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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics:
Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of English and Comparative Literature

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

By
Iman Said Darwish

Under the supervision of **Dr. Ferial Ghazoul**

May / 2014

The American University in Cairo

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Has been approved by

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Date

DEDICATION

To the memory of my father, Dr. Mohamed Said, who dedicated his life to his family and students, and who instilled in me a relentless love for knowledge,

To my mother, Hala Talaat, whose unwavering belief in my abilities was the prime reason I never quit,

To my brother, Ahmed, and my sister, Omnia, for their constant love and support,

My hope is that they are all proud of me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my advisor Dr. Ferial Ghazoul for all her guidance and insight; without her patience and support I would not have been able to complete this thesis. I am proud to be her student and I thank her from my heart for believing in me.

I also would like to thank my readers Dr. Doris Shoukri and Dr. Camillo Gómez-Rivas for their invaluable advice and feedback in completing this thesis.

ABSTRACT

The American University in Cairo
Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics:
Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan

Iman Said Darwish

Advisor: Dr. Ferial Ghazoul

In this thesis I examine the lives and works of two remarkable medieval women poets, Wallada bint al-Mustakfi, an eleventh-century Andalusian poet, and Christine de Pizan, a fourteenth-century French poet. Both Wallada and Christine were raised and lived in courtly quarters which enabled them access to knowledge and learning and accorded them a powerful status. Both women have been able to successfully pursue their intellectual interests and create their own space of literary engagement within the rich conventions of the literary courtly love tradition. I also examine the parallels that existed between the French courtly literature and the Arabic *ghazal* poetry and how they both represented women as subjects. In this study I do a comparative analysis of the development of the feminine consciousness of both Christine and Wallada and how their experience informed their literary production and enabled them to break the confines of a literary tradition that limited their representation. Furthermore, I look into how both women, who were very different, represented different aspects of feminism and forces us to reexamine our own contemporary understanding of what feminism is.

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INTRODUCTION

Although they were hundreds of years apart, and from two inherently different worlds, both Christine de Pizan and Wallada bint al-Mustakfi, were able to stand out and establish themselves as respected literary figures in their own day. They are also, two women who continue to challenge our own stereotypes about the role and the status of women in the Middle Ages. Extensive studies have been recently written about both writers, especially Christine de Pizan. However, very few studies have looked at these authors from a comparative perspective. In my thesis I propose a comparison between two medieval poets, who were worlds apart, and at the same time they stand apart from the women of their own worlds—two women who were extraordinary in the sense of their times, and at the same time were both different as individuals. I would like to explore how both Wallada and Christine were able to establish themselves as successful literary figures, re-imposing on us a different understanding of medieval women and their status, an understanding that would overcome contemporary generalization about the status of intellectual women in the Middle Ages.

Christine de Pizan, often regarded as Europe's first professional woman writer, lived in the courts of medieval France where she wrote prolifically. Born in Venice in 1364, she was the daughter of Tommaso de Pizzano, an astrologer and a physician, who moved to the court of the French King Charles V as his astrologer. At the age of fifteen she married Etienne de Castel, and led a happy married life until the untimely death of her husband which left her in charge of her family at the age of twenty five. She took writing as a profession, but her fame only started when she got engaged in what is often described as France's first literary debate related to the *Romance of the Rose*—an allegorical poem of courtly love written first by Guillaume de Lorris

and continued later in a misogynic mode by Jean de Meun. This debate established Christine as an intellectual and assertive woman, able to hold her ground. She continued her analysis of the effects of misogynist literature in other works, including her lyrical poetry. Christine firmly believed that through rhetoric, women, would be able to defend their positions and revise the way they are represented.

Wallada bint al-Mustakfi was born in 994, almost four centuries before Christine de Pizan. Wallada was the daughter of the Umayyad Caliph, Muhammad III al-Mustakfi, the ruler of Cordoba—the most famous center of Andalusian culture. Wallada's fame stemmed primarily from the poems she wrote, including poems dedicated to her by her lover the famous poet Ibn Zaydun. Wallada had her own literary salon, where she hosted famous poets of her day, in a tradition that goes back to Sukaynah bint al-Husayn during the Umayyad period. Wallada was famed for her beauty and audacity: She was known to have had two lovers, the famous poet Ibn Zaydun, and the minister Ibn 'Abdus, yet she remained single till her death in 1087. Her works that have reached us are scarce, yet they display a wide emotional range and reflect a sense of wit and eloquence.

Although both women are different in many aspects, yet they share many similarities. Both of them were considered successful literary figures who led independent lives, one as a widow and the other as a single woman. Wallada and Christine were raised and led their lives in courtly quarters. This class advantage has enabled them access to knowledge and learning and accorded them a powerful status, unlike most women of their time. In that respect, both women have been able to successfully pursue their intellectual interests and create their own space of literary engagement, Wallada through her salon, and Christine through her debates.

The works of both poets represent the tradition of courtly love. The poetry of courtly love was confined to aristocracy; it has developed several forms and variations, and followed specific conventions, some of which were originally developed in Hispano-Arabic literature (See Menocal 71-90). The use of this form offers a chance for a comparative analysis of the development of the female consciousness in their respective socio-economic environments.

How are we then able to understand and to explain the rise of such women, in spite of all odds? Both Christine de Pizan and even more so Wallada bint al-Mustakfi represent two figures who do not fit within our own *familiar* categories of medieval women. They both challenge our conceptions of gender and identity, and force us to reflect on the process of subject formation. Although any serious study of these two women should be informed by feminist theory, I endeavor to expand the subject of my study beyond the constraints of feminism. In many respects, feminist studies have tended to indulge in a sort of essentialism that has reinforced the male/female binary in such a way as to create two opposing categories. This process has had a polarizing effect of assigning and aligning notions, experiences and descriptions to those specific categories. For example the male/female binary entails necessarily assigning notions of power and oppression to one side against the other. Thus from such a perspective if we were to consider the characters of Christine and Wallada we would think of them as “oppressed” by virtue of *being* women living during the Middle Ages in repressive patriarchal societies. Yet the course of their lives and their achievements prove otherwise.

Another example is how the categorization of Christine de Pizan in particular has been contentious. Modern feminists and critics have declared her the first true European feminist, a label overloaded with assumptions and connotations. This has led them to be often confused by her changing, and what they deem “contradicting” positions towards feminism. She fails short of

espousing revolutionary feminist ideas; Is she then a feminist or not? Is it right in the first place to give her such a label or would that be anachronistic? It becomes essential then that we historicize our feminist reading of these subjects. This process would have the effect of destabilizing those polarities as it presents to us figures, behaviors, events that break away from our modern rigid categorization. Yet, the problem of a purely historicist reading is that along with it comes a certain air of positivism. There is an assumption that literature and literary texts somehow reflect historical reality, and that this reality is a single and a stable object of study. There is also always an urge or a need to justify or to read the text/person/event within another framework that is more familiar; for example, Wallada is often being described as the Arab George Sand.

Yet since history is subjective, a composition of “tales” of the past, the only way we know about someone like Wallada is through other writers who tell her story, writers who lived many years after her period and often with their own ideological viewpoints including the position of women in the social fabric. History is a process of meshing those stories together, a process of intertextualization, that leads to the creation of a specific epistemological stance, to borrow Michel Foucault’s position. The only way we can study a subject (event/text/person) is within this context, through the realization of the interplay between the literary and the non-literary text. This process of situating a particular text within a field of texts, not just the meaning of the text on its own, nor some general background, is what is called “thick description” to borrow the expression of Clifford Geertz.

This interplay between the literary and the non-literary is what will enable us to arrive at portraits of those poets. From the literary perspective, the poetry of those women enables us to discern the sensibilities of their age. They speak of longing, of loss, of reunion, of revenge, of the

tumultuous tribulations of courtly love, reflecting not only their own experiences but the female imagination of the time. These two figures challenge us to define what is medieval feminism, for if we were to follow our basic definition of feminism, that is the advocacy of female equal rights, Christine would be its advocate (the theoretical position) while Wallada would be the actual embodiment (the praxis) of feminism. Hence, in spite of the differences in character and in expression, the comparative study of those two women forces on us a re-examination, or rather a redrawing of the boundaries of what feminism is.

In my thesis, I will examine the poems of Wallada bint al-Mustakfi in their entirety since it is a limited corpus and selected poems of Christine de Pizan (Virelai I, rondeau XLIII and from *Cent ballades*: ballade XXIV) that highlight the diversity of her literary production. These poems display the main conventions of courtly love: The secret meeting, the joy of the union, the agony of longing and the bitterness of betrayal.

CHAPTER 1: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi in Andalusia

The character of the Cordoban princess Wallada bint al-Mustakfi has generated much interest over the past decades. She is by far the most celebrated woman poet of Andalusia; her biography presents a break with the traditional view of Muslim women, and medieval women in general. Her seductive, willful and vindictive character is clearly at odds with the modest, chaste image we have formed of women of her time and her stature. As is the case with most women of her age, the image we are able to form of her is mainly through the voice of a man: her lover, the poet Ibn Zaydun who has immortalized her with some of the most famous love poems in classical Arabic literature. Yet, what is specific with Wallada is that we can hear her voice as well; we are able to discern other sides of her character through her own poetry. As scarce as the lines that have reached us from her, they reflect a tenaciously strong and unrelenting character that is often tempting to draw conclusions about. Her biography also presents to historians and orientalist alike a paradox and an opportunity to support claims of the emancipated nature of women in Andalusia in comparison to women in the East. Her explicit and heedless verse that went without reprimand provides evidence not only of a liberated spirit but also of a society that tolerated, if not accepted such behavior. Yet such generalized and often quick interpretations not only tend to ignore the nuances of an extremely complex and diverse society, but also tend to sever it from a larger socio-historical context, as well as ignore the dilemma of situating gender in a historical context.

The issue of transmission raises several questions that bid further research. Wallada has lived until she was almost ninety; she must have written poems that exceed the few lines that have reached us. In general, the verse written by women that has been passed down to us has been extremely miniscule in comparison to the huge body of classical Arabic poetry that has

reached us. Women Poets were not indexed among their male counterparts, but were often relegated to the last chapter of books, such as Ibn Bashkuwal's *Kitab al-sila fi tarikh a'immat al-Andalus* and Ibn Qutayba's *'Uyun al-akhbar*. To what extent relegating women to the last chapter is a reflection of marginalization of women in patriarchal society is indeed a question that requires further research (Muñoz 99).

The poems of Wallada, specifically her invective poems against Ibn Zaydun seem to have offended some of her modern biographers—such as Nykl—who have refrained from translating her poems or have condemned her behavior. Her poetry that survived centuries of filtration and censorship was also perfectly acknowledged in eleventh-century Islamic society. Our knowledge of Wallada comes primarily from two main sources: Ibn Bassam's *Al-Dhakhira fi mahasin ahl al-jazira* and Abu 'Abbas al-Maqqari's *Nafh al-tib*, and although Wallada's mention occurs in several other sources, the data about her seems scarce and to a large extent repetitive, which gives us only a slight glimpse of her life and leaves much to speculation and much to our own perception of life in “medieval” Muslim Spain.

Medieval Cordoba, known as the crown jewel of Andalusia, was the capital of the Umayyad caliphate. It became the central hub of the bustling literary and artistic traditions of the age. Situated in southern Spain on the northern bank of the river Guadalquivir, the city had a long history that started with its Phoenician foundation. However, it only reached the zenith of preeminence when the Muslim conquerors established it as their capital. After the 'Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in Damascus in 750, 'Abd al-Rahman I (d.788) fled the capital and went through an arduous journey across Northern Africa till he was able to cross over the sea and found the Umayyad rule in Iberia in 756. He sought to establish a magnificent rule that would compensate for his lost throne in the East. Cordoba became the center of an extravagant court

life that would compete with Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo. Major construction works came underway and continued for years to come as palaces, gardens, mosques and bridges were built all over the city. “The Spring of Cordoba” thus began. A bustling court life appeared in parallel; ‘Abd al-Rahman II invited the most famous musician of the age, Ziryab, from the East to Cordoba. Ziryab became *the* trendsetter in this newly established court, his influence and fame extended beyond his musical innovations (which include the addition of the fifth cord in the *oud*) as he established a truly new lifestyle that elevated Andalusia to a new level of luxury, refinement and finesse (Faroukh 80). Everyone sought to imitate his fashion and manners, and to follow the novelties he brought. A new class of urban elites started displaying new forms of wealth and culture, such as, the building of *Munyas*, country villas, which were farming estates as well as places of leisure built in the most beautiful scenery. This new court life provided the perfect setting for an indulgent lifestyle that boasted of beautiful women, wine and music. By the reign of ‘Abd al-Rahman III (d. 961) Muslim Spain had reached its zenith. From a political and economic standpoint, it was at its strongest. The contemporary Saxon nun Hroswitha called Cordoba the “the ornament of the world”(Hillenbrand 119). The city reached new heights with the building of *al-Zahra*: a palatial extension, constructed by ‘Abd al-Rahman III, a city of near mythical beauty. It became an intellectual center housing almost seventy libraries. Al-Hakam II (d. 976), who was also a respected historian, invited prominent scholars from all over the Islamic world to teach in the Great Mosque of Cordoba. He also built twenty seven free schools and had in Alcazar a library of 400,000 volumes (Hillenbrand 120). He maintained a network of liaises all over the major Islamic capitals, who regularly bought him the latest written works of the day, including the famous multi-volumed book *al-Aghani* of Abu Faraj al-Asbhani. It became a necessity for every ruler to leave his own footprint in the city, during his reign the Chamberlain

Muhammed ibn Abi ‘Amir (d. 1002) insisted on building a similar extension to the city, *Madinat al-Zahira*, south-east of Cordoba, to compete with the beauty of *al-Zahra*. After the end of the Chamberlain period and with the decline of the political power of the Umayyad dynasty, the city witnessed a similar decline. In the following years, the city witnessed several rulers; during the short reign of the Petty States it was first ruled by the family of Banu Jahur (1031- 1078), and later the Banu ‘Abbads of Seville (1078-1091), followed by the rule of Almoravids in 1091 AD, the intolerant Almohad in 1172 AD, and was finally conquered by Ferdinand III of León and Castille in 1236, thus ending five hundred years of Muslim rule of the city and sealing the fate of its golden age forever.

The reign of the Petty States marked the beginning of the disintegration of a central political power and the overall decline of the Islamic State in the Iberian Peninsula. Following the Rule of the Chamberlain Al-Mansur Ibn Abi ‘Amir, al-Andalus fell prey to a turbulent period of civil strife between the ‘Amirid State (Ibn Abi ‘Amir’s sons), several Umayyad princes (the formal Caliphate) and the Berber, who enjoyed a prominent position during the ‘Amirid Period. In 1013 AD when Sulayman al-Musta‘in became the Caliph, he distributed several fiefs among the warring Berber factions in an effort to appease and reward them for their support; for example Banu Hammud were granted several North African ports such as Ceuta and Tangier, the Sinhaja Tribe were granted Elvira, Banu Birzal and Banu Yafran were granted Jaen. Shortly thereafter the cities of North Africa start proclaiming their independence from Cordoba; the Sinhaji Banu Hammud rebelled against the rule of al-Musta‘in, crossed over to Andalusia and marched to and successfully entered Cordoba in 1016 AD, they ordered the execution of the Caliph and proclaimed their own ‘Ali ibn Hammud as the new Caliph. What followed was a period of power struggle between the Umayyad Marwanids and the Banu Hammuds that lasted

until 1031 AD, with the final declaration of the abolition of the Caliphate, and the independence of individual city states under the rule of their respective governors. Thus began the reign of *'asr muluk al-tawa'if* or the reign of the Petty States . Muslim Spain was split into almost twenty three different principalities among Arab, Berber and Slav rulers. For the following four decades, Muslim Spain witnessed constant civil wars among those states, as each ruler sought to extend his rule beyond his city, often times allying with the northern Christian states of Navarre, León and Castille, which enabled those kingdoms, over the following four decades, to slowly gain foot in the Arab Muslim States. In 1085, Alfonso VI (d.1109) of Castille conquered Toledo, bringing the Christian expansion closer to the border of the heartland of the Muslim States. Losses were never regained and over the course of the following four centuries the borders of Muslim Spain shrank until the final fall of Granada in 1492, ending almost eight centuries of the Islamic Empire in Iberia.

