surrounds her, just as in a spring setting the poet’s happiness finds expression in his pleasant surroundings.25 The

25Compare Azalais’s opening with the following poem by Cercamon: “Quant l’aura doussa s’amarzis / e.l fueilha chai de sul verjan / e l’auzelh chanton lor latis, / et ieu de sai sospir e chan / d’Amor que.m te lassat e pres, / qu’ieu encar no l’aic en poder. [When the sweet breeze turns bitter / and the leaf falls down from the branch / and the birds change their language, / I, here, sigh, and sing / of love, whom I never have had in my power]” (96–97).
landscape becomes a lens for focusing the poet’s discontent. What is striking about Azalais’s invocation of the dreary landscape is her insistence on its enforced silence. The birds are mute, “for not one inclines to sing.” Even the nightingale, “whose song awakens me in May,” is silent, absent. The landscape’s silence repeats and highlights the poet’s reluctance to speak, which she shares with other troubairitz. In the second stanza, she seems to speak almost as if against her will: “e s’ieu faill ab motz verais [though I be blamed, I’ll tell the truth]” (l. 13).

Azalais’s reticence is further revealed in frequent circumlocutions. In the first stanza, for instance, the muteness of the landscape is conveyed negatively through the creation of absence. Negative particles abound in the stanza, five in the last half alone (“non,” “ni,” and “noi”). Her speech is hedged round with negatives that undercut straightforward, direct statement. Stanza 3 both reveals and disguises the reason for her reluctance through an elaborate periphrasis that attempts to conceal her situation by couching it in the generalized case. That situation is unspeakable precisely because it reveals the class alliances involved in the patronage networks of feudalism which fin’ amor was designed to disguise.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Domnna met mot mal s’amor} \\
\text{que ab ric ome plaideia,} \\
\text{ab plus aut de vavassor;} \\
\text{e s’il o faï, il folleia,} \\
\text{car so diz om en Veillai} \\
\text{que ges per ricor non vai,} \\
\text{e domnna que n’es chauzida} \\
\text{en tenc per envilanida. (ll. 17–24)}
\end{align*}
\]

[A domnna’s love is badly placed who pleads with a rich man, above the rank of vassal: she who does it is a fool. For the men of Vellay say love and money do not mix, and the domnna money chooses has debased herself.]

\[26\text{Ferrante argues that the troubairitz tend to employ negatives much more consistently than do troubadours to express frustration or deprivation (Paden 1989, 65). See also Shapiro, 565.}\]
The poet's shame comes from having placed her "love" in a man of higher rank than herself, a "ric ome." This fault is represented as a major transgression. The woman is a fool who loves someone above the rank of vassal, a greedy fool who has debased herself. There is never any suggestion anywhere throughout the corpus of courtly lyrics that a man who loves a woman of higher rank is greedy or debasing himself. Indeed, that situation is presented as the norm. The language of this stanza exposes the rigid class hierarchies that dominate social relations under feudalism. It shatters the romantic illusions of fin' amor as an idealization of love by exposing the mercenary motives it must disguise. The language of class hierarchies dominates the stanza. The "ric ome" is "plus aut," of higher rank, although the proper object for the dompna is the "vavassor," the vassal. The married noblewoman's lover—the poem insists that she is a married woman; the word dompna is repeated twice in the stanza—should be a vassal because fin' amor cannot be perceived as anything other than a patronage relationship. The woman's prestige—her symbolic capital—which derives from her status within marriage, is a resource she can dispense. To bestow it upon someone higher than herself, someone not a vassal or a client, would be to take herself out of the circulation of symbolic capital required by the feudal system. Her misplaced affections work against the dissemination of resources required within a patronage system, redirecting the flow of symbolic capital upward and concentrating resources at the top of the hierarchy. It is not the man at the apex of the feudal system who requires the status that is conferred by the dompna; it is the man of uncertain status, the vassal or bachelor. The woman who has refused her position as patron and made herself a client has, in effect, betrayed her class. The epithet "envilanida" suggests she has made herself base, a "villein." The illogic of blaming the "woman money chooses" but not the man who chooses a rich woman exposes the collusion between love and economics, between gender and class hierarchies, which fin' amor conspires to conceal. The "woman money chooses" is a class traitor not because she is greedy but because she has taken herself out of circulation; her resources are not available to those men beneath her in rank who are potentially her clients.
The poems of Castelloza, the last trobairitz poems I examine here, present some interesting challenges to the modern reader because in them she attempts to adapt the vocabulary and poetics of fin’amor to a situation they were never designed to describe. The language simply cannot be made to say what she wants it to say about feminine desire, and the energy of her poems comes primarily from this sense of having stretched the language to its breaking point. With its elaborate ritualistic language, complex syntax, and frustrated reciprocities, articulated through periphrasis, paradox, and enigmatic allusion, Castelloza’s poetry dismantles all the oppositions upon which fin’amor depends: patron/client, male/female, joy/pain, faith/betrayal, fulfillment/longing. Fin’amor requires a delicate balance between gender and class hierarchies; the female who is expected to submit to her husband in marriage, retains the power of her class over her vassal/lover. This balance is primarily rhetorical, a matter of style. In Castelloza’s poetry the balance is constantly upset. The dompna occupies the position of suffering lover usually reserved for the male poet; she has become the client forced to beg favors from a distant and more aristocratic male lover. She cannot rely, as the countess of Díaz does, on her paratges or noble birth to ensure her cortesia. Pushing the courtly lyric beyond what it can say, Castelloza exposes at its breaking point the inadequacies of fin’amor as an ideology: its contradictions, its repressions, its hidden collusion with the politics of power.

