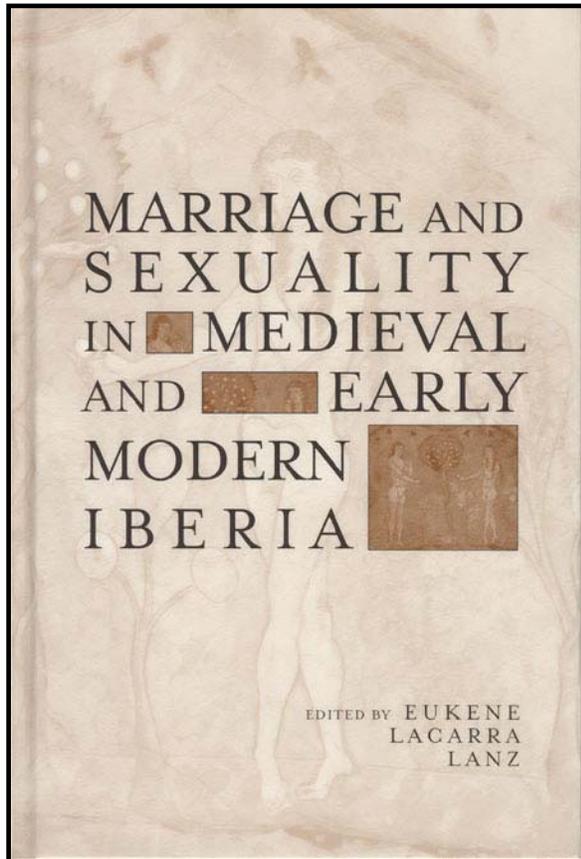


Lacarra Lanz, Eukene, Editor. *Marriage and Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*. New York: Routledge, 2002. pp. 265.
ISBN: 0-415-93634-9

Reviewed by James McCutcheon
University of California, Santa Barbara



Though this book does not pretend to be a comprehensive study of marriage and sexuality in medieval and early modern Spain, its variety of essays provides the reader with an ample view of several different aspects of sexuality in Spain from the middle of the seventh to the middle of the seventeenth century. The essays examine a wide selection of materials consisting of both literary and nonliterary works, while the approaches used reflect current trends in literary and historical studies, most clearly those regarding women's agency. In her introduction, Eukene Lacarra Lanz establishes the years of 1215 (the Fourth Lateran Council) and 1563 (the Council of Trent) as crucial, and the essays that follow never lose sight of the broader historical context in which the various texts examined were written. Though they cover a range of issues in a vast frame of time, the essays of this collection ultimately reflect on questions of power and how marriage and sexuality were used either to reinforce a male-dominant society, or, in some cases, to resist it.

The first of the four parts of the book consists of three essays which deal specifically with issues pertaining to marriage. In chapter one, "Marriage and sexuality in Al-Andalus," Manuela Marín examines several treatises written in Al-Andalus between the ninth and eleventh centuries in order to reveal how men attempted to control women's sexuality through marriage. Her analysis serves to refute traditional European views of medieval Islamic society as being sexually permissive, while it provides for a comparison with how sexuality was dealt with in medieval Christian Spain. The normative texts studied by Marín (which, as she reminds the reader, were written by men of the urban elite for other men of the same class) reveal the attempt to control women's sexuality through marriage. In the second chapter, "Intimate Violence: Shrew Taming as Wedding Ritual in the *Conde Lucanor*," Louise O. Vasvári studies the shrew motif in Don Juan Manuel's fourteenth century text, and looks at how this motif is carried on in Arabic and European versions of the story from the Middle Ages to the present. In this highly insightful study, Vasvári argues that what is actually masked in the humorous tone of these stories of violence against women is patriarchal

dominance, as they serve as a reminder to women of their subordinate position. She points out that the shrew-taming motif is still present today and proposes that this discourse only serves to perpetuate the subordination of women. In chapter 3, “The *Consells-Consejos* on Marriage and Their Broader Sentimental Context,” Antonio Cortijo Ocaña analyzes three doctrinal letters that advise women to become obedient wives. Tracing the sources of the letters to religious writings, he shows that the letters are a means of restraining female sexuality, and therefore fit in with the medieval misogynist tradition. The function of these letters contrasts with that of sentimental narratives, in which women are advised to marry in order to fulfill sexual desire. This well-researched essay provides the reader with new insight into the principal topics of sentimental narratives.