Although the Reign of the Petty States represented Muslim Spain at its weakest political point, it was the height of artistic and cultural production that featured the maturity of a distinct Andalusian culture. The courts of the different rulers, and their patronage, provided a venue for creativity and a strong motivation for competition amongst the luminaries of the day. There existed a rivalry amongst the several states as to whose court was the most opulent and the most civilized. Rulers were extending their patronage to poets and artists of the day to have their praises sung. The Banu 'Ibad the rulers of Seville, for example, in addition to their patronage, were poets in their own right; the Banu Aftas of Badajoz were famous art patrons. This brief reign (1031-1092 AD) was, as well, the height of the poetic tradition of Muslim Spain, it produced the likes of Ibn Hazm, Ibn Darrag al-Qastili, Ibn Zaydun, al-Mu'atmid ibn 'Abbad and Ibn Bassam among many others.

In spite of its remoteness and its diversity, Andalusia proved to be firm ground for the vitality and strength of Arabic culture in Iberia. Its upholding of the poetic traditions, conventions, forms and even imagery of eastern Arabic poetry is a testament to the influence of eastern poetics. By that time, a new development had been long taking place in the east, as poetic arts developed to match the social and political changes taking places in the Islamic Empire. Traditionally, in pre-Islamic Arabia, the venue for poetic expression had been in annual market places such as 'Ukaz and Irbid markets; where the most eminent poets of the day paraded their latest poetic productions in competition, and where the judges chose the most eloquent winners. The winning poems would be preserved orally as the poet and his followers would recite them as they roamed from one place to the other. As the Umayyad Caliphate established a centralized form of government in Damascus, a lavish court life emerged, and alongside with it poetry moved from the Bedouin open space, accessible to the public, to the private urban courts of kings and princes. Literary salons, *majlis*, at the house of nobles or princes became the new venue for poetic expression and literary discussions (See Robinson 88-140). In this newly found luxurious and wealthy courtly lifestyle, two main arts flourished: *ghazal* (love poetry) and *hija'* (satire).

Although women poets were very few, they were expected, like their male-counterparts to be well-educated, well-versed and acquainted with the great Arab poets of the past. One source for the education of slave girls is *Risalat al-qiyān* or the Epistle of Singing Girls by al-Jahiz. In this Epistle, al-Jahiz tells us how slave girls were brought up to associate with educated men, often attended the same schooling as they did, until they were old enough to learn dancing, playing instruments and singing. After the completion of their training, they were expected to sing, dance, recite poetry and actively participate in court life, often times being the mothers of future monarchs (Segol 153). Biographical sources refer to women who have carried intellectual

activities; Maria J. Viguera lists numerous intellectual activities that women practiced. She mentions that such biographical sources have listed 11 secretaries (*katiba*), 4 copyists, 3 lexicographers and 2 grammarians, 6 who have devoted themselves to tradition (*hadith*), 6 who knew jurisprudence, and 1 who knew arithmetic (Viguera 718). Some of the slave women rose among the ranks, for example I'timad al-Rumaykiyyah was a washerwoman, named after her master Rumayk, she married al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbad the ruler of Seville after he marveled at her wit and her impromptu poetic composition. Very few women of high birth became poets; by all accounts the most famous of them all is Wallada bint al-Mustakfi.

Wallada bint al-Mustakfi Billah Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Rahman. also known as Wallada al-Marwaniyya, in reference to her Umayyad lineage, was born in Cordoba during the last days of the Marwanids' rule as Andalusia was fast descending towards chaos. Her mother was most likely Sukkara al-Mawruriyya, often mentioned as a manipulative scheming slave who controlled the Caliph. Al-Mustakfi who reigned only for a brief eighteen months period amidst a turbulent power struggle, was ill-reputed, lazy, lustful and a drunk; a coward who never kept his word and who was ultimately forced to flee Cordoba in 1025 AD disguised as a woman, only to be killed later (Ibn Bassam 433). Sources often drew contrast between the character of Wallada and her father; she truly embodied everything that her father was not; a proud, intelligent, eloquent and strong-willed woman; she was the most famous and sought after woman of her day. She reveled in her beauty and boasted about her indulgences openly. In *Kitab al-sila*, Ibn Bashkuwal refers to a firsthand account of one of his tutors, Abu 'Abd Allah ibn al-Makki who described to him her intelligence, her eloquence and her passionate nature (Ibn Baskhuwal 696). According to several accounts, it seems that she refused to wear the veil, her behavior and manners were unrestrained and were to a large extent a challenge to the prevailing

customs of the day. Ibn Bassam in *al-Dhakhira* reproaches her for her recklessness: “May God forgive her and overlook her errors.” (Ibn Bassam 429); this behavior caused her to be the subject of gossip and hearsay. She had the following lines embroidered with gold on the right shoulder of her cape:

أنا والله أصلح للمعالي وأمشي مشيتي وأتبه تيهي
I am, by Allah, fit for high positions
And am going my way, with pride!
(Wallada qtd. in Ibn Bassam 433, tr. Segol 160)

And on the left shoulder:

وأعطي قبلتي من يشتهيها وأمكن عاشقي من صحن خدي
Forsooth I allow my lover to kiss my cheek
And bestow my kisses on him who craves it.
(Wallada qtd. in Ibn Bassam 433, tr. Segol 160)

The lines clearly reflect an audacious and proud spirit. In the first line Wallada boasts of her high birth and her ability to roam around, on her own, in public; she is confident that she is worthy of glory and fame. The second line is a seductive invitation where she asserts sole control over her body and says that she would grant her love to whomever wishes (lover or stranger). It is both luring and tantalizing verse. The fact that she had those lines embroidered on her shoulders, in a position where everyone is meant to see them, shows that she was intentionally drawing attention to herself. She was conscious of the perception of those lines in such a conservative society as the one in which she lived; she was conscious of her own seductive powers and control over her destiny as well as the dictates of her high birth. The verses reflect not only a defying, stubborn spirit that refuses to conform, but also a passion for control and independence.

Wallada was also famed in Cordoban society for her literary salon. This was not a new innovation; several women poets, most notably Sukayna bint al-Husayn during the eastern Umayyad period, have preceded her. Wallada's salon was a hub for contemporary poets, literary figures and nobles where they boasted their skills and engaged in debates. According to Ibn Bassam, it became an arena where literary figures competed, all attracted to her brilliance, and all seeking the charm of her company and approval. The conventions of literary salons entailed that men and women were segregated with a *hijab*, a curtain that drew along with it a reminder of the strict rules of engagement in Islamic society. Wallada's Salon however apparently did not seem to have this separation: Ibn Bassam mentions that men were drawn to her company due to what he calls *suhalat hijabiha* [ease of accessibility], yet at the same time he points out that in spite of her "accessibility" her behavior was in keeping with her high-birth and nobility (Ibn Bassam 433).

Yet Wallada's fame stems primarily from her amorous and turbulent relationship with the poet Ibn Zaydun. Abu al-Walid ibn 'Abdu Allah ibn Ghalib ibn Zaydun al-Makhzumi is considered by many the most famous Andalusian love poet. Born in Cordoba in 1003 AD, his life passed through two main stages: the first stage in the courts of Banu Jahur in Cordoba, and the second stage in the courts of Banu 'Ibad in Seville. Ibn Zaydun grew up in a household of distinguished family members; his father was a famous jurist and his grandfather a famous judge. At a time when eloquence and finesse were more than enough to carry a man to great heights, Ibn Zaydun proved great skill in their use. He quickly became a prominent figure in the court life of the city, his relation with the Banu Jahur and in particular with Abi al-Hazm Jahur and his son al-Walid started at an early age, well before their full usurpation of the rule of Cordoba, and in due time he rose among the ranks and was appointed an ambassador to other courts (Faroukh

590). Ibn Zaydun was envied by many of his contemporaries, not only was he a close friend of the city's ruler and his son, but he was also the lover of the most beautiful and sought after woman of the city, Wallada bint al-Mustakfi. He was subjected to several conspiracies and his reputation suffered several blows. He fell out of favor with Banu Jahur and was imprisoned for almost two years, but he finally succeeded in escaping prison and was received in Seville. He was able to return once more to the courts of Cordoba, after he received an official pardon and when al-Walid acceded to the throne, Ibn Zaydun soon regained his past position in the court as an ambassador. Several years later, Ibn Zaydun still remained a constant target of conspiracies at a time of political instability in the court, he fell out of favor once more with al-Walid. He fled Cordoba once more to Seville to the courts of the Banu 'Abbad, where he was duly welcomed and served as their minister and ambassador. He returned to Cordoba two decades later, with the Banu 'Abbad as they invaded the city; he died in 1070 (Faroukh 593).

Ibn Zaydun's most famous poems are the ones in which he immortalized his passionate love story with Wallada. It was in the bustling court life of Cordoba that Ibn Zaydun met with her as he frequented her famous salon. Two youthful figures who possessed intelligence, finesse, wit and beauty, proved to be a perfect match. And with such figures, the intensity of their love, could only be matched by the level of their talent. His poems provide us with a glimpse of just how beautiful she was, as he describes her light skin, her beautiful golden hair her slender figure, long neck, full bosom and buttocks, and long beautiful lashes ¹.

In *al-Dhakhira*, Ibn Bassam cites Ibn Zaydun as he gives an account of how he had fallen in love with a beautiful young woman, Wallada, and how after adamant pursuit she finally gave in. As Ibn Zaydun states in this account, it was she who wrote to him, asking for a rendezvous in secret. Al-Maqqari quotes Wallada in the following lines:

ترقب إذا جن الظلام زيارتي فإني رأيت الليل أكرم للسر
وبي منك ما لو كان بالشمس لم تلح وبالبدر لم يطلع وبالنجم لم يسر
(Wallada qtd. in al-Maqqari 433)

When the evening descends, await then my visit, because I
see the night is the one who keeps secrets best[is best
keeper of secrets].
I feel a love for you, which – if the sun would have felt a
similar love, she would not rise; and the moon, he would not
appear; and the stars, they would not undertake their nightly
travel.

(Wallada tr. Schippers 144)

According to the conventions of courtly love, it would be the male lover who would secretly slip under the guise of night, braving the dangers of the road, past the onlookers and the guards, to reach the abode of his beloved who would then be anxiously waiting for him. It is a source of pride, an adventure where men extol their power and prowess and sing of it in lyric. Yet, in a blatant disregard for convention, Wallada reversed those roles. Since their first meeting, she is the one who sets the rules and the one who remains in total control. It is she who reaches out to her lover; she is the one who sets the time and the place of the meeting, she is the one who risks the dangers of disclosure as she travels the road to reach her lover. Again, her lines mix control with tantalizing seduction, in the second line, she describes the intensity of her passion that overwhelms everything surrounding them, a passion so brilliant that it outshines the sun, the moon and the stars-- all of which are bashful in its presence. The images that Wallada draws may be overused, yet they are in place with the overall setting of a romantic evening under the moon and the stars.²

Upon meeting her, Ibn Zaydun composed the following lines, and asked 'Utba, Wallada's slave girl, to sing them at their reunion:

أحببتنا إني بلغت مؤملي وساعدني دهري وواصلني حبي

وجاء يهينيني البشير بقربه
فأعطيته نفسي وزدت له قلبي
(Ibn Zaydun qtd. in Ibn Bassam 431)

O nos amis. J'ai réalisé mon souhait et le destin m'a aidée:
Mon amant s'est uni à moi.
Le messenger du bonheur est venu me féliciter de sa proximité,
Je lui ai donné mon âme- et j'y ai ajouté mon coeur

(Ibn Zaydun qtd. in Uhl, tr. Abu Rub 243)

He then goes on to describe a heated night of love as she approached him sauntering her slender figure, amongst the beautiful scenery of a lush garden. They spent their night confessing their love and singing their hearts till the break of dawn. He bid her farewell with the following lines:

وإدع الصبر محب ودعك
يقرع السن على أن لم يكن
يا أخ البدر سناء وسنا
إن يطل بعدك ليلي فلکم
ذائع من سره ما أودعك
زاد في تلك الخطا إذ شيعك
حفظ الله زماناً أطلعك
بت أشكو قصر الليل معك
(Ibn Zaydun qtd. in Ibn Bassam 431)

The lover who bids you farewell, confiding his secret, bids farewell to patience.
He repents that he did not take more steps in seeing you off.
O brother of the full moon in splendor and eminence, may God protect the time which caused you to rise!
If, after you, my night grows long, then how much do I now complain of this night's shortness with you!

(Ibn Zaydun tr. Farrin, "The "Nuniyya" 84)

She wrote him the following lines, expressing her longing:

ألا هل لنا من بعد هذا التفرق
وقد كنت أوقات التزاور في الشنا
فكيف وقد أمسيت في حال قطعة
تمر الليالي لا أرى البين ينقضي
سقى الله أرضاً قد غدت لك منزلاً
سبيل فيشكو كل صب بما لقي
أبيت على جمر من الشوق محرق
لقد عجل المقنور ما كنت أتقي
ولا الصبر من رقّ التشوق معتقي
بكل سكوب هائل الويل مغدق
(Wallada qtd in al-Maqqari 795)

After this separation, do we not have some means by which each lover can complain of his fate?
During moments of visiting one another in the winter, I stood upon the burning embers of passionate yearning.
Why is it that I spend my evening alone?
Destiny has hastened on what I used to fear,
The nights pass while I see no end to my separation,
My manumitter has lost patience with the bondage of passion.
May God water the earth that has showered its blessings on your dwelling-place, copiously and generously!
(Wallada tr. Afsaruddin 160)

Those bold lines are an expression of a dominating sexual desire that overtakes her, where she expresses her longing to Ibn Zaydun, and she describes in many passionate images the agitated state of her suffering: the burning embers that torture her until she turns into one, the passionate longing that enslaves her with desire and the erotic metaphor of the perennial rain as it quenches the thirst of the earth. It seems that she is doomed to this passionate enslavement of desire with no hope in the future. This last line later became a source of further disagreement between them as Ibn Zaydun criticized it, shedding doubt over Wallada's creative powers. He allegedly said that the line is almost a prayer against her lover, rather than a prayer for him (al-Maqqari 795) and that it would have been better had she written about the fertilizing rain in spring, rather than rain that is conventionally assigned to the graves of beloved ones.

Their poetry continued to record the details of their relationship; in one instance Ibn Zaydun even describes in detail a romantic night of passionate love-making³. When Ibn Zaydun struck misfortune and was forced to flee Cordoba for the first time, he wrote to Wallada the *Qafiyya* –a poem rhyming in the letter *qaf*. A broken-hearted, oppressed man, Ibn Zaydun roamed around Cordoba incognito; he could only think of his only true love, Wallada, when he was in city of al-Zahra', on the outskirts of Cordoba, among the striking nature, the verdant gardens, and imposing architecture, he wrote her the following famous lines:

إِنِّي نَكَرْتُكَ، بِالزَّهْرَاءِ، مَشْتَاقًا، وَاللَّسِيمِ اعْتِلَالًا، فِي أَصَائِلِهِ،
وَالأَفْقُ طَلَقٌ وَمِرْأَى الأَرْضِ قَدْ رَاقَا
كَأَنَّهُ رَقَّ لِي، فَاعْتَلَّ إِشْفَاقًا

[....]