Critics have tended to focus on the theme of suffering in love in Castelloza’s poetry as if the artist and her subject matter were identical, as if content were not always mediated and distanced by form. Because Castelloza writes about suffering in love, it must be her suffering in love, autobiographically rendered. Therefore she is a masochist who is obsessed by and enjoys her suffering.27 But another perspective might view Castelloza as an artist who experiments with the effects on form of displacing subject positions with-

in a particular social formation. Castelloza’s poems differ from other courtly lyrics primarily in their shift of class and gender roles. The male occupies the position of unresponsive patron, the distant lover of a higher class, and the dompna (there is no reason we must identify her with Castelloza herself), the married lady, occupies the position of the client, the vassal who must court patronage. In Castelloza’s poetry, gender and class hierarchies coincide, upsetting the rhetorical balances required of the courtly lyric. For this reason her poems often seem a bit off-balance in comparison with the poems of other trobairitz.

In their exploration of hierarchy in fin’ amor, Castelloza’s poems make heavy use of a feudal vocabulary of rights and duties which calls attention to the operations of patronage. “Ja de chantar non degr’ aver talan” employs this imagery most extensively. In the first stanza, she offers her “service,” using the verb retener which describes the action of the seigneur or overlord in extending patronage to his vassals (Paden et al. 1981, 176).

E s’en breu no.m rete
Trop ai fag long badatge. (2.8–9)²⁸

[And if he doesn’t take me into his service now I’ve already made too long a wait.]

This verb reminds us that patronage relationships are entered into voluntarily by both sides. Just as her lord can accept or refuse her service, she is free to renounce her tie of vassalage. Yet she refuses to be recreant: “don no.m recre/D’amar per bona fe [Yet I don’t renounce loving you in good faith]” (2.16–17). Her relationship, despite the distance of her lover, brings her “honor” (22).²⁹ Recognizing the multiplicity of possible patron-client relations, she can-

²⁸For the poems of Castelloza, I am using the scholarly edition prepared by Paden et al. (1981) because it includes all variant manuscript readings. Paden’s text differs in some significant ways from Bogin’s; these differences will be discussed hereafter. I cite Paden’s numbering and lineation of the poems; translations are my own.
²⁹Duby (1983) reminds us that honor refers not only to virtue and fame in the abstract but also in feudal terms to the gifts—primarily but not exclusively the fief—that a vassal receives from his patron.
not expect, given her rank, to be the sole recipient of her lover’s service.

