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Joël Blanchard, *Poétiques de l'amour: Sexualité, genre, pouvoir XIe-XVe siècle*. Paris: Passés composés/Humensis, 2022. 334 pp. €22.00. (pb). ISBN 9782379332517.

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Guillaume de Lorris famously brags that "l'art d'amours est toute enclose" in his *Roman de la Rose*. Joël Blanchard's newest book is similarly ambitious; it is an attempt to tell "l'histoire de notre discours amoureux" (p. 9) from the eleventh century through the fifteenth. Unlike Guillaume, who refers to his material as "bone et nueve," Blanchard recognizes that his project is "loin d'être neuf" (p. 9). He nonetheless calls for renewed attention to the long history of amorous discourse in literature, focusing on its relations to (in particular) theology, the trivium, and medical science. He is interested in "les aspérités, les turbulences, les résistances, les formes de restauration ou de réactivation à partir desquelles se construit le discours amoureux dans l'imaginaire médiéval" (pp. 15-16). It logically follows that his approach is not sociological or historical but rather "literary," insofar as it emphasizes cross-pollinations and the bumpiness of the evolution of poetic representations of love.

Blanchard's volume is divided into three parts. The first, "Matrices et modèles," begins by looking to theology. After stressing how Saint Paul can waffle on whether chastity is superior to marriage, Blanchard discusses the emergence of the notion of "Christian virginity" in the works of John Cassian and Saint Jerome. Chastity in the former differs from ancient philosophic continence, insofar as it is cast as a persistently consuming effort. Jerome is, similarly, concerned with dramatizing, so as to combat, "l'effet irrépressible de la libido, son empire" (p. 25). Augustine, on the other hand, views things differently, as he believes that concupiscence is not necessarily sinful. Blanchard then traces how these various Christian perspectives on love made their way into twelfth-century thought, focusing on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and Aelred of Rievaulx's reflections on *amicitia*.

The second chapter is about Latin rhetoric and poetics, whose influence on high medieval writers, argues Blanchard, cannot be disassociated from the Gregorian Reform. This chapter observes how Cicero's *De inventione*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and Horace's *Ars poetica* impacted such authors as Matthew of Vendôme and Geoffrey of Vinsauf. Blanchard then looks at Bernard Silvester's *Cosmographia* and Alain de Lille's *De planctu Naturae*, studying both their engagement with Latin intellectual culture and their *gaillardise*. Afterward, Blanchard turns to Abelard and Eloise's letters to highlight "l'étendue de la culture des deux amants" (p. 46). He focuses on their debt to Ovid--and how counterintuitive Ovid's great influence in the twelfth century might be said to be. Delving a bit further into this issue, Blanchard highlights Petrus Cantor's refusal to

condemn Ovidian materials. He also touches on the "empreinte ovidienne" (p. 53) in Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*.

The troubadours distinguish themselves from these two models. In chapter three, which begins with Guillaume de Poitiers's blend of misogyny and idealism and insists that *fin'amor* was not a *creatio ex nihilo*, Blanchard notably focuses on troubadour *vidas*, the relation of lyrics to religion and feudalism, some slippery Occitan terms (*mezura*, *joi*, *sofrirs*, etc.), the phenomenon of *amor de lonh*, the implication of all five senses in lyrics, and the enemy figures that they invoke. He stresses how powerfully Occitan *fin'amor* came to compete with Latin discourses on love.

Chapter four is about "le discours théologique sur la *delectatio morosa* et le discours médical" (p. 77). The concept of *delectatio morosa*, which Blancard traces back to John Cassian and posits as "la source même de l'amour courtois, ou du moins...une clé de compréhension du phénomène" (p. 80), was, in the thirteenth century, scrutinized by William of Auxerre in theological terms, where it was related to theories of sin. Offering "un récit alternatif à celui de la théologie" (p. 83), physicians did not manifest "une réprobation quelconque envers la délectation charnelle" (p. 84). Blanchard relates this to an "equality" in pleasure hearkening back to debates on female emission of sperm. This chapter concludes by discussing homosexuality, arguing that it was widespread--why else would it have been so vehemently condemned?--but claiming that its stigmatization "a privé les couples homosexuels d'une culture amoureuse" (p. 94).

Chapter five is concerned with verse narratives. Blanchard reflects on the medieval *translatio* of such texts as *Pyramus and Thisbe*. He is interested in "le dur art de durer," the obstacles "qui donne[nt] au roman sa temporalité propre au regard du lyrisme" (p. 102). This chapter runs through romances by Chrétien and others (for instance, Heldris de Cornuälle's *Silence*). It highlights various poetic elements, such as topical amplification, oxymora, and allegory. Raising issues of subversion and irony in relation to lyric *fin'amor*, Blanchard casts these verse romances as simply widening its scope: "ils n'ont rien ébranlé de son assise, ni édulcoré son caractère transgressif, exclusif et paradoxal" (p. 114).

