

RESSENYES

BALDWIN, John W.

The Language of Sex: Five voices Northern France around 1200

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John Baldwin uses five distinct discourses — medical, theological, Andre the Chaplain for the Ovidian literature of the schools, the romances and the fabliaux to make a study of language and sexuality in northern France between 1185 and 1215. The fact that Baldwin uses five different discourses and restricts his study in this way is unusual as most studies of medieval sexuality have concentrated on one discourse or activity, but which has been placed in a geographically and chronologically extensive context. Unfortunately, like other studies of its kind the fact that the source material comes almost exclusively from men, with the exceptions of Marie de France and Marie d'Oignies, means that the work is subject to a masculine bias, and of course it must not be forgotten that even Marie d'Oignies' testimony reaches us through the voice of her confessor, Jacques de Vitry. While attempting to ignore any irony or humour in the texts, the author uses feminist terminology to give a historical interpretation of the texts by reducing them to a literal reading. He looks in turn at the different elements related to sexuality, such as sexual desire, the body, the physiological parameters and so on, sees how

these are reflected and dealt with in the different discourses and evaluates the consequences these have for the construction of gender. In other words, he investigates medieval sexuality in terms of both gender and eroticism.

The period Baldwin examines was a time when women enjoyed sexual equality in a generally otherwise male dominated society; this was because of the still widely accepted Galenic two-sperm theory. Aristotle's theories, which had far reaching effects for women were later to change this. However, it was also the time when the sexual parameters for both clergy and laymen alike were being formulated. The ecclesiastics were intent on laying down the rules related to sexual behaviour (chastity, marriage, sexual intercourse) and on bringing them under their jurisdiction. In many ways they were very successful and the five discourses reveal how the different sectors of the public to which they were directed agreed, disagreed or simply ignored them.

Baldwin argues that the upsurge of heterodoxy in France in the twelfth century with the revival of Manichean dualism, which condemned as evil sexual activity, propagation and marriage, left

the theologians no alternative but to reconsider the question of human sexuality. They proceeded to lay down both the physical and social parameters of sexuality, that is, deciding what was socially and physically acceptable. But the church was also concerned with bringing marriage under its complete jurisdiction and with convincing the laity that this was right: Pope Innocent the Third's final victory in the ruling on Philip Augustus' and Queen Ingeborg's marriage facilitated the spread of the church's influence from the ruling classes down through to the rest of society. The author shows how biblical sources were used as arguments and he follows the members of Pierre the Chanter's school working back in an attempt to trace their source materials. By doing so he demonstrates how Augustine's views were inherited by the Chanter and his disciples and how they were vital in forming the theological tradition. Later on new views brought in by the Latin translations of Aristotle's works on natural science and metaphysics and which were so influential in forming later scholastic theology and philosophy, gradually gained ground and were to flourish in the later Middle Ages. Baldwin suggests that this means that Pierre the Chanter and his school of thought were really the last true disciples of the Augustine tradition.

Each discourse bears witness to a particular tradition within twelfth century France, but Baldwin's interest also lies in identifying their immediate audiences. The audiences of the particular discourses were, according to Baldwin, also reflected in the language used: by using common expressions and language the romances, which were originally intended for the aristocratic courts, were adapted for the common audiences. However, discourse is not necessarily a mirror image of society, but may itself act upon that very same society by affecting social behaviour. Baldwin suggests that the roman-

ces, for example, proposed behaviour patterns and ideals which were eventually adopted by the aristocratic public to which they were addressed, while the fabliaux gave identity to the bourgeoisie in the towns. In this way the different discourses were positively active in shaping society.

In addition, Baldwin asserts that by looking at more than one discourse we are more likely to form a truer picture of social reality than if we take each discourse individually. In other words, each discourse will represent an extreme, but when they are compared and contrasted with each other we can see how they overlap with each other and a general overall view of society is obtained. In other words, society is not entirely made up of sharply defined groups, but is conditioned by overlapping multiple discourses and for this reason it is important to look at the various differing discourses of the period in question if we want to get a truer picture. The author shows, for example, how two seemingly different discourses, the theological and Andre the Chaplain come surprisingly close in concurring with each other on the subject in question.

Each discourse is discussed in detail, leaving the reader in no doubt as to what it consists of and making it unnecessary to refer to the original itself if one does not wish to, although there are extensive notes on the texts at the end of the book. Each discourse is studied in conjunction with its «discursive tradition» and in this way Baldwin is able to demonstrate the contemporary structures and what the audiences of the day expected from each discourse. For example, he traces Pierre the Chanter back to Pierre the Lombard and Augustine, he shows how Jean Renart relates to the Tristan and Iseut legend and how Andre the Chaplain connects to the Ovidian tradition and so on.

In chapter two, which deals with the participants in the sexual act, Baldwin

shows, for example, how Pierre the Chanter, drawing extensively from the scriptures, played an important role in the revival of homophobia. This was, in fact, the only position on which the other four discourses agreed unconditionally and whereas hermaphrodites were not to be blamed for their condition as it was their natural state, homosexuals were condemned. Other sexual acts which were not designed for procreation were also deemed sinful and the theologians even drew up a scale of «sinfulness» in which they classified in according to its seriousness and recommended appropriate punishments. Within the physiological parameters relating to sexual activity there was also great debate about the age of men and women involved in sexual activity —how age affects performance, the ideal age for sexual activity and how one's «humours» affect sexual prowess.