كَانَ التَّجَارِي بِمَحْضِ الوُدِّ، مَذْ زَمَنَ، مِيدَانَ أَنَسِ، جَرِينًا فِيهِ أَطْلَاقًا
فَالآنَ، أَحْمَدَ مَا كُنَّا لِعَهْدِكُمْ، سَلَوْتُمْ، وَبَقِينَا نَحْنُ عَشَاقًا!
(Ibn Zaydun 162)

From al-Zahra I remember you with passion.
The horizon is clear, the earth's face serene
The breeze grows faint with the coming of dawn.
It seems to pity me and lingers full of tenderness...

[....]

In times gone by we demanded of each other
Payments of pure love and were happy as colts running free in a pasture.
But now I am the only one who can boast of being loyal.
You left me, and I stay here, still sad, still loving you.
(Ibn Zaydun tr. Stewart 312-3)

The garden which was the usual setting for their nocturnal meetings, had become a site of memory, invoking his passion and longing for his beloved, who has abandoned him. The garden comes to life as it interacts with Ibn Zaydun's passion. Wallada and Ibn Zaydun spent a blissful period of private encounters; it is not clear though how long it lasted. It seems from poetic references that they were separated or at least were at odds during his first imprisonment. Sources mention that at one point Ibn Zaydun made advances towards Wallada's black slave, 'Utba, who was famous for her beautiful singing. For a proud woman like Wallada, such an incident was a huge affront. She wrote to him the following lines:

لو كنت تنصف في الهوى ما بيننا
وتركت غصناً مثمراً بجماله
ولقد علمت بأنني بدر السما
لكن ولعت، لشقوتي، بالمشترى
لم تهو جاريتي ولم تتخير
وجنحت للغصن الذي لم يثمر
(Wallada qtd. in Ibn Bassam 431)

If you did justice to our love, you would not desire nor prefer my
slave girl.
Nor would you forsake a fertile branch, in its beauty, and turn to
a branch devoid of fruit.

You know that I am the Moon in the sky, but burn, to my
chagrin, for Jupiter.
(Wallada tr. Stewart 309)

Wallada reproaches Ibn Zaydun for his indiscretion, she reminds him of her faithfulness that has been met with unjust ingratitude. She is indignant of the fact that he betrayed a high-born princess for the sake of a common slave; she compares herself to a fruitful branch that has been abandoned for a sterile one. She also compares herself to the white full moon in the sky, while her slave to the dark gloomy Jupiter in an obvious intended pun (*al-Mushtara* means both Jupiter, and the bought-one in reference to the slave woman) (Farrin, “The ‘Nuniyya’” 84).

Ibn Zaydun admitted his guilt and sought forgiveness repeatedly, yet it seems that Wallada took this as an unforgivable mistake. He tried to remind her of their past love, but this last incident caused serious damage to their relationship. During that same time, several court figures continued to compete for the love of Wallada, even after Ibn Zaydun had won her over. The most prominent was Abu ‘Amir Ibn ‘Abdus. Ibn ‘Abdus was a powerful minister in the court of Cordoba, a man of limited intelligence, yet of resourceful means and powers; he was called the Mouse *al-fa’r*. Like many Cordoban men, the minister Ibn ‘Abdus was in love with Wallada, although she constantly ridiculed and mocked him. Wallada once passed by him while he was standing in front of a murky puddle, she mentioned a line from Abu Nuwwas’ poem dedicated to Abu al- Nasr al-Khasib al-Jirjani the ruler of Egypt:

أنت الخصب وهذه مصر فتدفقا فكلما بحر
(Ibn Bassam 432)

You are the Nile, and this area is Egypt;
your water has overflowed, and now both of you are a sea.
(Wallada qtd. in Farrin, “Abundance” 196)

Ibn ‘Abdus with his limited intellect failed to understand either the meaning or the source of the lines. He was naturally the subject of satire from Ibn Zaydun as well, who wrote him a *qasida* ridiculing and threatening him to steer his way away from Wallada, warning him that she is like water difficult to take hold of. ⁴ And in another poem he points out to the difference between himself and Ibn ‘Abdus:

لو فرقت بين بيطار و عطار قلت الفراشة قد تدنو من النار فيمن نحب وما في ذلك من عار بعضا، وبعضا صفحنا عنه للفار	أكرم بولادة نخرأ لمذخر قالوا أبو عامر أضحى يلثم بها عبرتمونا بأن قد صار يخلفنا أكل شهى أصبنا من أطاييه
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(Ibn Zaydun 262)

Wallada would be such a noble prize for a collector,
 If she could but differentiate between a veterinarian and a
 druggist.
 They said, “Abu Amir now embraces her.”
 I replied, “Moth are often drawn close to the fire.”
 You have blamed us for being succeeded by him
 With the one we love, yet there is no shame in this.
 It was a tasty meal; we ate the sweetest morsels,
 and left some for the Mouse.
 (Ibn Zaydun tr. Stewart 310)

Again it is unclear, whether Ibn ‘Abdus decided to pursue Wallada, or when she decided to take him as a lover to stir the jealousy of Ibn Zaydun. It is also unclear if this happened during the fall-out of Wallada and Ibn Zaydun over her slave, or after it, for the lines as much as they satirize Ibn ‘Abdus they reveal an unquestionable invective against Wallada’s character. However, none of this dissuaded Ibn ‘Abdus from further approaching Wallada. In the end Ibn Zaydun, fed up with Ibn ‘Abdus’ behavior, sent him *al-Risala al-hazliyya* (The Comic Epistle), a fictitious reply from Wallada to Ibn ‘Abdus. This fictitious reply is supposed to be to a messenger sent to Wallada who describes Ibn ‘Abdus in unrealistically flattering terms; she then supposedly rejects his offer and launches a tirade against Ibn ‘Abdus’, exposing his true qualities:

“You are deformed by birth... unsurpassed in stupidity, cruel by nature, hard of hearing, boorish in response, despicable in appearance, clumsy in coming and going... endowed with putrid breath, possessed of abundant defects, and renowned for your vices! Your speech is stutter, your conversation a mutter, your discourse a clutter! Your laugh is cackle, and your gait a scamper! Your wealth is beggary, your religion heresy and your learning bragger!”

(Ibn Zaydun tr. Stewart 310-1)

then she asks how she could turn away from all the available nobleman to turn to someone

“whose pond is a trickle and whose well has gone dry, whose energy is gone and whose remaining strength enables him to do nothing but fart?!”

(Ibn Zaydun tr. Stewart 310-1)

This epistle became widely distributed and popular in Cordoba, and turned Ibn ‘Abdus into the laughing-stock of the city. Following those instances Ibn ‘Abdus vowed to avenge himself from Ibn Zaydun, who undoubtedly continued to spread rumors against him in the court.

In addition to Ibn Zaydun’s previous indiscretions, this last episode, displayed a possessive and overbearing side of Ibn Zaydun to Wallada, who was definitely not accustomed to this treatment. As they embarked on their relationship, she was the one who was in control, determining when to succumb to his pursuits and setting the terms of their reunions. Furthermore, as she had openly declared it: she who vowed to grant her love to whomever she pleases. Ibn Zaydun was usurping this right in those instances; he was boasting his “ownership” of Wallada, and in an effort to prove his wit and ridicule his competitors, he repeatedly portrayed Wallada as an unheeding promiscuous woman. By appropriating her own voice in “The Comic Epistle” he basically took control of her self-expression. In another instance it seemed that during one of their quarrels, he assaulted her. He later apologized to her, vowing eternal faithfulness.⁵

Again, the exact timeline and sequence of events is not clear, but all of those instances combined caused Wallada to become deeply hurt and grow constantly suspicious of him, until she decided to launch a smear campaign against him:

إنّ ابن زيدون على فضله يغتابني ظلماً ولا ذنب لي
يلحظني شزراً إذا جئته كأنني جئت لأخصي علي
(Wallada qtd. in al-Maqqari 794)

Ibn Zaydun, despite his virtue, slanders me unjustly, though I am not at fault.

When I approach him, he looks askance at me, as if I were about to castrate ‘Ali.

(Wallada tr. Stuart 309)

In those lines, Wallada subtly hints that Ibn Zaydun engaged in a homosexual relationship with his servant-boy Ali. She eventually became extremely vile and capricious in her slandering campaign against him:

ولقبت المسدس وهو نعت تفارقك الحياة ولا يفارق
وديوث وقرنان وسارق قلوطي ومأبون وزان
(Wallada qtd. in al-Maqqari 794)

They call you the “Sixer”; and your life will leave you before this nickname does:

Sodomite and buggered you are, adulterer, pimp, cuckold, and thief!

(Wallada tr. Stewart 309)

In that poem, Wallada moves on from indirect satire, to outright obscene slander, she does not shy away and conceal her anger by using metaphors and indirect language; she launches a full throttle attack, in malicious vengeance and she openly accuses Ibn Zaydun of sexual perversity and deviant behavior. Satire was a genre that Wallada was known to master, there are other lines attributed to her in which she satirizes another poet, al-Asbahi, also in very obscene words:

يا أصبجي إهناً فكم نعمة جاءتك من ذي العرش ربّ المنن

قد نلت بإست إبنك ما لم ينل بفرج بوران أبوها الحسن
(Wallada qtd. In al-Maqqari 794)

Félicitations, al-Asbahi pour les bénéfices
Que tu as reçus du Maitre du Trône, du Bienfaiteur
Tu as obtenu avec le cul de ton fils
Ce que n'était pas parvenu à obtenir,
Avec le con de Buran- son père al-Hasan
(Wallada tr. Uhl 20)

That such obscene poems were reserved across the years, displays a specific literary appreciation of the genre, and the common use of obscenity and wry humor.

إن ابن زيدون له فقحة تعشق قضبان السراويل
لو أبصرت أيراً على نخلة صارت من الطير الأباويل
(Wallada qtd. in al-Maqqari 794)

Ibn Zaydun's backside swoons for the rods in men's pants.
Were it to spy a penis atop a palm tree, it would swoop down on it
Like a vulture
(Wallada tr. Stewart 309)

This episode probably coincided with Ibn Zaydun's second fall out with the Banu Jahur in Cordoba, which was probably set up by Ibn 'Abdus himself. Subjected to the animosity of his former lover and under the impending threat of arrest, Ibn Zaydun was forced to flee to Badajoz, and from there on to Seville. It was easy for such a skillful man to quickly rise among the ranks in the courts of Seville and he became a favorite of the ruler of the city al-Mu'tadid and afterwards his son al-Mu'tamid, both prominent poets in their own right. He spent the following twenty years in the court of Seville. However, it seems that the intensity of his love never waned with the years, and in spite of all that Wallada had done to him, he continued to love her passionately and dedicate poems to her, long after all hope was lost in resuming their relationship. He wrote to Wallada his most famous poem the *Nuniyya*, an ode of fifty-two lines rhyming in the letter *nun*, considered by some as the most famous *ghazal* poem of the Andalus

(Farrin, “The ‘Nuniyya’” 82). In it, he moans his separation from her and recalls their nights of blissful love:

أَصْحَى التَّنَائِي بَدِيلاً عَنْ تَدَانِينَا، وَنَابَ عَنْ طِيبِ لُقْيَانَا تَجَافِينَا
 أَلَا وَقَدْ حَانَ صُبْحُ الْبَيْنِ، صَبَّحْنَا حَيْنٌ، فَقَامَ بِنَا لِلْحَيْنِ نَاعِينَا
 [...] فَالْيَوْمَ نَحْنُ، وَمَا يُرْجَى تَلَاقِينَا
 وَقَدْ نَكُونُ، وَمَا يُخْشَى تَفَرُّقُنَا،
 (Ibn Zaydun 167)

Morning came – the separation –
 Substitute for the love we shared,
 For the fragrance of our coming together,
 Falling away

[...]
 We never used to give a thought
 To separation, and now, for us
 To be together again
 Is beyond our dreams...
 (Ibn Zaydun tr. Stewart 311)

Sources mention another person in relation Wallada: Muhja bint al-Tiyyani, who was a young Cordoban woman poet, who frequented Wallada’s literary salon and became part of her circle. Sources mention that her father was a seller of fig, and that she was pretty and whimsical. Just how a girl of such low rank got to frequent the courtly salon of Wallada is not entirely clear, however, what Ibn Sa‘id mentions is that Wallada took a liking to her, decided to be her patron and educate her until she became a poetess in her own right. Muhja was outspoken and has some profane poems attributed to her. There seems to have been a falling between her and Wallada and Muhja claimed that Wallada had a bastard child:

ولادة قد صرت ولادة من دون بعل، فضح الكاتم!
 حكّت لنا مريم لكنه نخلة هذي ذكر قائم
 (Muhja qtd. in Ibn Sa‘id 143)

Walladah you have become a Walladah [child-bearer] without a husband!
 And the secret has been revealed;
 Maryam spoke to us --

But the palm-tree of this woman is only the symbol of passion.
(Muhja tr. Afsaruddin 165)

Based on those two lines, some modern critics have hypothesized that a lesbian relationship had developed between the two women. Sahar Amer discusses this claim in “Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women” as she cites Philip K. Hitti who has called Wallada “the Sappho of Spain” and mentions that this view was repeated by Abu Khalil (34) among others. She mentions however, that Everett Rowson takes the opposite view, stating that there is insufficient evidence for making any assertions about her lesbianism (Amer 231).

In spite of having lived well into her eighties, sources mention very little of Wallada thereafter. She never married, and she maintained a friendship with Ibn ‘Abdus as they continued to visit each other as they grew old.

CHAPTER TWO: Christine de Pizan in France

Christine de Pizan is often hailed as the first professional woman writer in Europe. As a young widow living in fourteenth-century France, Christine was able to build her own career and become recognized as an able writer throughout the courts of France and England. Christine was a prolific writer who wrote across all different genres, her works encompassed a variety of subjects including courtly love, politics, history and religion. The backdrop against which Christine lived was a very turbulent time; at the outset of the fourteenth century, Europe witnessed one of the most destructive plagues in human history which killed off almost half of the continent's population in less than six years. The economic effect of this sudden decline in population was disastrous as widespread famine led to frequent peasants revolts which erupted across the continent: The Jacquerie in France in 1358, the Revolt of the Ciompi in Florence in 1378, the English peasants' revolt of 1381 were all popular expression of resentment against the policies of their governments which all led similar policies of increased taxation and wage limiting laws. The fourteenth century also witnessed Europe's longest war, the Hundred Years war, which was fought between England and France between 1337 and 1453. The conflict started with a crisis when the Capetian dynasty, that had ruled France since 987, failed to produce a male heir to the throne following the death of Charles IV, whose nearest surviving male relative was his nephew, the son of his sister, the English king Edward III (d. 1377). The Estates General denied lineage through females, and instead chose Philip of Valois (d.1350), a cousin of one of the preceding kings, as the legitimate heir to the throne. Initially Edward did not contest the claim; actually as a holder of the French duchies of Aquitaine and Ponthieu, Edward had paid homage to the new king. This episode however played against a more strained backdrop of economic tensions between the two nations; the county of Flanders, famous for its cloth-making

industry, relied heavily on England for wool. When the Flemish population revolted against their ruler, a vassal of the French king, they gained their independence for a brief period until Philip defeated their forces and insisted on the arrest of the English merchants. Edward III responded by cutting off the export of wool, causing widespread unemployment in Flanders. The Flemish population revolted once more and urged the English king to claim the throne. Edward withdrew the homage he had previously paid to the French king, and in return Philip declared that Edward's rights to those fiefs had been forfeited and decided to attack Aquitaine and Ponthieu, and thus began the war. The war is commonly divided into three different phases separated by a stalemate: The English victories (1337–60), a stalemate from (1367–1415) followed by the final period of changing tides with the French victories (1415–53) (Chambers et al. 382). This war formed the backdrop of life in daily France.