E sai ben que.us conve
Dompna d’ausor paratge. (2.26–27)

[And I know well that a dompna of higher rank deserves you.]

Her lover seeks a much nobler patron, and if that behavior causes the speaker pain, she also recognizes that it is appropriate within the confines of courtly behavior. The description in the fifth stanza of the speaker’s attempt to get the lover’s glove as a love token—usually the prerogative of the knight—calls to mind the intricate rituals that accompanied feudal relations. She returns the glove because

Pueis aic paor
Que.i aguesetz dampnage
D’aiicella que.us rete,
Amics, per qu’ieu dese
L’i torniei, car ben cre
Que no.i ai podiratge (2.40–45)

[I was afraid that you might suffer harm from the woman who retains you, friend, so I promptly gave it back, for I truly believe that I do not have any claim on it].

She seems to recognize the right of her knight to seek patronage in other places, since she doesn’t have “podiratge.” Paden glosses podiratge as “right of first mortgage,” that is the primary rights over a fief that a feudal lord cedes to a vassal. At every turn, then, this relationship reenacts the rituals of feudal patronage. In describing the course of feminine desire, this poem makes elaborate use of the feudal vocabulary of seignoratge and vassalatge, suggesting the interconnections between socially mandated class and gender roles, desire, and the operations of power.

Castelloza’s dompna is doubly oppressed, by her class and her gender. Her class makes her unattractive, at least to the knight she
wishes to “serve.” Unlike the countess of Dia, she never reproaches her knight for ignoring either her beauty or her courtly virtues, most likely because, given her class, she lacks the resources—the symbolic if not material capital—to be attractive in a culture that inextricably links material wealth, beauty, and virtue. Yet, her gender prevents her from courting openly, from seeking patronage: “ben dison tuig que mout descove / Que dompna prec ja cavalier de se, / Ni que’l tenga totz tems tam lonc pressic [people say it is unseemly that a dompna pleads her own cause with a knight, or holds him in a long sermon]” (i.18–20). That privilege is reserved for the knight alone.

Mout aurei mes mal usatge
A las autras amairitz,
C’hom sol trametre mesatge,
E motz triaz e chauzitz (3.21–24)

[I shall have set a bad example for other women in love. It’s the man only who sends a message and words discerning and well chosen.]

The language designed to facilitate the advancement of male vassals under feudalism cannot easily be made to serve the ends of feminine desire.

Castelloza’s appropriations of the feudal vocabulary, however, are anything but straightforward. Her language continually contests the power of the feudal and courtly vocabulary to fix social relations by calling into question its primary signifiers. Her poems illustrate what Paul Zumthor has called the *mouvance* of the medieval text, its status as a text “always in the process of becoming” (1972, 70–75). Because medieval texts circulated in manuscript, every work would be recreated anew with each recension. In the interests of presenting the appearance of a single authoritative text, modern editing practices tend to erase or flatten out the differences among multiple texts of the same work. To create the modern printed text, textual variants have to be designated as “noise,” at best relegated to a footnote at the bottom of the page. But in the case of the courtly lyric, this dialogism, the polysemanticy of the
signs that *fin' amor* contests (to repeat Kristeva’s terms), “throws doubt on meaning at the very core of the sign” (1987, 282) by challenging the most basic principles of word formation: the relation between letter and word and the division of groups of letters into discrete words.  

Even the most superficial glance at the textual variants in Castelloza’s poems demonstrates this process of *mouvance*, whereby words oppose or interanimate one another. Two examples from “Amics, s’ie.us trobes avinen” should suffice to demonstrate the complexity of this process. Paden renders line 4 “Qu’ie.us trop ves mi mal e sebenc e ric [I find you wicked and false and haughty]” based on manuscript N. But all the other manuscripts read “tric” instead “ric” in this line, which Bogin glosses as “villainous.” Both readings make sense in context; neither can be certified as more “authoritative” than the other. One might grammatically construe the string of letters “etric” as either “et ric” or “e tric.” And the two interpretations illuminate each other since one might argue, and I think Castelloza does, that the lover’s villainy lies precisely in his wealth and haughtiness, his higher rank.