John Baldwin also dedicates a section of the book to the social parameters, tracing the attitudes reflected in the different discourses back to their original traditions; for example, Andre the Chaplain again reflects Ovid, while at the same time drawing on other traditions as well. Social categories were drawn up and the author shows how these reflected the interests of the dominant groups within society: courtly love was for the aristocrat, whereas the peasants were thought to be too tired for love of this sort after a hard day in the fields —theirs was of a more bestial nature! On the other hand, a peasant woman was considered fair game for rape as far as an aristocrat was concerned. In contrast to the romances the fabliaux reflected a richly diversified social scene. Baldwin concludes, therefore, that social disparity dominated both discourses and the characters remain aware of the social barriers.

As sexuality was, for the theologians, related to the question of «concupiscentia» they also considered the pathology of desire. Baldwin gives fascinating evidence of

how while Andre the Chaplain distorted medical facts stating that intercourse weakens the body, causes insomnia and shortens life, the medical treatises sometimes recommended therapeutic coitus, such as frequent intercourse with many partners to relieve certain disorders. This was, of course, highly questionable to the theologians, who preferred to «cast out satan by satanic means», using dubious therapies such as locking a cleric in a cell with his lover until they had tired each other out!

The discussion amongst the theologians in Pierre the Chanter's times about both the reduction of celibacy on the one hand and an attempt to create an absolutely clear division between the laity and the clergy in sexual matters on the other, is dealt with in chapter three. This was something which had been overshadowed by Abelard's own experience and which was countered by the scholastic tradition of the clerical lover, the latter so often reflected in the bawdy fabliaux. However, the Lateran council in 1215 strengthened the requirements for chastity fully and made the religious calling a possibility for larger sections of the population. Here Baldwin reminds the reader that it was women like Marie d'Oignies, who, through their lifestyle and dress became what he calls «living sermons» for the ecclesiastics. He shows how in contrast to the theologians the fabliaux «challenged this feigned modesty» and therefore, at the same time «Augustine's shame», by exposing the male and female body to view.

Baldwin notes with interest how little attention was paid to the end result of an activity which generated so much interest. The church justified sexual activity as a means to an end and was therefore interested in fecundity, the sinfulness of contraception and fertility problems. This contrasts sharply with the almost total lack of interest in children displayed by the authors of the fabliaux and the

romances, the one notable exception being the *lais* of Marie de France and it is suggested that this is because she is a woman.

The Language of Sex is an extremely interesting, very readable book. It is well written and full of fascinating informa-

tion and it is to be highly recommended in anyone interested in the period around 1200, in the gendering of the male and specially female bodies and how this is reflected in discourse.

Gillian McClure Blackmore

BROOKE, Christopher

The Medieval Idea of Marriage

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. XVIII, 325 p., 9 il.

Onze assajos, alguns d'ells publicats amb anterioritat, configuren aquest llibre de Christopher Brooke, professor d'història eclesiàstica a la Universitat de Cambridge. L'obra s'introdueix en l'anàlisi del matrimoni, en l'Europa Occidental, en el període comprès entre els anys 1000-1500, i se centra principalment en els segles XII i XIII. Brooke, un dels pioners en l'estudi del matrimoni, per penetrar en el seu objecte de recerca aplica metodologia d'història social, política, religiosa i legal, també recorre a d'altres disciplines com la literatura, l'art, l'antropologia i la teologia. Dues són les preocupacions, recurrents, d'aquest estudi: definir el matrimoni i determinar si la naturalesa del matrimoni cristià té alguna cosa que la diferencia de la resta de relacions de parentiu.

El primer capítol s'anomena «Approaches». Es tracta d'una aproximació a la matèria i d'una declaració d'intencions. L'autor es mostra respectuós amb el treball i les fonts utilitzades per demògrafs i historiadors socials, però remarca la necessitat de recórrer també a d'altres fonts, com les literàries i les teològiques, que esdevenen vitals en la seva exposició. Considera que la literatura, sotmesa a una crítica rigorosa, proporciona una informació valuosa que, tanmateix, no situa al mateix nivell que les dades que es poden extreure de sermons o tractats. En la seva recerca de les claus del matrimoni medieval explora, sobretot, dret, teologia, lite-

ratura i art. Un repàs a la biografia de santa Caterina de Siena, els sermons de sant Bernardino de Siena (1380-1444), la correspondència mantinguda entre el mercader florentí Francesco de Marco Datini (c. 1335-1410) i la seva esposa Margherita i, per últim, la figura de la mare d'Enric VII, lady Margaret Beaufort, tanquen aquest capítol.

El segon assaig s'anomena «The inheritance, Christian and Roman». Tracta el tema de l'herència que rep el matrimoni medieval: de l'antiguitat, dels jueus, de l'Església primitiva, de Roma i dels pobles «bàrbars». La Bíblia és presentada com la font més adient per conèixer el matrimoni jueu i cristià. La Bíblia i les interpretacions que n'han fet teòlegs, papes... i les corrents de pensament sorgides com a conseqüència d'aquestes interpretacions són comentades aquí. El nostre autor considera que, al segle XII, l'essència del matrimoni, de les seves lleis i doctrines no és més que la reafirmació de posicions de centúries anteriors. En aquest segle es produeix un enfortiment de la legislació matrimonial, perquè des de llavors el matrimoni és un sacrament. I aquí és on aquest capítol enllaça amb el següent, el tercer: «The cult of celibacy in the Eleventh and Twelfth centuries». El celibat, com a valor en alça, positiu, s'ha de relacionar amb la Reforma Gregoriana i amb els corrents més ascètics que pensen el matrimoni. Alguns teòlegs, com Hug