Christine de Pizan was born around 1364. Her father, Tommaso di Benvenuto de Pizzano, had studied medicine in the University of Bologna and was a lecturer of astrology. It was thought that constellations not only controlled the destiny of the individual but also the function of the various members of one's body (Willard 17). Tommaso moved to the city of Venice, and Christine was born there. In 1368 Tommaso received a tempting offer to move the royal courts of Charles V of France (d. 1380) as the king's astrologer. The family moved to France, which offered Christine the opportunity to grow in a very exceptional environment: the court of Charles V. After the French defeat in the battle of Poitiers, the French king, John II (d. 1364), was held captive and it was during this period that his son, Charles V (known as *Charles le sage*), first reigned as the regent of France. He finally ascended to the throne in 1364; his reign marked the end of the first phase of the war as he was able to recapture most of the French territories captured by the English, restore the power and authority of the state, and stand up to

the internal turmoil created by Charles II of Navarre (d. 1387) and Etienne Marcel (d.1358). As a patron of the arts, Charles restored the Louvre palace, but decided to live in the Hotel St. Paul on the right bank of the Seine, which remained the administrative center of Paris, where Christine de Pizan spent her childhood. She was so familiar with court life, that she could describe the daily activities of it in details, and give portraits of major court figures (Willard 29). One of Charles V greatest accomplishments was the founding of the first royal library, which later constituted the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, Charles wanted to establish himself as a patron of learning and in this course he collected a large and distinct collection of books and manuscripts, some of which have come through Bologna. In her book *Christine de Pizan, her life and works*, Charity Cannon Willard claims that Christine's father, might have acted as a liaison, providing supply of books from his native Bologna. She provides this assumption to explain Christine's frequent access to the library and her connections and familiarity with the Paris book trade (Willard 30). All of those influences combined formed the early consciousness of Christine's love for learning and education.

Within the clear boundaries of the French feudal society, education was a privilege accorded only to noblewomen to promote religious piety and render them chaste and modest. Didactic works for teaching girls how to behave were the most common literature circulating within those circles. Pierre Dubois, a thirteenth-century political pamphleteer and an advocate of female education, believed that women possessed the abilities to acquire a certain level of education, however he believed that women's education should be a means rather than an end in itself; he believed that through women's education, the Holy Lands could be reconquered, he also believed that an educated woman possessed more value in marriage and was more desirable (Shahar 155). In reality noblewomen were given a basic education that allowed them to maintain

daily prayer out of their prayer books and were also taught some poetry. There existed a few exceptional examples of highly educated women, such as Héloïse who was well educated in the classics and Latin; Marie de France who in addition to her native French, knew English and Latin as well and was familiar with Roman and Latin classics. The social conventions of noble women were quite rigid, they were expected to know how to dance, sing, recite poetry and to spend their pastime weaving and embroidering. Marriages were planned by the family for economic and social considerations. The daughters and sons of the nobility were often betrothed at a very young age and they would often stay with their families till they reached the legal age of marriage (12 for girls, 14 for boys). A woman was expected to pay dowry to the groom, and in some areas, where a strong feudal system existed, the lord of the fief would intervene in the marriages of his vassals, and often the bridegroom would have to pay the lord for the privilege of marrying the candidate bride (Shahar 133).

At an early age Christine displayed keen interest in intellectual pursuits; her father encouraged her to continue her readings and education, while her mother objected and sought to limit her attention only to feminine activities such as needlework. Christine refers to this obstacle in her book *La Cité des dames*:

“Your father...did not believe that women were worth less by knowing science, rather, as you know, he took great pleasure from seeing your inclination to learning. The feminine opinion of your mother, however, who wished to keep you busy with spinning and foolish girlishness, following the common custom of women, was the major obstacle to your being more involved in the sciences.” (Christine de Pizan qtd and tr. Willard 142)

At the age of fifteen Christine married Etienne de Castel, a royal secretary at the court, which meant they continued to be active members of the court life. Their marriage was a very happy one; she constantly remembered her husband with affection and dedicated an entire ballad to describe how loving and affectionate her husband was on their wedding night. She gave birth

to three children, of which two only survived. This happiness did not last for long, almost ten years after they were married, in 1390 while travelling to Beauvais, Etienne suddenly died. At the age of twenty five Christine found herself a widow responsible not only for her children but also for her widowed mother and a niece as well. Soon after that, Christine was plagued with financial problems, as she tried to settle debts due to her husband, to the extent that she became involved in suits in four Parisian courts at one time (Willard 40). Eventually Christine was able to pass through this period of hardship with the help of several court contacts, including Jean de Montaigu, who was an advisor to King Charles V. As the family's circumstances improved, her daughter took the veil and was accepted at the royal Dominican convent at Poissy and the Earl of Salisbury offered her son a position in his household in England. This was a common practice as children of the nobility were usually sent at a young age to the courts of lords for their education. Her third son probably died at a young age. It is interesting to note that while Christine wrote extensively mourning her dead husband, she never wrote affectionately about her own children. There was a prevailing sense of ambivalence towards children, the social structure and the fact that children were separated from their parents at a young age (either to join the monastic orders or for their education) did not allow the development of close ties (Shahar 145).

In general, widows enjoyed church protection since they were classified among the oppressed (Shahar 93), some chose to remain unmarried and would lead secular lives and some would enter the monastery, while others would remarry. Instead of remarrying or entering the convent as many widows would have done, Christine decided to remain single. Once a woman loses her husband, she was not obliged to answer to anyone any longer, and she would enjoy a unique independent status, which may have motivated some women, including Christine, to remain unmarried. Christine decided that as the sole provider of her family, she would adopt

writing as a profession and seek patrons, an act that was quite unusual. Christine started probably around 1399 by writing romance lyric, which was quite a popular art form, very much in demand and which also provided an outlet for her grief and mourning. She wrote in a variety of forms such as the *virelai*, the *ballade* and the *rondeau*.⁶ It was not before long that she started enjoying fame within the court circles; as she explains in *L'Advision Christine* that poetry written by women was such a novelty that princes were willing to host this new spectacle (Willard 51).

Christine was also actively involved in the production and illumination of her manuscripts; she would supervise the details of the illumination of her texts and their binding and would represent them to her patrons (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee xiv). It was in the court of Louis de Orleans where Christine first debuted her literary merits. Christine's fame in the French literary scene started as a result of the famous intellectual debate known as the *Querelle du Roman de la Rose* (The debate of the Romance of the Rose). The *Roman de la Rose* was one of the most influential texts of the Middle Ages, composed initially by Guillaume de Lorris (d. 1238) and continued by Jean de Meun (d. 1305), between 1228 and 1270. The text is an allegory of love, a satire that depicts women as seductresses and launches attacks against them on the tongues of the different characters.⁷ The debate started when Jean de Montreuil, the provost of the city of Lille, issued a treatise praising the *Roman de la Rose*, Christine was indignant and issued several texts and letters in defense of women and in criticism of the text, and she presented them to the Queen Isabeau of Bavaria. This new found fame also marked a beginning for Christine to start writing on more serious subjects such as history and politics. Throughout those writings, Christine believed that she was entrusted with a message to act as a moralist and a patriot, and her works reflected her own religious, social and political beliefs often in didactic and polemic nature. She wrote fifteen major works including : *Le Chemin de long*

estude (1403), *Le Livre de la mutation de fortune* (1403), *Le Livre de la cité des dames* (1405), *L'Avison de Christine* (1405). She also received a commission from the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Bold, to write a biography of his late brother, King Charles V, the *Livres de fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*; she also wrote a handbook of women's conduct and a treatise on military art.

Christine's political writings reflected the turbulent period that she had lived through. When Charles V died in 1380 he left behind his young heir Charles VI (*Charles le Fou*) who was at the age of twelve then and thus his uncles the dukes of Burgundy, Anjou, Berry, and Bourgogne ruled on his behalf. As Charles VI reached the legal age, he began to assert his authority but he soon fell victim to bouts of insanity, which resulted in the decline of royal authority and led the houses of Burgundy and Orléans to fight over power. In 1407 Louis of Orléans was killed by his cousin, John the Fearless (d. 1419), duke of Burgundy. This murder resulted in France being split into two warring factions, the Armagnacs and the Bourguignons; what followed was a long and bitter civil war that resulted in further debilitation of the French spirit that was already at its lowest, as a result of the war with the English (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee xiv). In 1417 Charles VII (d. 1461) ascended to the throne, and shortly thereafter John the Fearless occupied Paris. At that point Christine de Pizan fled the city and wrote the *Epistre de la prison de vie humaine* in which she preached a Christian message of hope in the afterlife. For the following eleven years, Christine most probably lived in seclusion in the abbey of Poissy and ceased writing during that period. In 1429 Joan of Arc (d. 1431), a young peasant girl from north-east France, inspired by a divine voice, led the French army to lift the siege of the English of the city of Orléans and had Charles VII officially crowned at the city of Rheims. This young lady inspired Christine to write her last work the *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc* (1429). Christine

however, probably did not survive to see Joan's tragic end as she was burned at the stake in 1431 (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee xv).

Christine inspired many modern critics to label her as the first truly feminist writer in the European tradition—a label that carried a heavy burden. Christine's most famous work is *Le Livre de la cité des dames*—and indeed it seems that she was probably the first to discuss the misogynist attitudes prevalent in the contemporary literature—in that book she wrote about an allegorical city, populated by many talented women who lived throughout history. Her aim was to display the possibilities that women were able to achieve, to set example to other women and in a way to write women's history (Bell 176). Throughout the book Christine showcases exemplary women with the purpose of displaying that the bad examples depicted in popular literature are mere isolated cases. Another feminist concern that Christine was occupied with was explaining the lack of female scholars throughout history; she believed that this phenomenon could only be attributed to one reason and that is the lack of education. She believed that had women been allowed the same opportunity for education as men, they would have been able to produce scholarship. In her book the *Cité des dames*, Christine has a conversation with the allegorical figure of Reason, who assures her that “if it were customary to send daughters to school like sons, and if they were then taught the natural sciences, they would learn as thoroughly and understand the subtleties of all arts and sciences as sons” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 281). Although Christine defended women against the tirades of the misogynistic trends of her day, she never actively advocated an improvement in their social status and she never questioned the hierarchy of society of her time. All her wishes were that women should be regarded in a fair light. And although she clearly spells out a passion for education and learning throughout her works, Christine never advocated in particular the

education of women per se. In *Le Livre de trois vertus* a didactic work in which Christine instructs women on how they should spend their days, and how to best fulfill their roles whether they are queens, aristocrats, merchant wives or peasant wives, her work gives no mention of a pursuit of scholarly interests, instead it focused primarily on reiterating women's role across the social strata of society and how they can best perform such roles (Bell 178). Although Christine herself chose solitude and decided never to remarry, in both her books *Le Livre de trois vertus* and in *Le Livre du duc des vrais amants* Christine stresses the undesirability of solitude, instructing women to be constantly surrounded by others lest they would be thought of as engaging in illicit love affairs (Bell 182). In *Le Livre de trois vertus* discussing the greatest honor ascribed to women, that is loyalty to their husbands, Christine suggested that wives who do not love their husbands should pretend to do so, and this would be considered loyalty. Amidst prevailing ideas of the misery of marriage, Christine offers a very practical advice to women; she further suggests that no matter how their husbands treat them badly, women should maintain the peace of their marriages in line with their duties as wives (Bell 179).

Christine's poetry however represents her greatest artistic innovation, it was written in fixed form, *formes fixes*, a well established literary tradition whose most famous practitioner, the poet Eustache Duchamp (d. 1406), was a contemporary of Christine. Christine wrote almost three hundred ballads and many shorter poems (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 5) most of which were written in the first ten years of her career as a writer. Her first collection was the *Cent ballades* which was written around 1402. In her ballades, Christine explored many themes, among them the trials of widowhood and the woes and sorrows of courtly love. Lyrical poetry was very popular and as a woman looking for patrons, Christine conscious of the attractiveness of the genre, chose to write her first works in it. She experimented with short fixed forms of

poetry, the virelai, the rondeau and the ballade. Those forms were standardized by the most famous French poets of the day: Guillaume de Machaut (d. 1377), Eustache Deschamps (d. 1406), and Jean Froissart (d. 1405).

The subject of the *Cent ballades* was courtly love; some of the poems were narrated from the point of view of a woman in love, others would be a conversation between a lady and her lover, and in few instances the poems would be an expression of Christine's personal emotions, like the famous ballade 11, "Seulette suy et seulette vueil estre" in which she laments her loneliness across every possible situation in life. Danielle Roch points to Barbara Altman's observation that across the multiplicity of voices in the *Cent ballades* Christine establishes the first foundations of her literary self as an author who has the image of a grieving widow, notably in ballades 1, 50 and 100 where she clearly addresses her audiences (Roch 91).

Christine wrote another group of poems entitled *Autres ballades*, fifty three in total, that dealt with various subjects. The ballade was the most attractive form for Christine, as it was the form that provided the greatest poetic versatility. By that time she also started composing longer poems, such as the *L'epistre d'Othea la deesee* where she invents a goddess of wisdom, Othea, and draws on mythological stories to teach the Trojan prince Hector (Willard 94). The last collection of short poems was the *Cent ballades d'amant et de dame* written around 1410.

The following poems are examples of Christine's literary creations. A virelai, two rondeaus and four ballades, they represent a brief anthology of Christine's handling of the subject of courtly love.

Virelai I

Je chante par couverture,
Mais mieulx plourassent mi œil,
Ne nul ne scet le traveil
Que mon povre cuer endure.

Pour ce muce ma douleur
Qu'en nul je ne voy pitié,
Plus a l'en cause de plour
Mains treuve l'en d'amistié.

Pour ce plainte ne murmure
Ne fais de mon piteux dueil ;
Ainçois ris quant plourer vueil,
Et sanz rime et sanz mesure
Je chante par couverture.

Petit porte de valour
De soy monstrier dehaitié,
Ne le tiennent qu'a folour
Ceulz qui ont le cuer haitié

Si n'ay de demonstrer cure
L'entencion de mon vueil,
Ains, tout ainsi com je sueil,
Pour celler ma peine obscure,
Je chante par couverture.

(Christine de Pizan qtd. in Roy 101)

This mask no grief reveals;
My eyes may overflow,
But none shall guess the woe
Which my poor heart conceals.

For I must mask the pain,
As nowhere is there pity;
Greater the cause to gain,
The less the amity.

So no plaint nor appeal
My aching heart can show
And mirth, not tears bestow;
Those my gay rhymes conceal.
May this mask no grief reveal.

So is it I conceal
The true source of my ditty,
Instead I must be witty
To hide the wound which does not heal.
Let this mask no grief reveal.

(Christine de Pizan tr. Willard 57)

This virelai is the first one in Christine's set of collected virelais. The virelai is the least rigid of the fixed forms, it consists of five stanzas, each stanza has two rhymes (Margolis 34). The virelai begins with a refrain, *this mask no grief reveals*, which is repeated at the end of each odd stanza (the third and fifth). In this virelai Christine is as always occupied with self expression, she distances herself from her own works which represent a veil to her true feelings; she also reaffirms the picture of the grieving widow who has to hide her feelings so as to entertain others.

Rondeau XLIII

Hé lune! trop luis longuement,
Par toy pers les biens doucereux
Qu'Amours donne aux vrais amoureux.