The second example comes from line 22, which Paden, following manuscript N, gives as “Qu’ieu vueil preiar ennanz que .m lais morir [I want to pray now before I let myself die].” But manuscript A, which was the basis for the Schultz-Gora text (1888) that Bogin follows in her edition, reads “proar” (“prove”) in place of “preiar” (“pray”). If we substitute “proar” for “preiar” the line reads “I want to prove now before I let myself die / that . . . ” To add to the ambiguity of the line, “ennanz” can mean either “before” or “rather,” so that we might construe the phrase “ennanz que .m lais morir” to mean either “before I let myself die” or “rather than let myself die.”

Castelloza’s poetry, then, is anything but simple and direct. Hers are perhaps the most difficult of all the trobairitz poems to read, to edit, or to translate. If we equate simplicity of structure and syntax with direct, “natural” speech, then complexity might signify either artifice on the speaker’s part or her inability to say what she means,

30 Medievalists are beginning to examine manuscript variants more seriously as part of the literariness of the medieval text rather than as “noise” or scribal “error.” Kendrick’s study (1988) of troubadour wordplay is perhaps the most persuasive attempt to apply Zumthor’s (1972) notion of *mouvance* to the troubadour lyric.
either because she does not know it or because what she wants to say cannot be said within the linguistic structures available to her. The complexity of Castelloza’s syntax and the difficulty of her language differ from that found in much troubadour verse. If troubadour poetry functions as a kind of symbolic capital, providing poets with a means of achieving certain socially sanctioned ends (the accumulation of patronage), Castelloza uses linguistic complexity to explore the failure of the codes of fin’ amor to work for those whose gender or class excluded them from patronage networks. She relies heavily on hypotaxis to suggest a logical world of cause and effect and of mutual reciprocity, only to insist again and again on the failure of both logic and reciprocity. In “Amics, s’ie.us trobes avinen,” she writes

Amics, s’ie.us trobes avinen,
Humil e franc e de bona merce,
Be.us amera—cant era m’en sove
Qu’ie.us trop ves mi mal e sebenc e ric,
E’n fatz chansons per tal que fass’ausir
Vostre bon prez: don eu nom pue sc sofrir
Qu’eu no.us fasa lausar a tota gen
On plus me faitz mal es asiramen. (i.1-8)

[Friend, if I had found you gracious, humble, open, and compassionate I would love you—since now I realize that I find you wicked and false and haughty, yet I make songs to make your good name heard which is why I cannot refrain from making everyone praise you when most you cause me harm and anger.]

This stanza is somewhat reminiscent of the opening of “Ab joi et ab joven m’apais,” in which the countess of Dia uses the conditional with the subjunctive to establish a carefully balanced reciprocity between herself and her lover. But unlike that poem, this one insists on the failure of such reciprocity. As H. Jay Siskin and Julie A. Storme have argued (Paden 1989, 114), this stanza constructs an elaborate set of conditional clauses, only to abandon them halfway through. The first four lines contrast socially sanctioned qualities that define courtliness (“avinen,” “humil,” “franc,” “bona merce”)
with her lover's uncourtly behavior toward her ("mal," "sebenc," "ric"), inviting the reader to imagine the consequences of each type of behavior.

If I had found you courtly I would love you
But I find you uncourtly therefore ?

But the speaker can hold no consequences out as a threat to chastise her knight's uncourtly behavior. The poet cannot complete the logical sequence she has set up. Even so, the logic does not collapse on itself, as Siskin and Storme suggest; rather, it is displaced into song. The speaker cannot punish her lover's coldness; so she displaces her desire into her poetry: therefore "I make songs to make your good name heard." There is no illogic in her praising the good name of the man she has just called "wicked, false, and haughty." She simply is not in a position to exploit the resources of her own logical argument. She doesn't command the material resources that would enable her to make good on any threat she might issue, that is, she doesn't have the patronage—or the threat of lost patronage—to hold over her lover.

