Reading Transgressive Sexualities in the Middle Ages (LT 22)

(P. Knox)

The seminar course aims to explore (on the one hand) how a range of medieval ideas about sex and gender were mobilised in texts, and (on the other hand) the different ways in which we, today, might read and think about those medieval texts and ideas. Over the four seminars, we will examine the alterity of the medieval past while also recognising its closeness, and the different forms of identification or solidarity with that past that we might (or might not) want to embrace. A mix of medieval and modern concepts and terms will appear, and we will discuss what they might afford us as readers of medieval texts; these include sodomy, homosexuality, virginity, heterosexuality, transgender. We'll spend some of our time thinking about wide-ranging approaches (from within and without medieval studies) that will give us a useful conceptual grounding, and some of our time looking different kinds of medieval writing. En route we'll think about what the cultural history of sexualities might offer to our reading of literary texts, and also what the distinctive category of literature might offer to the history of sexuality. There are many more texts that might speak to our concerns than are listed here; I'll be encouraging you to bring along for discussion any examples, problems, or questions that you encounter in your wider reading.

In advance of the course, I’d like you to have a look at two of the influential theoretical approaches listed below, and dip into a few of the wide-ranging studies of medieval/premodern sexuality listed further down. A number of these will reappear as core reading for the weekly seminars. All the ‘further reading’ in each week’s list of things to look at is for reference only – you can glance at it if you like, but the discussion will focus on the works listed under ‘Approaches’ and ‘Texts’.

Useful background

Some influential theoretical approaches

Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, tr. Robert Hurley, 3 vols (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986; first publ. as Histoire de la sexualité, 1976–84). [note that the 4th volume was posthumously published a few years ago as Les aveux de la chair]


**Some wide-ranging studies of medieval or premodern sexuality**

*Essay collections*

*Constructing Medieval Sexualities*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schulz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)


*Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).


*Monographs*


——, *Sex and the New Medieval Literature of Confession, 1150–1300* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2009).


**SEMINAR OUTLINE**

**1. Histories of Sexuality: Starting Points**

**Approaches**


Texts


Further reading


2. Virginities

Approaches


Texts

*Hali Meidhad in Medieval English Prose for Women from the Katherine Group and ‘Ancrene Wisse’,* ed. Bella Millet and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), scanned selection to be provided


[available online]

[you might also want to consult the edition by B.A. Windeatt, (Harlow, 2004)]

Further Reading


3. Deviant Heterosexualities

Approaches


[available on iDiscover]


[available via iDiscover]
Texts


[on Moodle]


[available online]


4. Transgressive Genders


Primary


Further Reading