Ta clarté nuit trop durement
A mon cuer qui est desireux,
Hé lune! trop luis longuement.

Car tu fais le decevrement
De moy et du doulz savoureux;
Nous ne t'en savons gré touz deux,
Hé lune! trop luis longuement.

(Christine de Pizan qtd. in Roy 171)

Oh moon, you shine too lengthily!
I lose those lovely gifts through you
Which Love prepares for lovers true.

Your brightness wounds so readily

My poor heart, where desire flames blue,
Oh moon, you shine too lengthily!

Because of you, quite drearily,
I lose, and my beloved too,
So we revile you thus, we too,

Oh moon! you shine too lengthily!

(Christine de Pizan tr. Willard 58)

Christine wrote a total of seventy-nine rondeaux, of which sixty-odd form their own sequence titled "*Rondeaux*"; the rest are inserted into other works (Margolis 41). The rondeau begins with a refrain which recurs at the poem's middle and then again at the end. This rondeau is one in a series of connected poems (ballades 39-43 in Roy's edition) that depict a lover wooing his lady, then at the end he announces his vexation at her husband's return (Margolis 43). The series ends with the male lover complaining to the moon, a common courtly tradition as the moon is the companion of lovers on the lengthy nights of separation away from their loved ones. In this instance the moon, as it shines continuously, represents an obstacle to the lovers that would reveal their secret rendez-vous under the cover of the night.

Ballade XXIV (from Cent Ballades)

Ma douce amour, ma plaisance chérie,
Mon doulz ami, quanque je puis amer,
Vostre douceur m'a de tous maulz garie,
Et vrayement je vous puis bien clamer
 Fontaine dont tout bien vient,
Et qui en paix et joye me soustient,
Et dont plaisirs me viennent a largece ;
Car vous tout seul me tenez en leece.

Et la doulour qui en mon cuer norrie
S'est longuement, qui tant m'a fait d'amer,
Le bien de vous a de tous poins tarie ;

Or ne me puis complaindre ne blasmer
De Fortune qui devient
Bonne pour moy, se en ce point se tient.
Mis m'en avez en la voye et adrece;
Car vous tout seul me tenez en leece.

Si lo Amours qui, par sa seigneurie,
A tel plaisir m'a voulu reclamer ;
Car dire puis de vray sanz flaterie,
Qu'il n'a meilleur de la ne de ça mer
De vous, m'amour, ainsi le tient
Mon cuer pour vray, qui tout a vous se tient,
N'a aultre rien sa pensée ne drece ;
Car vous tout seul me tenez en leece.

(Christine de Pizan qtd. in Roy 25)

My sweet love, the pleasure I adore,
My sweet beloved, all that I can love,
Your sweetness has cured me of all ills
And truly in/deed can I describe you as
The fountain from which all good comes,
Which sustains me in peace and joy
And from which pleasures come to me in abundance,
For you alone keep me in bliss.

And the pain which has been nourished
In my heart for so long, which has caused me such bitterness,
Has been stopped entirely by your goodness.
Now I cannot complain
about fortune Or cast blame on her who
Is becoming kind to me, if she remains of that mind;
You have set me on that path, in that direction,
For you alone keep me in bliss.

And so I praise love who by his power,
Has been please to call me to such pleasure,
For I can truly say without flattery
That neither here nor beyond the seas
Is there one better than you, my love.
Such is the true belief of my heart
Which cleaves to you entirely

And directs its thoughts on none other,
For you alone keep me in bliss.

(Christine de Pizan tr. Laidlaw 25)

This poem is one of a group of twenty-nine consecutive ballades (21-49 in Roy's edition) telling the unhappy story of a young woman, which begins with an admission of her love to the man who courts her, followed by a song in praise of Love for being so good to her; the story then describes how her happiness is short-lived as she needs to go away to Germany. When she comes back she is extremely happy that she has to assure her lover that her happiness around people is only an expression of her love to him. One day she playfully refuses his attention but soon seeks his forgiveness, she says that she rejoices in her belief that his love protects her from all harm. An omen that soon is realized as gossipers begin to cause trouble; she gets anxious that he will leave her and consents to grant him whatever he desires, assuring him that his wishes will always be granted. He declares that he has to leave, and she becomes miserable in his absence and wonders if he will ever return, and vows to be faithful to him throughout but he never returns, and for the final sixteen poems she laments his loss as she gives in to despair (Varty xxiv). This cycle of poems is an example of a cycle of courtly romance, which usually ends in a tragic and desperate ending. The emphasis then becomes on the end of the affair, on the suffering and the despair rather than on the joys and hopefulness of love. Joy and happiness are short lived and are only illusory, the woman becomes a victim of suspicion and at the end will suffer alone as she tries to heal her broken heart. This particular poem is a ballade layée a unique form of heterometric ballades employed by Machaut. The poem is composed of eight line stanzas of octosyllables and in the rhyme scheme is *ababccdD*, where D is the refrain. The shorter fifth line is emphatic (Laidlaw 59). In this ballade the lady addresses her lover: in a reversal of roles, she

places him on a pedestal as the source of all goodness, bliss and pleasures. She is apparently a victim of a previous painful experience (“the pain which has been nourished in my heart”) probably an unhappy marriage or a betrayal which is only healed now by her new lover. The fifth emphatic line is a tribute to Fortune who has bestowed the man’s love upon her, yet at the same the line is also a reminder of Fortune’s fickle nature and the ephemeral state of love. This is followed by a praise of Love, who has enchanted her with her lover, and finally a confession of how her own existence is totally enamored by her lover.

CHAPTER THREE: Medieval Courtly Culture and Women

In this chapter I will survey both the French courtly love tradition and the Andalusian love poetry. Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan composed their lyric poetry within the conventions of well-established literary traditions. As educated women, they were also familiar with the canonical works of their profession. Although almost three centuries apart, French courtly love poetry and Arabic love poetry, specifically Andalusian poetry bear several resemblances, and as will be shown below, much evidence exists of a close link between both traditions that indicates a literary continuity which challenged borders and conflicting politics.

One of the first images that are evoked as one thinks of the Middle Ages is that of the lover serenading his lady under her balcony. The tradition of French courtly love with all the images that it invokes is one of the most important characteristics of the medieval literary field. The term *amour courtois* was first coined by the French scholar Gaston Paris in 1883 (Burns, "Courtly Love", 28). It refers to a literary tradition that was popular in the lyric poetry written in France and Germany at the end of the twelfth century which displayed several common features, conceptual elements and broad similarities in themes and phrases which came to influence the Italian lyric written a century later (O'Donoghue 2).

A courtly poem or romance usually revolves around an adulterous affair, where a man (usually a knight) seeks the love of a lady who never succumbs to his advances easily. His love for her would motivate him to embark on heroic deeds and to endure all the hardships to win her approval, as if he is bound to her with an oath of fidelity. Courtly romances were often sensual, and the lady in question was almost always married and usually in a higher position than the man—in many instances she would be the wife of the lord of the vassal as in the case of Lancelot

who was in love with Guinevere, the wife of his Lord Arthur. The lady was never seen as a wicked adulteress; on the contrary, the lady was always elevated on a pedestal by her lover. She was a source of inspiration for him to undertake adventurous and heroic actions, and she imposed on him tasks to attain perfection. Love then functions as a purifying force: “Love makes the hirsute barbarian as handsome as he can be; it can even enrich the lowest born with nobility of manners; usually it even endows with humility the arrogant” (Capellanus 39).

As a literary tradition courtly romances were not the first form of vernacular literature to develop as the earliest form in French vernacular is the *chanson de geste*. These were epic poems intended for oral recitation which sung the heroic deeds of the Emperor Charlemagne (d. 814) and his warriors (the twelve noble peers) against the pagan populations (the Danes and Saxons) and the Saracens—the most famous of those poems is *La Chanson de Roland*. Roland was the nephew of Charlemagne who embarked on a campaign to fight the Muslims in Spain; upon his return from Saragossa he was the victim of the betrayal of his father-in-law who conspired with the Muslims to ambush him in the pass of Roncesvalles, where he gallantly died. These stories became known as the “Matter of France” and their primary purpose was probably propaganda, as they were intended to amass support for the Crusades. The songs did not reflect an infallible image of the Christian heroes who often betrayed one another, yet they ultimately triumphed as they were the “defenders of the faith.” With time the *chanson de geste* incorporated various elements of fantasy and romance to maintain its appeal. Its popularity did not last for long as audiences became more aware of the political realities of the time, such as the sack of Constantinople in 1204 by the Fourth crusade army that discredited the image of a united Christendom in the face of the Muslims; thus as “Chivalry became less chivalrous, romance became more romantic”(Muir 46).

The evolution of Romance as a new genre started in the twelfth century. The “Matter of Britain” was the popular term used to refer to King Arthur’s legends and Arthurian Romance came to refer to the romances of Lancelot and Guinevere and Tristan and Isolde. In the French tradition, one of the earliest French authors was Chretien de Troyes (d. 1183) who lived in Champagne and was considered one of the most able writers of medieval France. His patron was Marie, Countess of Champagne and daughter of Eleanor de Aquitaine (d. 1204) and Louis VII (d.1180). Chretien was familiar with classical tales, including Arthur’s legends; his most famous work *Lancelot* recounts the hardships and obstacles that Lancelot had to overcome to save his love, Queen Guinevere. Another canonical work in the genre was Andreas Capellanus’ *De Arte Honeste Amandi* , which was written also under the patronage of Marie de Champagne, circa 1185; it is a treatise that explains the codes, behaviors and procedures of courtly love. In the text, Capellanus drew from Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* and the *Remedia Amoris* works as a model for his book. Another example of early French vernacular literature is the works written by Marie de France. Marie was believed to be a French noblewoman who lived in England in the court of Henry II (d.1189). Her works were probably written in the late twelfth century and includes poems known as *lais*—a short narrative work. Her poems often portray the joys and the ordeals of love. The *lais* presented several of the problems that lovers face, often ending in happy resolutions through fantastical interventions. In one of the tales *Milun* a knight falls in love with a beautiful maiden, who gets pregnant , she becomes very distressed and is wary of what will befall her if she is found out. In this way Marie used the courtly literature as means to express the concerns of women who would not have been otherwise heard (Krueger 21).

The origins of the European courtly love tradition have been debated for long. What is clear is that the literary conventions that characterized this genre mysteriously appeared in the

literary scene of the late thirteenth century France. In his book *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship*, Roger Boase identifies seven different possible sources for the courtly love tradition. The first of those sources and arguably the strongest of them is the Hispano-Arabic origin. In this argument Boase explains how the influence of Arabic literature, in Iberia specifically, arguing that values of chivalry prominent in Arabic poetry seem to explain the origins of the courtly tradition. Boase maintains that the essential features of courtly love can be discerned in Hispano-Arabic poetry: the insatiability of desire, the description of love as agony, the idolization of the lady into an object of worship and the poet's submission to her will. He summarizes his argument in three main parallels that he identifies: the first of those parallels is the existence of common formal and stylistic elements that involve the development of the popular strophic forms particular to Iberia, the Spanish *villancico* which is then the Romance equivalent of *zajal*. The second parallel is the common themes which are extant in the works of Ibn Hazm's *Tawq al-hamama*, Ibn 'Arabi's *Tarjuman al-ashwaq* and Avicenna's *Risala fi al-'ishq*, authors who wrote some of the most popular examples of works on love as an ideology. Their ideas are echoed in the works of the likes of the French troubadour Aimeric de Peguilhan (d. 1230) and Francesco da Barberino (d. 1348) among many others. The third parallel that exists is in the concept of love that developed on both sides where both lyrical traditions conceived of love as an ennobling but potentially destructive force (Boase 65).

The second possible origin for courtly love that Boase has identified is the chivalric-matriarchal origin: The courtly tradition resulted from the combination of the medieval values of Christianity and Germanic and Celtic chivalry, in particular the privileged status of women among pagan Gothic tribes. The third possible influence is the "crypto-Cathar" theory. Catharism

was a dualist religious movement that developed in southern France between the twelfth and fourteenth century and was later condemned as heretical by the Catholic Church. Its believers regarded the human body as a creation of Satan; they rejected marriage and developed their ideas on the belief of the sublimity of the soul. The Fourth possible origin is the “Neoplatonic” theory, which perceived the soul as a divine substance. Love then becomes a sublime goal of immaterialistic nature, where the idea of the ennobling nature of love is similar to how beauty acts as a purifying force . The Fifth source may be the “Marianist” inspiration or in general religious influences, which attribute spiritual and mystical beginnings to the movement. The high Middle Ages witnessed an emphasis on the sanctity of the Virgin Mary, in what became known as the “cult of Mary” which became fully developed by then. Churches were dedicated to the Virgin such as Notre Dame de Paris and the Catholic Church started marking feasts to commemorate incidents of her life and the Ave Maria became one of the most important prayers. All of this led to the Virgin becoming a central figure in the art and the sculpture of the period. This glorified image of the Virgin might have been the first instance of the glorification of women in Christianity and could have provided the basis for placing the beloved on a pedestal. Another possible religious influence may be explained through the rise of the Cistercian orders, with its emphasis on “progress from carnal to spiritual love” (O'Donoghue 11). The Sixth influence is the European pagan traditions of the “spring folk rituals” including ritual dance songs and the “free love” concept celebrated on the vernal equinox. The final origin may be the “feudal-sociological” influences of the day that gave rise to this tradition, in particular, arranged marriages which resulted in many unhappy unions. The feudal bonds of vassalage, which will be discussed in more details below, with their economic and class conditions gave rise to the art form.

Roger Boase believes that the first theory of Arab origins is the strongest among all others. Patrice Uhl, in his book *Anti-doxa, paradoxes et contre-textes: études occitanes* also argues that the Arabic theory of origin is indisputable. For the purposes of this study the parallels that shall be drawn between both traditions will not question in details the proofs for the link that exists between both of them. The courtly love tradition had probably developed due to the combined effect of all the above surveyed influences, especially if we consider that they are not independent from one another as Manichaeian ideas had a strong influence on both Cathars and on Islamic Philosophy. Neo-Platonism was very prominent in the Islamic thought through the writings of the likes of Avicenna and al-Farabi as well as in medieval Europe.

Poetry was a well established Arabic literary genre, which extends all the way back to the seventh century AD, and the theme of love is a classical form of traditional Arabic poetry that underwent several developments and encompassed several trends. In the pre-Islamic poetic tradition *nasib* emerged as a predecessor of *ghazal* poetry. The *qasida* often began with the *nasib* lines, where the poet would meditate on the *atlat*, the ruins of the campsite of his beloved. He would recall past times that are gone forever; there is always a certainty and a fatalistic belief that separation was inevitable, a result of the vicissitudes of time and fate (Sells 127). And with the development of the multithematic *qasida* to a more traditional form, *ghazal* poetry arose thus as an independent theme. The Umayyad ‘Umar ibn Abi Rabi‘a (d. 712) represented this art form at its best; his poetry focused exclusively on celebrating his love affairs displaying love as a game of pursuit and conquest. What set him apart from other poets is how he often appropriated the female voice in his lines. In the following lines, ‘Umar chases a young woman during pilgrimage, where he stands in the corner watching the pilgrim girls go by:

I spotted her at night walking with her women between the shrine
And the [Ka‘bah] stone.
‘ Well then’ , she said to a companion, ‘ for ‘Umar’s sake let us spoil
this circumambulation.
Go after him so that he may spot us, then, sweet sister, give him a
coy wink’.
‘But I already did’, she said, ‘and he turned away’.
Whereupon she came rushing after me.
(Ibn Rabi‘a tr. Allen 104)

The appropriation of the voice of his lady-lovers authorized him to create a narcissistic persona that delights in displaying the irresistible nature of his sex-appeal and his many qualities. He often described his own effect on other women: his attraction to women, rather than their attraction to him. ‘Umar represents a rare case of a man who claims to know how women think and talk but his subject was ultimately himself. Another trend in *ghazal* poetry was ‘Udhri poetry which was named after the poet Jamil (d. 701) who came from the ‘Udhrah tribe. Jamil broke the social codes of the tribe by publically declaring his love to Buthayna; dishonoring and scandalizing her tribe. The tribe banned any contact between them, leaving Jamil in a situation where he was deprived of his beloved and he became tormented and grew ill as a result of this doomed relationship. He placed his beloved Buthayna on a pedestal; she became the personification of the ideal—the beautiful and chaste woman (Allen 105). This art form displayed many of the characteristics of courtly love: the idolized beloved, the torments of separation, the hopeless love that is never consummated or that is doomed.