Castelloza's use of the rhetorical tools of logical argument consistently exposes logic as a tool the powerful use against the powerless. Scholastic philosophy in the Middle Ages was marked by a rigorous separation of logic and rhetoric, an insistence that the rules of logic are universal and strictly separate from the dictates of self-interest. Castelloza consistently uses syntax to dismantle the philosophical separation of logic and self-interest, exposing the powerful interests served by the rules of logical argumentation. Challenges to this hegemony take the form of displacement, as in the example I have just discussed, or of non sequiturs such as the one cited earlier: "E s'en breu no.m rete / Trop ai fag long badatge [And if he doesn't take me into his service now / I've already made too long a wait]" (2.8–9). It also expresses itself in multiple contradictions in which the syntax simply implodes on itself in a *mise en abyme* of failed reciprocity, as in the following strophe.

Ja mais no.us tenrai per valen,
Ni.us amarai de bon cor ni per fe:
Per ver veirei si ja.m valria re,
S’ie.us mostrava cor felon ni enic.
—Non farai ja, qu’eu non vueill puscaz dir
Qu’eu anc ves vos agues cor de faillir:
C’auriaz i qualche razonamen,
S’ieu avia ves vos fait faillimen. (1.9–16)

[Never shall I consider you worthy, nor shall I love you from the heart or with trust: in truth I’ll see if ever it would do me any good, if I showed you a treacherous and wicked heart. —I will never do it for I don’t want you to be able to say that I had the heart to be false to you. You would have some justification if I had committed some fault against you.]

In this labyrinthine passage, the declarative force of the first “never” is undercut by the conditional clause beginning “if,” and the possibilities engendered by that conditional are negated by the repetition of “never.” The first half of the stanza suggests that the speaker will reciprocate her lover’s coldness with “a treacherous and wicked heart” of her own. But the futility of such a gesture almost immediately occurs to her. Her coldness will be construed not as power but as a fault, the failure of a vassal to render proper “homage.” The syntax alone cannot conjure up the distant, haughty dompna of fin’amor because the speaker lacks symbolic capital; she lacks the resources that would enable her to participate in the reciprocal exchanges demanded by fin’amor.

But she does have her songs, which, Castelloza seems to suggest, accumulate for her and for her family a certain amount of symbolic capital. Her poems contain several references to the power her songs have to create status. One enigmatic statement even suggests that the “honor” that she gets through her relationship rebounds on her family: “Vos fai grasir mos lignage / E sobre totz mos maritz [My lineage makes you welcome and above all my husband]” (3.43–44). It does not seem too farfetched to argue that the “honor” here represents the symbolic capital that accrues from her fame as a poet, from “mos bos motz” and “mas chansos,” an honor that would be shared by her entire family as well, including, however contradictory to the ethics of primogeniture it might seem, her husband.
Castelloza doesn’t just passively endure suffering and pain, nor does she take compensatory pleasure in contemplating that suffering, as the criticism of her poetry seems to suggest. Rather, her poems—like those of her contemporaries, both male and female—become a socially recognizable asset she can exploit as a means of self-empowerment. She can exploit the vocabulary and logic of courtly love to expose its flaws, inconsistencies, and repressions. Like all the trobairitz, Castelloza seems at once completely reactionary in the interconnections her poems forge between the political and sexual economies of her time and utterly subversive in exposing hegemonic structures of gender and class.

There are no records of any trobairitz who wrote after 1250. The network of associations among literary form, sexuality, and patronage which gave these women voice seem particular to the political life of twelfth-century Occitania, and by midcentury the conditions that created these linkages were changing. Fin’amor spread widely throughout Europe, but the particular forms that it took varied greatly from country to country, as political and economic conditions varied. But sexuality and the body—the female body in particular—continued to be focal points for anxieties about authority, power, and resistance. In the next chapter I turn from erotic love in the Middle Ages to spiritual love, exploring the religious technologies of the late Middle Ages which were designed to produce “docile” bodies—to control a female sexuality that was perceived as dangerous. I examine the ways in which some women were able to poach on those technologies, reconstructing their oppression as a form of power through mysticism.