Part two, "Du miroir de Narcisse au Miroir des Princes," uses Jean de Meun to think about changes in late medieval amorous discourse. The first chapter, on the *Rose*, argues that the discourse of Reason explores new ethical horizons. Those of Ami and la Vieille highlight paradoxes, artifice, ruses; yet this is because of constraints on freer expressions of desire. Nature and Genius raise, in their interventions, issues related to naturalness and procreation. For Blanchard, the differences between Guillaime's *Rose* and Jean's continuation are crucial. With Jean, love notably exceeds its former confines. "D'une quête...on passe à un 'compendium', à une encyclopédie des savoirs, à une somme scolastique...autrement dit un 'miroir aux amoureux'" (p. 131).

The importance of this shift is manifest in its posterity. Thus, in chapter seven, Blanchard considers how, in the *Échecs amoureux*, "le champs amoureux est étendu jusqu'aux limites de l'univers et englobe l'ensemble des relations humaines" (p. 135). This is more pronounced in Évrard de Conty's commentary on the *Échecs*, where "la réflexion déborde le cadre de la *fin'amor* et ouvre sur un autre champ de vision plus 'social,' plus 'politique,' plus 'civil'" (p. 141). Interestingly, Blanchard likens this to an "ouverture sur le monde" with implications for attitudes toward "'diversités' sexuelles" (p. 141). He also locates a concern with "la bonne conjugalité" in this text, which is developed in Philippe de Mézières's *Livre de la vertu du sacrament de mariage et*

du réconfort des femmes mariées, where the author emphasizes the joys of freely chosen marriage. This chapter looks, too, to the prominence of the story of Griselda in Philippe's text and the *Decameron*. It concludes by glancing to attitudes toward marriage, women, and desire in the work of the clerk Jean Gerson.

Gerson famously participated in the *Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, the subject of chapter eight. This debate raises "des thèmes toujours d'actualité" (p. 153). Christine de Pizan refused, of course, to "apporter sa caution à un livre qui...ne réussit qu'à travestir la réalité oppressante de la condition féminine à son époque" (p. 157). Blanchard highlights Christine's allusions to Dante as a way of getting at both her views on women and love and her more properly literary engagement with issues of authorial responsibility.

Chapter nine is about "misogynie et littérature." While many *fabliaux* contain "des traces indélébiles de misogynie," Blanchard nonetheless casts them as "peut-être les seules fictions médiévales où s'entendent librement des voix féminines" (p. 171). Thus, in *Ignauré*, women get "le dernier mot" (p. 172). Afterward, Blanchard jumps to later antifeminist writings, such as Matheolus's *Lamentations*. Eustace Deschamps's *Miroir de mariage*, Blanchard then suggests, is more interested in its own encyclopedic pretensions than in the question of conjugal relations. *Les Quinze Joies du Mariage*, Blanchard argues, is focused on exposing "la fable de l'amour conjugal" (p. 177). This chapter also peeks to Antoine de La Sale's *Jehan de Saintré*, where "la satire vise la femme" (p. 181); to the *Decameron*, where Boccaccio "revendique une voie qui n'emprunte ni les chemins de l'ascétisme chrétien ni ceux de la débauche effrénée" (pp. 182-183); and finally, to "the Wife of Bath's Prologue," the message of which Blanchard translates as "Respectez-nous et nous vous respecterons" (p. 188).

Chapter ten asks, "Comment comprendre que les poétiques de l'amour infusent d'autres champs de réflexion?" (p. 189). It looks at the figure of the "poète-croisé," which clearly juxtaposes the register of *fin'amor* with that of religion. It looks, too, at the relationship of late medieval poetry to the law, concentrating on Alain Chartier's *La Belle Dame sans mercy* and the "querelle" it inspired. For Blanchard, the incursion of the juridical into the literary is an invitation for ethical readings of texts. It also reflects a growing "exigence de vérité de la parole amoureuse" (p. 200).

Part three, "De l'amour à l'amour de l'écriture," is about late medieval poetry. Chapter eleven considers the nature of self-reflexivity in Machaut's *dits*. Machaut "réhabilite et réinvente...la *fin'amor* en explorant des chemins que ni les trouvères ni a fortiori les troubadours n'avaient parcourus" (p. 211). This chapter gestures toward the oft-recognized importance, for Machaut, of issues of authorship and the material book. The *Fontaine amoureuse* raises, moreover, the question of late medieval negotiations of the relationship of *clerc* to *chevalier*.

The subject of chapter twelve is "la poésie amoureuse comme pratique sociale" (p. 219). The *Cent Ballades* and the *Réponses* exemplify the phenomenon of "composition collective" (p. 220). In this chapter, Blanchard is interested in how, in late medieval aristocratic circles, "l'activité poétique fonctionne comme un révélateur de l'être profond" (p. 222). Thus Charles d'Orléans negotiates in new ways such oppositions as those between the personal and the social, interior and exterior. Similar issues are at play for the Cour amoureuse, a group founded in Paris in 1401 to "célébrer le sexe féminin et cultiver la poésie" (p. 230). "Son originalité tient à son caractère (faussement) consensuel," writes Blanchard (p. 234). This chapter concludes by looking at Christine's *Dit de la*

Rose. Its "condamnation de la médisance" (p. 235) is, among other things, a stance against a communal behavior gone wrong.