In *ghazal* poetry we can clearly discern the ideal of female beauty: the teeth of pearl, the firm ivory breasts, the slender waist, the full buttocks, the grace of a gazelle and the black thick hair—all these characteristics formed an ideal that both men sang to and women aspired to become. On the other-hand when men took pride in themselves (*fakhr*) the subject was valor and endurance in the battlefield, or ancestry, but it never took an erotic, physical form. It was in new

harems that this feminine ideal was further developed as slave-girls versed in the arts of music, poetry and conversation became the subjects of adoration of men, without regard to class or stature. When the Amir al-Hakam I (d. 822) was subjected to the withholding of five of his harems; he sang them the following lines unashamedly:

[willow boughs] swaying over sand dunes
Tuned away from me, decided to eschew me;
I told them of my right, yet they persist
In their disobedience, when mine has ceased:
A king am I, subdued, his power humbled
To love, like a captive in fetters, forlorn!
What of me, when those who tore my soul from my body
Are stripping me of my power and might in love!
Excessive love has made me a slave.

(al-Hakam tr. Nykl 20-1)

Sentiments of chastity have been replaced with those of playfulness and licentiousness. As this new ideal was emerging in the poetry of slave girls, women boasted of their own physical beauty, taking pride in their own seductive powers (Nichols 87). This has become true not only of Andalusian women poets but with Eastern women poets as well. Salma al-Baghdadiyya boasts of her beauty in the following lines:

The black eyes of the oryx are the ransom of my eye,
And the gazelles' necks are the ransom of my bust.
I am adorned by necklaces, but truly, it is my neck that adorns them.
I do not complain of the weight of my buttocks , but when I stand
My body groans from the weight of the rounded breasts.
(tr. Nichols 87)

As we can see that both the Arabic tradition and the French Courtly love traditions share several similarities: love is a malady that possesses the soul with ecstasy yet with anguish at the same time. The status of the lady, both physically and morally is elevated and the control of the relationship is in her hands: she is a tyrant who commands. She sets the challenge and she

becomes the source of joy or suffering; with a word, a smile or a gesture she commands her lover. Love becomes a purifying force, motivating the lover to achieve great deeds to his beloved. There was also a common emphasis on secrecy and a fear of disclosure and hearsay. The primary objection to the Hispano-Arabic theory is that no evidence exists of Arabic texts that have been translated or transmitted to southern France at the time. However, Boase argues that the channels that provide this transfer of ideas were quite numerous at the time: The courts of Castille, Leon and Aragon were constantly engaged with the Andalusian courts of Muslim Spain, be it through war, migration, intermarriage, or simply as Muslim populations (*Mudejares*) who came under Spanish rule during the *reconquista*. Southern France was heavily influenced by those courts and many troubadours among them Guillaume IX, frequented them. (Boase 68).

“Troubadours” was the name given to the composers and performers of a new form of short love lyric that developed in the late twelfth century in southern France. Guillaume IX, duke of Aquitaine (d. 1127) is often cited as the first troubadour. The poems of the troubadours were written and sung in the vernacular language of southern France (*langue d’Oc*). Their main topic was romantic love and its motifs: the adoration of the female ideal, the ennobling effect of love, the suffering of separation and the hopelessness of attaining the love of the lady. Troubadours became an essential part of the courtly culture of medieval Europe. Noblewomen were often patrons of arts and one of the most notable examples is Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was the granddaughter of Guillaume IX, and whose daughter Marie de Champagne was the patroness of Chretien de Troyes and Andreas Capellanus.

Although the majority of the troubadours were men, some women wrote their own lyric. Southern French women who wrote in the *langue d’Oc*, were known as *trobairitz*, while northern French women who wrote in the *langue d’oil* were known as *troveresses* . When considering

women's lyric, critics have often distinguished between two types of texts: 'textualité féminine': female-voiced texts that are not necessarily composed by women, and 'féminité génétique': the expression of women authors (Krueger 23). Although the identity of the poets cannot be exactly determined, it is assumed that some of those texts are ascribed to women. In total the number of poems attributed to *trobairitz* ranges from twenty-three to almost twice as many. However, only two women, Comtessa de Dia and Na Castelloza have more than one song attributed to them. This contribution is indeed miniscule in comparison to the male corpus of almost 2500 troubadour lyrics that have survived (Krueger 23). The northern French *troveresses* on the other hand, seem more contested to be accurately attributed to female authors. There is however the so-called *chanson de toile*, which were songs sung by women while engaged in needlework. Although there is no specific claim that they were written by women, there is a strong feminine voice that laments crises in love, and the ordeals of longing (Krueger 23).

As was the case with women Arab poets, the *trobairitz* employed the same conventions of gender which men used. As Sarah Kay discusses in her book *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* the *trobairitz* can be divided into two types: first are those who copied the exact image of women as the fickle, troublesome wife as their misogynist counterparts did; and the second women poets are the ones who wrote about the *domna*, which is a character of 'mixed gender often disguised under the name *senhal*, and who usually possesses male attributes including power and rank (Larrington 44). As they composed their poetry, the female *trobairitz* found at their disposal a whole range of female voices from the various "woman's songs": *chansons d'ami*, *albas*, *chansons de mal mariées*, and *chansons de toile* (Bruckner 872). yet as this second group of women embarked on their poetic creations, they were faced with one dilemma, the *domna*: that silent statue of beauty and power that they were compelled to give voice to. Some of them chose

to animate the *domna* and endow her with the antipathetic role (the femna). The second strategy that they employed is the invention of a new persona, in which they mimic the feminized topoi of servitude and powerlessness; in this respect the women trobairitz re-feminize the beloved portraying her as powerless, abandoned or forgotten (Gravdal 413).

This challenge was similarly faced by Arabic women poets. As noted earlier, women poets found themselves confined to a literary convention that draws idealized images of its subject, the women. What they also found was that they had to mimic the images, words and language of their male-counterparts to prove their literary merits. *Hija'* (satire), was the second art of poetry that flourished in medieval Spain, where court intrigue provided a fit environment for its development especially during times of political upheaval. Character defamation was widely used by women poets, often expressing bawdy and explicit sexual references against their enemies. Women did not shy away from matching the ferocity of their male counterparts; one example is Nazhun bint al-Qala'i. Nazhun was a poetess from Granada, active during the Petty States period, she was known for the ferociousness of her tongue, she frequented literary salons where she met poets such as al-Makhzumi and Ibn-Quzman and engaged with them in long poetic skirmishes. One such instance is mentioned in Ibn al-Khatib's *al-Ihata fi akhbar Ghurnata* when Nazhun first meets the blind poet al-Makhzumi, widely feared for the sharpness of his tongue. She shamelessly ridicules his origins: "someone who descended from the stronghold of Almodovar and grew up amidst the goats and sheep, where has he learned about assemblies with pleasant music?" Al-Makhzumi calls her a "hot whore, whose unpleasant smell could be sniffed miles away" although her face has a slight touch of beauty, but "for who those who go to Nazhun, pass by every other woman; who sets out for the sea, considers irrigation-canals unimportant." She doesn't shy away from engaging in the same level of grotesqueness. When al-

Makhzumi curses her: “I have heard about her speaking, may God not make her hear the good, and show her nothing than a rod,” she answers him back: “O infamous old man, you contradict yourself, with what [else than a rod] can a woman better be bestowed” (Schippers 145). She ends her long tirade of invective poems directed against him by boasting of her ultimate victory over him: “I have repaid a poem with a poem; by my life, tell me now who is the best poet. Although I am a woman by nature, my poetry is masculine” (Schippers 146). Nazhun acknowledges the fact that her behavior, her conduct, and her explicit poetry are unfeminine, yet it is a source of pride for her; she is able to take on infamous and feared men like al-Makhzumi and beat them at their own game. Abu-Bakr Ibn Sa‘id, at whose salon this incident took place introduced her as a learned poetess, she is aware of her status and it empowers her to engage in shameless attacks on others. Yet when she boasts of her own merits, when she believes she deserves praise, she refers to a male ideal.

The above examples challenge our own contemporary ideas of the social reality of the those ages. As we can see in Arabic literary tradition we come across examples of women who openly expressed their feelings of love or hatred in the same manner as their male counterparts. In the case of Andalusian women poets, the aforementioned examples seem to reflect a fairly emancipated stance of women in Andalusia more than their counterparts in the East. This argument has been long-debated: the poetry indeed displays an obvious lack of restraints that would be atypical of women living in medieval Islamic societies. However as the historian Paul Guichard himself points out, the sources are sparse: “Interpretation often tends to take on a greater role than conclusions firmly supported by established documented data” (Guichard 681). There are two theories to examine this premise of cultural (dis)continuity: The “traditionalist” approach espoused by Spanish historians such as Julián Ribera and Sánchez Albornoz, which

highlights a continuity that existed between pre-Islamic Visigothic Spain and Islamic Spain. It argues that the Islamic conquest was nothing but a mere political change in the history of Spain that did not affect the structure of the society nor imbue any difference in its character, thus in spite of the modified appearance, the Iberian peninsula remained constantly faithful to its own Visigothic-Romano Western roots. The other historiographic approach, the “anti-continuist” trend, espoused by several modern scholars such as Pierre Guichard himself, emphasizes a discontinuity, not only in the language and religion that was brought forward by the conquering Muslims, but also in the deeper underlying structures of society.

The traditionalist approach claims that women in Andalusia enjoyed greater freedoms as a result of the fabric of society that remained faithful to its western roots. They believed that settlement happened essentially in terms of men only as the incoming conquerors married Spanish women who were able to maintain their own traditions, including freedom and independence that they had enjoyed in Roman and Gothic Spain. This argument is not very valid as Guichard points out because it “hardly accords with the traditions and customs of Arab Society... in which warriors apparently still often travelled with their entire tribal or family group” (Guichard 682). Furthermore, all the examples used to support the entire premise, of the emancipation of Andalusian women, are anecdotes of women from two particular categories. The first category is that of the *qiyān* or *jawārī*, slave girls whose social function was to entertain gatherings of men with dancing and singing; for those women, the kind of freedoms they enjoyed, did not extend beyond those confines. The other category included the likes of Wallada bint al-Mustakfi along with a handful of free women, such as I‘timad al-Rumaykiyya (who was originally a slave girl) who were all women associated with courtly life and as such were an exception; otherwise, it seems that women in Andalusia were no different than the rest of the

women in the Islamic world. Guichard also points out, that this argument is based on the a priori assumption that women in Andalusian Spain enjoyed a more liberal way of life and were in a better position than their Eastern counterparts. There are abundant examples of women poets in the Eastern Islamic Empire who expressed themselves and their feelings such as Layla al Akhyaliyya, Alia' bint al-Mahdi, and Sukayna bint al-Husayn who had her own literary salon long before Wallada. As a matter of fact, certain evidence points out to the fact that Andalusian women had more in common with their Eastern counterparts than with their western Spanish counterparts; for example the art of *hija'*, that often involved explicit sexual jokes and as such displayed greater freedom of expression for women, was a common theme for many Andalusian women poets. This art form was almost absent from Mozarabic texts which may reflect a different level of social acceptance of this art form coming from Mozarab women (Uhl 21). Furthermore, no evidence exists of any *trobairitz*, throughout the Christian west, composing audacious verse intended to compete with their male troubadours (Uhl 23). Manuela Marin argues that our contemporary concept of emancipation of women or their freedom is, at best, anachronistic (Bellido Bello 56).

As for French courtly romance it was clear that it did not reflect the realities of life in medieval Europe and in particular two of its distinct ideas: the idolization of women and the acceptance of adultery. Although generalizations about the status of women cannot be fully made, as they varied according to rank and location, but what is clear is that women in the west, similar to their eastern counterparts, across different classes faced different challenges due to the common belief of their inferior position. Women were generally regarded as inferior to men, and as Bloch observed there seems to be a persistent *topoi* of misogyny that was established in the first centuries of Christianity that explains the lack of variety of the texts and the arguments that

held women inferior to men that was almost universally held until recently (3). The most important institutions of the Middle Ages, the first and the second estate and later the third estate, seemed all to agree on one thing and that is the inferior position of women. Starting from creation and the role of Eve in the original sin seemed to justify their inferior position, and accordingly how the church regarded them as the instrument of the devil; women were considered the source of sin and as such they had to be kept in check (Duby 77). Keeping women in check was the key insurance of the hierarchical structure that defined feudal life. Aristocracy embraced the church's subjugation of women who were expected to blindly obey their husbands and canon law allowed wife-beating (Power 16). Chastity was regarded as one of the highest virtues; it represented not only emancipation from the lusts of the flesh, but more an imitation of the life of Christ. Adultery seemed to be the major preoccupation of medieval society. Honor was a possession of men, but it is a woman's burden; it is a woman's responsibility and she is the one accountable to guard it, no matter how other men seduce, fool or trick her.

There was always a clear distinction drawn between a lay woman and a nun, and although no women were allowed to officiate in church, women who took the veil were considered on a different level than other women. Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of the Cistercian order, describes the transition a woman takes as she takes the veil as passing from a life according to her own will to a life according to God, as a woman permitting "the fire of the Divine spirit to extinguish the lust of flesh." Thus what we see here is a paradox: a woman could only be accepted in the divine world, if she is willing to forgo of her full potential and reject the laws of nature as child bearer (Shahar 69). Marriage was regarded then as an inferior way of life to chastity; its purpose is the prevention of sin and procreation. According to St. Augustine, any sexual relations which do not lead to procreation are nothing but lust (Shahar 68). The idea of

love and companionship though was not unheard of, Thomas Aquinas depicts marriage as a union between the hearts which no one can asunder (Shahar 68). Many other writers have emphasized the obligations of both parties in the union, what was permissible to men was permissible to women. Yves the bishop of Chartres (d.1115) wrote that a man wishing to join the order of the Templars, must seek the consent of his wife, lest he sacrifices her needs (Shahar 70). This clearly shows that there was a recognition of women's sexual needs in marriage. However, marriage itself was often depicted in a negative light in the literary works of the day, such as in the tale of the "Wife of Bath" in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The image of the wife was usually that of a dominating, quarrelsome woman, who usually neglected her husband but at the same time suffocated him with her constant nagging, and in keeping with her image as a temptress she was also often depicted as lascivious and deceitful. Fabliau was a genre of short stories with non aristocratic settings and characters; it was a funny tale often involving bawdy and obscene humor and such stories often involved practical jokes and black humor. In this genre women were also often depicted as lascivious, capricious and unfaithful. The inferior and odious rendering of women is a stark contrast to their ideal veneration in courtly literature.