In the second part, entitled “Playing the Game of Wife and Mother”, both essays question the way marriage and motherhood has been traditionally viewed by historians. In chapter 4, “Pawn or Player?: Violant of Bar and the Game of Matrimonial Politics in the Crown of Aragon (1380-1396),” Dawn Bratsch-Prince analyzes the correspondence of the French princess Violant of Bar in order to show how noble women used marriage as a means to secure their own political, as well as personal, interests. These letters, which are edited for the first time in an appendix to the chapter, show how Violant of Bar became an active agent in the strengthening of her political power. Bratsch-Prince’s fascinating study illustrates how the princess went from a pawn, used by her mother in the game of marital diplomacy, to a player in the same game. In the next chapter, “Milking the Poor: Wet-nursing and the Sexual Economy of Early Modern Spain,” Emilie L. Bergmann traces the evolution of wet-nursing from the twelfth century to the premodern period through historical records, medical treatises, and moral writings. This extensive study on wet-nursing sheds light on many aspects of sexuality in Spain of that time. Bergmann finds that, although increasingly discouraged at the time, wet-nursing continued as an optimal means of producing multiple heirs in order to protect against infant mortality and ultimately carry on the family name. She also shows that in some cases wet-nursing provided for a means of social mobility and that it even served the practical means of preventing men from committing adultery.

Each of the three chapters that make up part three, “Love and Sexuality: Allegory of Society’s Corruption,” deals with more illicit aspects of sexuality, with the first two focusing on literary works. In chapter 6, “Natural Love in Early Renaissance Spanish Theater: *Serafina*, an Anonymous *Comedia* of 1521,” David Castillo studies sexuality as represented on stage in the comedy *Serafina*. He traces the playful depiction of sexual activity to ancient times and recognizes it as common in medieval literature. Castillo’s study reveals that these representations were critical dialogues with the public that exposed the hypocrisy of many social codes of the time, as well as the artificiality of traditional representations of love. This essay is extremely informative as it sheds light on a way in which sixteenth century Spanish society criticized conventional treatment of sexual issues. In chapter 7, “Un engaño a los ojos’: Sex and Allegory in *La Lozana andaluza*,” Manuel da Costa Fontes examines sexuality and prostitution in another sixteenth century literary work, *La Lozana andaluza*, by Francisco Delicado, a convert of Jewish background. Da Costa Fontes briefly discusses several recent studies of the quasi-picaresque narrative in order to show the diverse, often conflicting, interpretations of the novel. After drawing several parallels between the life of the protagonist and that of the author, Da Costa Fontes concludes that Delicado did not intend to create a real female character; rather that he used the issues of sexuality and prostitution to serve as an

allegory for the discrimination against converts of Jewish background. In Chapter 8, "Changing boundaries of Licit and Illicit Unions: Concubinage and Prostitution," Eukene Lacarra Lanz looks at the dubious divisions between Concubinage and prostitution and shows how it was often simply a matter of labeling that separated the two. Her study includes the analysis of a variety of legal, religious, and notarial sources, which help her to uncover the arbitrariness of the definitions given to Concubinage and prostitution. She also reveals how women's resistance, whether conscious or not, served to destabilize the foundations of the moral discourse that sought to reinforce these subjective labels which served a male dominant society.

Both essays of Part four, "Female Approaches to Power: Revelation and 'Moral Pornography,'" serve to reveal the views women had about power and sexuality. In Chapter nine, "Writing and Sodomy in the inquisitorial Trial (1445-1496) of Tecla Servent," ... Surtz examines the writings of a visionary woman married against her will who was tried by the Inquisition. Surtz proposes that Tecla Servent's visions were conditioned by verbal and iconic texts with which she was familiar, and that they served to criticize the clergy and even the pope. In the final chapter of the collection, "'Moral Pornography': Angela Carter and María de Zayas," Marina S. Brownlee's analysis of the short stories of María de Zayas exposes the prejudices of seventeenth century Spanish society regarding issues of gender, race, and social class. Brownlee submits that Zayas uses pornography as a means of criticizing the accepted state of relations between men and women, and suggests that Zayas' views can be linked with those of many contemporary feminists.

The various essays of this study greatly contribute to the study of sexuality, marriage and power in medieval and early modern Spain, and they provide the reader with a basis upon which he or she can continue investigation into any number of related themes. Eukene Lacarra has done an exceptional job of compiling these persuasive essays covering a variety of issues over a wide range of time, yet all pertinent to the main theme of the title, *Marriage and Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*.