Chapter thirteen is concerned with women writers before Christine. It looks at what happens when "la statue parle" (p. 238) in *chansons de toile* and trobairitz lyrics. "Dans ces expériences poétiques qu'orchestre parfois une poétesse," writes Blanchard, "on redécouvre le sens profond de la lyrique" (p. 241). He then focuses on the *Réponse du Bestiaire d'amour*. The *Réponse* punctures the male lover's pretensions, as the female voice "déroge à la lecture dominante" of *fin'amor* (p. 246).

The final chapter is about Christine de Pizan. It first emphasizes the uncertainty with which the *Dit de la Pastoure* ends, which may signal how Christine is (already) looking for solutions beyond *fin'amor*. This is more pronounced in the geometric, architectural, activist pretensions of the *Livre des faits et bonnes moeurs de Charles V* and the *Cité des Dames*. These forays beyond *fin'amor* are not, however, "le désaveu du discours poétique" but rather its "extension" (p. 258), as "éthique et esthétique avancent d'un pas égal" (p. 259). To illustrate "le caractère à la fois organique et diversifié" (p. 259) of Christine's *oeuvre*, Blanchard chooses two texts: the *Heures de contemplacion*, where religious fervor and particular concern with women rub shoulders, and the *Ditié de Jeanne d'Arc*, where "s'y chevauchent prophéties, patrotisme et féminisme" (p. 269), and Christine looks for solutions beyond the "natural." The book ends with a nod to Marguerite Porete and to the potentially dangerous interplay of *fin'amor* and feminine mysticism in *le Miroir des âmes simples anéanties*.

Blanchard concludes by briefly reflecting on his volume's wide trajectory. In the space that remains, I wish to reflect on why I believe that the summarization I have been engaging in does particular justice to this critical text. The summary draws attention to its most distinctive quality: its extensive range. One would be hard-pressed to find a recent critical text that engages with more medieval works (many prominent modern figures also make fleeting appearances). This is perhaps a refreshing break from more microscopic endeavors, as it implies that the biggest questions should still be being energetically tackled. It is, moreover, particularly welcome to read a French critic's engagement with towering questions related to gender and sexuality, as these issues have been so important in the anglophone sphere (where it is arguable that they are now at risk of being sidelined). The scope of Blanchard's text opens it up, however, to criticisms both fair and (in my opinion) less fair. Less fair but perhaps inevitable is the temptation to note what is left out from Blanchard's long and wide itinerary. Only about a page, for instance, is devoted to the *Tristan* material, and prose romances are almost entirely ignored. Yet, I would argue, Blanchard's notion of a literary approach implies that his trajectory will be idiosyncratic. It is perhaps more surprising that Blanchard is not in conversation with anglophone critical works with similarly vast scopes that treat related questions or material: for example, Simon Gaunt's *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* or Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay's *Knowing Poetry: Verse in Medieval France from* the Rose *to the* Rhétoriqueurs.[1]

A fairer criticism would no doubt be that the decision to touch on so many literary texts ironically minimizes the literariness of Blanchard's work, which does not really have the space to engage substantially with textual nuances. The decision (almost unanimously) to cite texts in modern translation does feel like it prevents such close textual analysis. To some extent, then, this volume reads like a fantastically ambitious survey course. Indeed, I hope it will be of particular interest

to students trying to figure out where different elements may fit into the larger puzzle of things--or what the basic pieces of the puzzle are.

There is, too, the question of the overall argument. In this volume (and contrary to what the back cover suggests), it does not seem to me that things are fitted into a tight or daring theoretical argument about the relation between the terms in the subtitle: gender, sexuality, and power. Foucault is mentioned occasionally, but engagement with feminist and/or queer scholarship on gender and sexuality is minimal. Rather, Blanchard seems more interested in how poetic amorous discourse continually grew, ever expanding in new directions. This decision is potentially productive, insofar as there is little risk of the modern critic fitting the medieval texts into his own eccentric or *intéressé* lens. It also allows for the possibility that Blanchard's volume will be very useful to scholars of gender and sexuality looking to engage with different material.

In sum, then, this is a volume of extremely vast learning. As I began this review by noting a similarity between Guillaume de Lorris's text and Blanchard's, I'll conclude with one between his text and Jean de Meun's. Of Jean's *Rose*, Blanchard writes, "D'une quête--la cueillette de la rose--ou passe à un 'compendium', à une encyclopédie des savoirs, à une somme scolastique, un speculum, au sens médiéval du terme, autrement dit un 'miroir aux amoureux'" (p. 131). As mentioned, Blanchard then traces the expanding encyclopedic pretensions of amorous discourse in such works as the *Échecs amoureux* and Évrard de Conty's commentary of it. If Blanchard's vision of amorous discourse in late medieval literature emphasizes this compilatory mode of exegesis, it is fitting that his volume responds as a sort of very rich exegetic compilation of amorous discourse in medieval letters.

NOTE

[1] Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay, *Knowing Poetry: Verse in Medieval France from* the Rose *to the* Rhétoriqueurs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

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