Generally, both men and women were punished for adultery. If a married woman had intercourse with another man whether he was married or not, she was considered an adulteress. On the other hand, a man is considered an adulterer if he had relations with a married woman only, otherwise it would be considered fornication (Shahar 107). Most didactic literature of the time was directed to women. A woman was held responsible for safe guarding her own chastity as she has to abide by the rules of modesty and virtue. Often times those works cited cautionary tales of unchaste, lustful women, who ended in eternal hell-fire for indecent sexual behavior. In spite of all of this it seems that fornication and the begetting of bastard children was rife in both

the urban and peasant societies and across peasantry, nobility and even royalty. It seems that men and women were not disgraced by the act itself, but only if it resulted in the birth of a bastard child (Shahar 119) and as Duby noted with the large setup of the feudal household where various women (wife, children, the mother-in-law, aunts, nieces, sisters in-law) lived under the protection of a Lord, it is not difficult to imagine that various secret relationships flourished in such an environment (Duby 81).

With such high emphasis on chastity, and fidelity, how is one able to reconcile the popularity of the courtly love literature, specifically extramarital aspect which characterized it and which was a clear breach of the most highly venerated ideals of contemporary society: chastity and chivalric loyalty? How can an adulterous courtly affair be accepted and celebrated in a conservative society that valued chastity and virtue above all other values? Literature might not be a reflection of the social reality of the day, but as will be demonstrated below, the way courtly literature functioned within medieval society reflected the underlying socio-economic-sexual tensions of society. Shahar quotes A. Auerbach in his book *Mimesis*:

The courtly romance is not reality shaped and set forth by art, but an escape into fable and fairy tale. From the very beginning, at the height of its cultural florescence, this ruling class adopted an ethos and an ideal which concealed its real function. And it proceeded to describe its own life in extra-historical terms, as an absolute aesthetic configuration without practical purpose. (Auerbach qtd. in Shahar 120)

The social structure of medieval Europe was defined by the system of vassalage, which was built on bonds of loyalty. Originating in Germanic practices, this relationship became more prominent during the end of the eighth century. By the time of Carolingians, vassals were free men who bound themselves in rituals to a lord who in return offered them protection, and later some form of compensation initially in the form of money but later in the form of land parcels,

which become known as fiefs. This provided the vassals with a privileged status in society. The lord and his vassal were bound together through a ceremony known as the homage, which was followed by the vassal taking an oath of “fealty” in which the vassal declared himself the man of his lord. Fidelity thus became the distinctive value of the feudal ethic (Reynolds 20). Later, several young men from noble families went in service of rich lords.

If we are to consider the bond that characterized the relation between the knight and his lady and the fact that the lady almost always occupied a status higher than the knight, it would appear to us that the pledges paid to the lady are very similar to the kind of homage that the knight paid to his lord. In one way then the lady functions as a “feudal lord”: as the knight pledges allegiance to his lord in return for his protection, a lady is expected to yield at the end and reward her lover for the hardship he endures for her. This model thus presents an instance where gender roles are crossed—authority and power seem to lie in the hand of the woman. Also, she becomes the erotic object of desire, a cold statue of beauty, sexualized yet at the same time defeminized by the very power she wields upon her lover. The knight as a symbol of manhood and chivalry is in the weak position, forming what Burns calls a “putatively reversed gender hierarchy” (Burns, “Courtly Love” 32) thus as an object of desire and power, she becomes a being who is a muse, a tyrant, a lord, a lady, a reflection of the Virgin, an object of desire that is unattainable yet always within reach. Burns mentions the arguments of Erich Kohler and Georges Duby arguments that one way of reading courtly literature is as a literary strategy masking the social tensions associated with class conflict in feudal society. Kohler argues that the love of the *domna* actually masks the aspiration of the lover to the social status of her husband; the courtly lady then becomes irresistibly attractive and at the same time powerful as she becomes a representation of class aspirations (Burns, “Courtly Love” 40). The lady

becomes the subject of both an unattainable desire that cannot be fully represented as Kristeva contends “the lady is seldom defined and, slipping away between restrained presence and absence, she is simply an imaginary addressee, the pretext for the [male poet’s] incantation” (qtd. in Burns 41) and as this lady vanishes what the poet extols is not the lady herself but her qualities: her beauty, valor, kindness.

In her essay “The Man Behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric,” Jane Burns argues that the lady in courtly literature is a projection of the poet’s desire and reflection of his fears. To assume that the lady is simply an impersonation of the feudal rule is a simplification of a problematic issue. There exists two sides of the fiction that occupy the poet’s imagination: on the one hand, there is the image of the virtuous de-sexualized lady embodying all the features that her lover aspires to attain but in reality he could never sleep with her; and on the other hand, there is the erotic, manipulative woman who is also problematic because she could sleep with other men. And thus he creates this third woman, combining the things he desires in both a powerless and a sexual figure (Burns, “The Man Behind” 268). And as Bloch points out the struggle then is that “Antifeminism and courtliness stand in a dialectical rapport . . . woman is placed in the over determined and polarized position of vying neither one nor the other but both at once, and thus trapped in an ideological entanglement whose ultimate effect is her abstraction from history” (164). The “Abstraction of women” becomes then the real answer to understand how they constituted a paradox of courtly romance; what we are reading then was not about real women as such but rather a male-constituted abstraction.

We know that to prove their worth, women had to write within the literary conventions that were at their disposal, so how could women writers abstract themselves as subjects, then? Were they able to escape such a trap? What challenges did they face as they decided to write

about themselves? And what weight does this lend to the few lines of women's experience that have reached us? In the following concluding chapter I will discuss what is the authority of women's experiences and how we can read those particular texts.

CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion

In this thesis I presented two examples of women who challenge our cotemporary ideas of what it meant to live as a woman in medieval France or in medieval Muslim Spain. Their feminine voice was able to draw its own space within the confines of a literary tradition that sought to own their representation by constituting them as subjects. Throughout their lives both Christine de Pizan and Wallada defied conventions as exceptional women. There is no way for us to experience fully how medieval women lived their daily lives as much as there is no way for us to reconstitute the social realities of fourteenth-century France or of eleventh-century Muslim Spain. Yet, it seems that there exists a specific narrative that was formed in our contemporary consciousness of medieval women—a narrative that was formed through the historical reading of texts. But In spite of the overarching power of this narrative, there exists a discourse that breaks across this narrative and that is the literary works of the women themselves. The works of these women bear the heavy burden of being the voice of medieval women and of providing the evidence of experience of *all* women in those ages at those places. But how do we read a text? And does the experience of someone really tell us about their “reality”? Can their individual voices represent the experience of their “group”? How do the voices of these women rupture the seemingly cohesive historical image that we have formed of their times? What kind of social tensions do their voices reflect?

To answer the first question I turn to Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production* in which he argues that the act of artistic creation and the artistic product (the text) are both situated within a field, which he defines as: “the space of positions and the space of the position-takings” (30). Any “position-taking” (for example the artistic creation of an author) within the field entails a distribution of a specific capital. The aim of every position taking is to re-

appropriate (or re-distribute) this cultural capital. And any change within the field is a result of the change in power relations (the space of the positions). The generative, unifying principle of the ‘system’ of “position taking” is struggle, with all the contradictions it engenders. It is a product and prize of permanent conflict (34). The literary field then is a field of forces as well as a field of struggles constantly in flux. The creation of any new cultural product within it will force a change in the position of every existing one. The question then of the agency of the author is determined not only by his own creation but through other agents as well who constitute the cultural field.

That the creation of a work of art as a process of position-taking, helps us escape the dilemma of the internal and the external readings of a work of art, i.e., either as a pure personal creation of a disinterested artist (art for art’s sake) or a purposeful creation of a dominant faction/group serving a specific agenda. The creation of a work of art is a collective effort between the producers and the consumers. Christine de Pizan’s composition of courtly poems, as mentioned earlier was a result of clear consciousness of the popularity of the genre within the literary field and the need to seek patronage (the producers) and at the same time it provided a personal need as an outlet for her grief. The creation of value for a work of art is not only determined by the producer himself, but also by the producers of the meaning and the value of the work—critics, publishers, etc.—thus any work of art is a manifestation of the field as whole. The majority of Christine’s moralizing works, which are very likely to be extremely tedious to our modern tastes, were apparently appreciated by her contemporaries—the other producers within the field (her patrons, later authors) and the consumers (her readership). The value that modern critics assign to Christine, the symbolic capital, she enjoys is very different from the symbolic capital that she had enjoyed in fourteenth-century field of courtly literature. We value

her for different things than what she was valued for then. The task of interpretation takes on a new challenge then as we need to re-construct that field at the point of the position-taking (the publishing of a text for example). But Bourdieu explains that this task is almost impossible because for the contemporary producers and consumers of a field, self-evident givens of reality did not have to be mentioned or explained (Bourdieu, *Social Space* 31). An artist does not create a work of art in a vacuum as the cultural product is not an outcome of the pure artistic genius of its author; it is a product as well of the *doxa*, a term that Bourdieu defines to denote what is taken for granted in any particular society. The *doxa* in his view is the experience by which the realities of the surrounding social world appear as self-evident often going unnoticed. Thus Wallada, need not explain to us how her explicit language and defamation of her enemies are acceptable in eleventh-century Muslim Cordoba and were actually a testament to intelligence rather than capriciousness; to her contemporaries that *may* have been intuitive. What this also means is that the poetry of Wallada, for example, is not entirely her own creation, but is rather a product of a world which might have considered character defamation highly commendable and an expression of witticism. Bourdieu mentions that one of the biggest losses in this respect is the connotations words have. Consider for example our contemporary connotations that we associate with the profane and the explicit words we find in Wallada's poetry that might have been entirely different at her time which might explain how she may not have seemed as shocking to her contemporaries as her words seem to us.

Wallada went around with a cape boasting her high birth, poetic prowess and sexual provocation. Whereas on the other hand, Christine who was known to have contributed in the illumination of her books, drew herself kneeling as she presented her book to queen Isabeau of Bavaria. The expression of experience then is a deliberate act of selection that constituted a

subject that fitted within the social conventions of the day, but was also in a constant state of struggle within the field.

When women wrote within the confines of those traditions, their styles, forms and images were not a clear break from the dominating genre. But the term ‘genre’ carries a decidedly negative charge: conformity, predictability, standardization, and an idea that seemed to have rested on notions of ‘convention’ and decorum (Duff 56). The theory of intertextuality offers a solution to the problem of genre. Intertextuality is the notion that every text can be read only through its inter-relation with other texts. A text then is nothing but a signifier, but what this also implies is the reduced agency of the author in the production of his/her work of art. Texts then are bound together not through the rigid conventions of genre, but through the threads of intertextuality. The law of genre was not annulled as much as it was transcended (Duff 56). Duff quotes Kristeva by explaining that the theory of intertextuality is an enlargement of a typology to include all types of discourse beyond the literary, to look into the “signifying practices” and their history and cultural preconditions, and expanded awareness of the way texts are bound *within* their social and ideological environment (Duff 58). Value, then, lies within the “connotative strength” of a text as a statement of ideals in reference to other works of its kind (Shapiro 561)—a relation that assumes a specific horizontal correspondence between works, where specific topoi, motifs and images are flowing. But Kristeva’s intertextuality carries a deeper dimension than this assumed referentiality; it implies a vertical understanding of the text by splitting it into two fundamental elements, the phenotext and the genotext. The phenotext is the textual structure as realized at the surface level of language. The genotext on the other hand is not linguistic but rather the process which articulates deeper structures, underlying foundation (social, family, etc.)

the matrices of enunciation which give rise to the genre. It could thus be seen as a language's underlying foundation (Kristeva, *Reader* 57).

Bourdieu's objection to the structuralist approach (he singles out Foucault and the Russian Formalists) is combined with his field theory to provide a wider view beyond 'the field of discourse.' To understand a text, it is not enough to look within the discourse of fourteenth-century French women writers and it is not enough to look at the underlying foundations of Christine's poems for example. To situate a text within a field, we need to recreate this entire field, understand the economies of production, understand how symbolic capital flowed within this field and how this field and the discourse within it interacted with the wider political field of power and within the larger all-encompassing field of class relations (one has to assume then that gender is subsumed within the field of class relations).

This is when the question of agency comes in. Between Kristeva's structuralist intertextuality, with its vertical and horizontal structures, and Bourdieu's open field of forces with the consumers and producers, where were those women situated, what power did they possess that allowed them to express themselves? Bourdieu contends that "The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it ... [based on] what is and what they can do with it from the position they occupy within it" (Bourdieu, "Social Space" 734). Christine and Wallada were both intelligent women who displayed an acute awareness of their position within the social structure that they had lived in as well as the symbolic capital they possessed. The conscious act of developing a specific awareness of their position empowered them to act accordingly (Wallada establishing her own literary salon, or refusing the veil; Christine taking writing as a profession, and engaging in literary debates) and thus displays a deliberate intent that clearly reflects a strong sense of agency. Their experience was rooted in their consciousness of being

different. When women wrote they were faced with this male-constituted female subject. The female subject by women authors could not be fully acceptable to them, and it is their experience that enables them to embark on a differentiating process from (or within) the dominating discourse.

In *Keywords* Raymond Williams defines experience as: “a particular kind of consciousness, which can in some contexts be distinguished from 'reason' or 'knowledge.’” (qtd. in Scott 781). In Classical Arabic poetic tradition, poetry was understood as a direct expression of personal experience, which may explain the reason that the art of elegy and the theme of lamentation was very popular among women, as it expressed the deeply personal experience of loss that many women went through as the men in their families died in ongoing wars. This is also true in other poetic themes as we have seen in *ghazal* and *hija'* where we are almost struck with the audacity of women in expressing their desire and in launching tirades of obscenities on their enemies. Women clearly owned their experience; they owned the means to express it and they displayed an unflinching and unconstrained desire to do so. Within the field of artistic creation of the time, personal experience; was not embarrassing. All of Wallada’s poems are a chronicle of her relationships and they reflect her emotional state at every stage of it: longing, passion, desire and vile animosity. On the other hand within the French medieval tradition, experience was expressed and viewed differently. Personal experience as a source of inspiration was rare. There are very few examples such as Adam de la Halle (d. 1306), the French troubadour who was forced to leave his native town for political reasons and in some of Froissart works he spoke of some happy childhood memories (Varty xvii). And even though troubadour literature might be the most personal poetic art of the time as Réginer-Bohler points out the poetic “I” that occurs in their lyrics does not reflect a unique individual but rather a universal “I”

(Réginer-Bohler 375). Christine clearly broke this tradition, when she expressed her grief as a widow in several poems in the *Cent ballades*. As a matter of fact her most famous poem “Seulete Sui” is also her most personal one; in this poem, she expresses a deep sense of isolation, a rare instance that reflects a void and loneliness that might have allowed her to take liberty at expressing such deep personal feelings. Yet, throughout her writings Christine insisted on distancing herself from her own poetic creations, particularly courtly ones; she is careful to divorce her poetic existence from her personal one as she was quite aware of how her lyrical poems, the poetic *I*, could be misread as an expression of personal experience. She draws attention to this distinction in ballad 50 of her *Cent ballades*. As discussed in the chapter on Christine de Pizan, she was clearly very self-conscious of her own image. She chose the image of the bereaved widow, the virtuous woman and the sage author; an image of desexualized woman, not desiring and not desired (Brownlee 347): “love gives me neither joy nor pain” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 8). But this overriding wish to maintain a specific image, did not fully override her experience. In other works, including the poems that were discussed earlier, despite the fact that they were written within the courtly tradition, where Christine utilized the same themes and motifs, we can still discern a distinct voice of experience. In some of those poems, she expresses a sage advice, an ominous warning, a strong commendable voice that is rooted in experiences that seems to override the conventions of courtly tradition that dictated a woman’s subjugation to her lover and her obligation to fulfill his wishes.

