



Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages

R. Howard Bloch

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"Mr. Bloch has attempted to establish what he calls a 'literary anthropology.' The project is important and ambitious. It seems to me that Mr. Bloch has completely achieved this ambition." –Michel Foucault

"Bloch's Study is a genuinely interdisciplinary one, bringing together elements of history, ethnology, philology, philosophy, economics and literature, with the undoubted ambition of generating a new synthesis which will enable us to read the Middle Ages in a different light.

Stated simply, and in terms which do justice neither to the density nor the subtlety of his argument, Bloch's thesis is this: that medieval society perceived itself in terms of a vertical mode of descent from origins. This model is articulated etymologically in medieval theories of grammar and language, and is consequently reflected in historical and theological writings; it is also latent in the genealogical structure of the aristocratic family as it began to be organized in France in the twelfth century, and is made manifest in such systems of signs as heraldry and the adoption of patronymns. . . .

It is an ingenious and compelling synthesis which no medievalist, even on this side of the Atlantic, can afford to ignore." –Nicholas Mann, *Times Literary Supplement*

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