

Marsilio Ficino. *Kommentar til Platons Symposion, eller Om eros.*

Ed. Leo Catana. Platonselskabets Skriftserie 15. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2013. 338 pp. \$60. ISBN: 978-87-635-3046-0.

After the first English translation of Ficino's *Symposium* came out of the press in 1944, Paul Oskar Kristeller summed up the importance of this work with the following thought: "Among the works of Marsilio Ficino, leader of the Platonic Academy of Florence, his commentary of Plato's *Symposium* was certainly one of the most influential. This work is one of the few extensive commentaries Ficino wrote on Plato, and the only one that has a literary form and appeal in itself" ("Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's *Symposion*," *The Journal of Philosophy* 42.21 [1945]: 586). Sears Reynold Jayne's edition contained not only an English translation with extensive footnotes, but the Latin text itself. This edition made this important work available for scholars, but unfortunately the text contained many errors, and even the dating was incorrect. Despite other attempts, this matter was only resolved in 2002, when Pierre Laurens published a critical edition along with a modern French translation, thus giving an opportunity to scholars to work with the most adequate text possible. Over this past decade more translations from Laurens's edition have been rendered in other languages. The biggest achievement of Leo Catana's book is that he used this opportunity to create and publish the very first Danish translation of the *Symposium*. As a result, an accurate text is available for Danish (and may I add Norwegian and Swedish) researchers.

Written in 1468–69, *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis, De amore* is one of the most pleasant writings of Ficino. It describes one of the annual feasts held in the Villa Careggi by the Florentine Neoplatonists on Plato's birthday. Trying to relive the symposium that their Greek icon wrote about, each of them makes a speech about love. Leo Catana's book divides into three parts: first, we read a detailed introduction; then the Danish text of the *Symposium* follows; and, at the end, we find some useful research tools, such as the collection and translation of often-used Latin terms and expressions and a detailed bibliography for the subject matter.

The introduction contains an informative description of Florence and the Medicis in Ficino's age, thus making it possible to understand the work itself

without previous studies. A summary of Ficino's views on Plato, Hermes Trismegistos, and the *prisca theologia* also gives important pointers to the reader. An extract of the theology of Ficino also helps one not to get lost in the complex world of the *Symposium*.

The translation itself I found to be correct and punctually accurate. It seems to me that the concept was to make it as easy as possible for the reader to move through the whole book. The longer Latin sentences are divided into two or more in Danish, and the translator re-created Ficino's work in today's Danish, avoiding awkward Latinisms. The text itself is not interrupted with too many footnotes, and the Greek and Latin citations are also translated. I miss, however, the translator's notes on certain questionable points. It makes a faster and easier read, but a lot is lost: the reader does not see the hard decisions in translating Ficino into Danish. It would have been exciting to know which terms are causing trouble in this language. An example could be Ficino's salute to Giovanni Cavalcanti. The Latin text contains the greeting formula in Greek: "Marsilius Ficinis Iohanni Cavalcanti amico unico εὐ πρόαττειν." This becomes "med platonisk hilsen" ("with Platonic greetings," 97). The translation doesn't contain the actual meaning of the greeting formula, nor the fact that the fifteenth-century writer uses a classical Greek salutation within a Latin text.

It is without a doubt a big achievement that we have the first Danish translation of the *Symposium*, but the book offers something unique even to the wider international circle of scholars. Chapter 9 of the introduction describes the reception history of Ficino's Neoplatonism in Northern Europe. It was fascinating reading about it, and therefore I am not hesitant in recommending it to everyone who is interested in Ficino's work and life.

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