But even though their works reflected a specific feminine experience that sought to wriggle itself from the constraints of masculine traditions, throughout their lives (and in some of their works) both Christine and Wallada displayed a direct or indirect belief that for them to survive within their societies, they had to display manly traits. In the *Livre de la Mutacion de*

Fortune, Christine refers to herself as the “Filz de noble homme” as “The son a of noble man” and in the opening chapters of that book she describes allegorically her ordeal as a young widow going through a full metamorphosis from a woman to a man, so that as “a good master... to help myself and my people” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 107). The metamorphosis that she had to unwillingly go through to be able to pass through those ordeals was unwelcome as she would have rather remained a woman. Praiseworthy feminine qualities such as modesty, chastity and sweetness are womanly, whereas bravery, strength and independence are masculine. A strong woman then needed to be a man characterized by fortitude, bravery, and responsibility all of which would be bestowed upon her by Lady Fortune as she took pity on her. In spite of all that Christine had been through and the successful person she had become, she would have rather remained a woman without all those very same traits that helped her overcome her ordeals. In Christine’s mind those differences are clearly demarcated by a line and crossing this line turns a woman into a man, and those very same qualities that are laudable in a man would be a source of reprehension for a woman even if they are indispensable for her own survival. This line still clearly exists in our contemporary world: a strong woman is often dismissed as being aggressive or masculine. A masculine woman and an effeminate man are still derogatory terms in our world.

Wallada’s presence in the public sphere made her a subject of rumors, as many of her biographers have noted. To be present and prominent in such turbulent times in Cordoba required a tenacity and strength of character to survive court intrigue and to maintain one’s reputation. Wallada’s capriciousness might seem excessive, but it is not only pride or indignation that drove her to act as she did with Ibn Zaydun, probably a deep sense of insecurity, an awareness of her vulnerability as a single woman in a very patriarchal society motivated her to launch this war where words were her only weapon. This insecurity led her at the end to take

Ibn 'Abdus as a lover, who was someone she used to ridicule, and whose lack of intelligence and refinement was well-known.

Can we call those women feminists then? According to our contemporary understanding, feminism would be broadly defined as “the campaigns, activities, and texts concerned with challenging and transforming how women are treated and represented in society. It is a political movement and discourse that encompasses a diverse range of perspectives, theories, and methods. As well as analyzing patriarchal structures, feminist theory seeks to propose new ways for women to bring about social change” (Garner and Katie). The term of course would be quite anachronistic if we were to apply it to our own perception of what was in medieval France or medieval Spain. Sarah Kay claims that “only if women use this gender system ironically, or attempt to reform it, will their status as subjects be distinguished from the masculine model”(Kay 102). Does this mean that we dismiss their experience because it was not revolutionary enough?

As mentioned before, it is clear that Christine de Pizan did not advocate a certain improvement in the social standards of women. Yet throughout her writings what is clearly discernible is a distinct and precocious awareness of the problems of her gender and a specific sense of belonging to a larger group. Christine was wondering about the source of hatred, just as Virginia Woolf six hundred years later would do in *A Room of One's Own*. The process of identifying this consciousness is very clear in the first chapter of her book the *Cité des dames*. In that chapter Christine describes how she had decided to write the book: her first motivation was the outrage she felt at how women had been represented across history. Based on her readings of all the learned men, she came to the inevitable conclusion that “women's ways are inclined to and full of all possible vices”. However, she became so disturbed with this conclusion that she “began to examine myself and my behavior as a natural woman, and likewise I thought about

other women that I see frequently” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 119). A different consciousness emerged within her that was in contradiction to all the narratives that surrounded and shaped her sex (Case 73). She expressed her concern: “I see frequently, princesses, great ladies as well as great many ladies of the middle and lower classes who were gracious enough to tell me their private and hidden thought . . . it was clear to me that these judgments did not square with the natural behavior and ways of women “(Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 119). In her view it was impossible that all those learned men were wrong in their judgments; she hated herself and her entire sex and wished she had been born a man. The allegory begins as three ladies of Reason, Rectitude and Justice appear to Christine. Lady Reason is the first to appear carrying “a mirror that signifies self-knowledge”. She first undermines the authority of men then she claims that a higher source exists: “it is clearly proved by experience that the contrary of the evil that they say exists in this estate through the fault of women is true” ((Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 122). This revelation represents an epiphany to Christine herself as an author: Reason reveals to her an alternative to the patriarchal discourse that she found herself bound within. It is a discourse that drew its authority not just from the powerful position of men, but also from the reason and wisdom that they surely possess. Yet it is Reason now that comes to tell her to set this aside, and to trust her own resources as the ultimate authority, namely experience (Case 72). What Christine embarked on doing afterwards was not as revolutionary as we may have wished. According to Judith Butler, the “subject is constructed through acts of differentiation that distinguish the subject from the constitutive outside, a domain of abjected alterity” (Butler and Scott 12). Much of what preoccupied Christine’s writings was the problem of women’s representation rather than actual women issues. Christine believed that women were unjustly portrayed, that if the *image* of women truly reflected their reality, so much

of this animosity and pervading misogyny would not exist. In this respect Christine probably represented the first attempt by any woman to analyze this pervading misogyny, and since much of those ideas were mere repetitions of established works, it seems that Christine's attempt was to break this cycle, to represent an alternative history of women. Yet at the same time Christine did not stray much from the main problem of the women as constituted subject. Women were represented as textualized object, the *real* woman was never the subject, and although the literary text almost never reflected reality, as historical sources reveal, yet it projected the struggles (social, economic and religious) and tensions of feudal society. In the *Cité des dames* parades of commendable queens, goddesses, as well as mythological and literary figures, some of which are questionable to say the least (consider Medea!) were present. Although Christine was able to distinguish the subject away from the dominant discourse, her efforts to reconstitute a different subject were not fully independent from the originally constituted one. Throughout medieval literature we find two faces of Eve: the menacing *femna* or the docile *domna*, a woman is either chaste, dutiful and docile, or lustful, deceptive and troublesome (Burns, "The Man behind the Lady" 256). In this respect also, experience failed Christine: to her dismay, she thought of herself as a woman who was forced to turn into a man. She failed to recognize herself as a reconstituted subject that had broken the boundaries of gender, and that might explain the fact that although she was proud of her achievements, she never called for women to follow her example (Bell 181). Christine was a visionary not because she was a feminist in our modern sense of the word, but because she had the vision to develop a differentiating mindset, in addition to an awareness of belonging to a larger group, even if she did not fully carry through with the project of reconstituting a new female subject. As Sarah Key herself points out: it is difficult for modern critics to fully understand the perceptions of the self in the past (Kay 95).

On the other hand for Wallada, we can think of the feminine consciousness as springing exclusively out of personal experience. Feelings of desire, longing, betrayal, and coyness were all expression of her own experience. The fact that some of those poems were bawdy and audacious is quite striking as female desire and sexuality were hardly masked. And while in French courtly literature female sexuality is only present as a token or a prize, an affair between men as Burns calls it (Burns, "Courtly Love" 39), in medieval Arabic literature female desire is communicated through the voice of the woman herself even if—similar to their western counterparts—women poets had to write within a masculine-dominated discourse and were still limited by the imagery and themes that were created by men. Thus, the poetry displayed a gender neutrality that often created confusion about the authorship and the references in some of the poems. The poem, for example, starting with the line "The lover who bids you farewell" in some sources is attributed to Wallada and in others to Ibn Zaydun (Cantarino 261).

Although Wallada herself never claimed to speak on behalf of her gender, nor advocate a feminist cause, yet her life seems to be a real practice of how an emancipated woman would live. By all accounts, her behavior clearly broke every social convention we might think of as typical of medieval Muslim society. Also, her tumultuous love story with Ibn Zaydun seems to be in violation of every convention of courtly love tradition we might think of. Unlike other women in courtly fiction, as noted earlier, Wallada was the one who initiated the visit to Ibn Zaydun. She was the one who was in control, who set the time and place and took the risk upon herself to arrange their rendez-vous. Unlike almost every other courtly romance, it was Wallada, the woman who betrayed Ibn Zaydun and took Ibn 'Abdus as a lover to avenge her hurt pride. Unlike every other courtly romance, it was Ibn Zaydun who had to sing of longing, of betrayal or separation and the infidelity of his lover. Courtly romance might have not reflected reality, but

Wallada and Ibn Zaydun's relationship—insofar as we believe the sources—right from its beginning, through its realization and all the way till its ugly ending reflected (and represented) a full romantic cycle and their poetry reflected their emotions at every stage of it. Wallada was not a feminist then, but she strove to live to her full potential as a woman; she decided to do what she wanted and she felt like doing and there is no a stronger practice of rebellious feminism than hers.

This also brings us to a central question about feminism. To what extent is it a prescriptive discourse and has thus impeded women rather than helped them out? Is Christine with her feminine consciousness and her insights into misogyny a better feminist than Wallada who chose to defy conventions, celebrate her talent, beauty and love and embrace life openly? Who was a better feminist? who sets a better example? Is it better to theorize about life or to live it? But such anachronistic questions overlook the nuances of personal experiences, as Scott notes (777). Personal experience becomes a way to generalize the experience of an entire group/gender/category/class, dismissing how it was formed and how the subject was constituted. We are baffled by the fact that it seems that Christine was accepted by her contemporaries and that Wallada's indulgent behavior was accepted (even if it were dismissed by her later biographers). But the fact is Christine and Wallada acted as they did, because they knew they could. They were aware of the field that they operated within, they were aware of the capital they possessed (one was a princess, witty, charming, pretty; the other was a well-connected self-educated widow).

Wallada seemed to be aware of her own strengths, whereas Christine seemed always wary of her own weaknesses. Wallada seemed to live life, whereas Christine seemed to think about life. Wallada seemed to have placed less emphasis on her affiliation with women as an

affinity group, whereas Christine seemed to be very conscious of belonging to a larger group. Such comparisons and generalizations may be easy to draw but they ignore the nuances of experience. Spivak argues that history provides the categories that enable us to understand the position of the people, whereas literature relativizes those categories that history assigns and exposes the processes that construct subjects (qtd. in Scott 791). From a historical standpoint it is possible to draw a comparative study not between “Muslim Women in Medieval Cordoban Society in the Petty States period” and “Christian Women in the Courts of Northern fourteenth-century” drawing up categories and checking boxes where they fit or not . But questions about how such women were exceptional, how their personal traits enabled them to be aware of their position and to act as conscious agents, remain unclear.

Because two such women existed we cannot draw conclusions on women of their times in general. And as much as I would have loved to learn about them more, I am sure that no matter how many history books were written about them, no matter how many manuscripts have reached us *from* them or *about* them, I will never be able to fully understand their experience. Christine de Pizan and Wallada bint al-Mustakfi lived, thrived and their words found a way to reach us down the centuries because they chose to reflect upon their *own* individual experiences both personal and societal. In my thesis I presented a study of two women only, I cannot draw generalizations about how other women were because experience is incomparable.

Endnotes:

¹ several verses were written by Ibn Zaydun describing Wallada's beauty

أَوْ صَاغَهُ وَرِقًا مَحْضًا، وَتَوَجَّهُ
مِنْ نَاصِعِ الثَّبْرِ إِبْدَاعًا وَتَحْسِينًا

(Ibn Zaydun 49)

And in another instance

وَفِي السَّبِيْرَاءِ الرَّقْمِ، وَسَطِّ قَبَابِهِمْ،
تَبَايَرْنَ خَلْقَاهُ، فَعَبِلَ مِنْعَمٌ،
فَللعَانِكِ المَرْتَجِ مَا حَازَ مَنزَرٌ؛
بَعِيدُ مَنَاطِ القَرَطِ أَحْوَرُ أَوْطَفُ
تَأَوَّدَ، فِي أَعْلَاهُ، لَدُنْ مَهْفَهُ
وَللغُصْنِ المِهْتَزِّ مَا صَمَّ مِطْرَفُ

(Ibn Zaydun 49)

² Cf. Those lines were echoed by another Andalusian poetess, Hafsa bint al-Hajj al-Rakuniyaa, who lived in

Granada in the twelfth century (d.1190 AD); she was also known for her famous and unabashed love affair with the poet Abu Ja'af'r Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Malil Ibn Sai'd. She took the initiative as well in the following lines directed to

Abu Ja'af'r:

Shall I visit you or shall you visit me? For my heart always bows to what you long for;
My mouth is a source of clear sweet water, and the hair of my head is a leafy shade.
I hoped you were thirsty and struck by the sun, when the moon hour would bring me to you;
Give me answer quickly it is not nice, O Jamil that you keep Buthyana waiting! (Hafsa tr. Schippers 149)

³

زَارِنِي، بَعْدَ هَجْعَةٍ، وَالتَّرِيَا
فَرَشَفْتِ الرُّضَابَ أَعْدَبَ رَشْفِ،
وَنَعِمْنَا بِلَفِّ جِسْمِ بِجِسْمِ
يَا لَهَا لَيْلَةٌ تَجَلَّى دَجَاهَا
رَاحَةَ تَقْدُرُ الظَّلَامَ بِشِيرِ
وَهَصْرَتِ القَضِيْبِ اللُّطْفَ هَصْرِ
لِلنَّصَافِي وَقَرَعَ نَعْرَ بِنَعْرِ
مِنْ سَنَاءِ وَجَنَّتِيهِ عَن ضَوْءِ فَجْرِ
أَنْ يَطْوِلَ القَصِيْرُ مِنْهَا بِعُمْرِي
قَصَرَ الوَصْلُ عُمَرَهَا وَيُوْدِي

(Ibn Zaydun 314)

⁴ The exact lines are as follows :

وَعَرَّكَ مِنْ عَهْدِ وِلَادَةٍ
تَطُنُّ الوَفَاءَ بِهَا وَالظَّنُونُ
هِيَ المَاءُ يَأْبَى عَلَى قَابِضِ
سَرَابٌ تَرَأَى وَبَرَقٌ وَمَضُ
فِيهَا تَقُولُ عَلَى مَنْ فَرَضُ
وَيَمْنَعُ زَبْدَتَهُ مَن مَخْضُ
(Ibn Zaydun)

⁵ The exact lines are as follows :

إِنْ تَكُنْ نَالَتِكَ، بِالضَّرْبِ، يَدِي؛
فَلَقَدْ كُنْتُ، لِعُمْرِي، فَادِيَا لَكَ
فَتَقِي مَنِي بَعْدَ ثَابِتِ،
وَلَنْ سَأَكُ يَوْمَ، فَاعْلَمِي
وَأَصَابَتِكَ بِمَا لَمْ أَرُدْ
بِالمَالِ وَبِعضِ الوَلَدِ
وَضَمِيرِ خَالِصِ المَعْتَقِدِ
أَنْ سَيَلُوهُ سُرُورِ بَغْدِ
(Ibn Zaydun 56)

⁶ The virelai is a form of song, which usually begins with a refrain, followed by a stanza of four lines, of which the first two are repeated musical lines, the last two lines of stanza return to the music of the refrain (Holmes). The rondeau is derived from dance-rounds (fondes or jondels) with singing accompaniment the refrain was sung by the chorus. The poem is constructed on two rhymes only with lines of eight or ten syllables, and the first word or phrase of the first line is used as a refrain (Brogan); The ballade is the most famous of those fixed forms, comprising 28 lines of octosyllables,, and four line envoi (Preminger).

⁷ Guillaume de Lorris' section provides an account of the protocol of loving, from the viewpoint of a male lover who courts the object of his desire. As it stands, the poem provides a manual of the art of courtly loving in a narrative form. Jean de Meun's continuation brings in a new set of characters to advise and educate the Lover. This is when the narrative becomes a set of debates about the practice of love and women's role. ("Roman De La Rose.")

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