

*Über die Liebe oder Platos Gastmahl.* Marsilio Ficino.

Ed. Paul Richard Blum. Philosophische Bibliothek Band 642. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2014. xlviii + 216 pp. €19.90.

---

This is an enthusiastic review about a book that is an important contribution to Ficino scholarship: please do not stop reading it just because the book in question is a German translation or because you do not read this language; the notes and the comprehensive bibliography on one of the most focused texts of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European Renaissance culture make it an indispensable aid for all scholars in the field. Marsilio Ficino finished his commentary on Plato's *Symposium* in 1469; it is the only work that he also translated into Italian. Actually, the *De Amore* is a paratext on what is perhaps the most famous of the Platonic dialogues: it is the attempt to integrate some of Plato's ideas into a Christian tradition. Ficino's version of the Platonic theory of love (he coined the term "Platonic love"), his succinct descriptions and definitions of beauty, the astrological description of the causes of infatuation, love as a physiological disease, the explanations of action at a distance, and the doctrine of the evil eye in a cosmological context, to name but a few, made *De Amore* a seminal and inspirational work for Renaissance philosophers, writers, artists, medical doctors, and magicians.

As Professor Blum notes in his introduction, it is bewildering to the modern student that in Ficino's approach "quotation and interpretation form a seamless continuum" (xii). Indeed, the sophisticated amalgamation one encounters in the *De Amore* of religious, philosophical, astrological, magical, and medical traditions from very different sources, classical and medieval alike, combines sets of ideas that, for the most part, were not Ficino's own invention. Rather, they delineate a specific approach toward textual sources that Ficino considered to be the venerable testimonies of the one and true philosophy, Platonism. As Blum points out in his preface, the originality of the *De Amore* lies in its synthetic effort, which gave these doctrines a new and unexpected coherence.

In this reviewer's mind, art historians, literary historians, and historians of magic and medicine working between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries should have a sound firsthand knowledge and understanding of the *De Amore*. With Professor Blum's *Über die Liebe*, we have the contribution of one of the eminent scholars of Renaissance philosophy, and a pioneer in the field. Thirty years ago he published a bilingual edition of the *De Amore* with Meiner, basically a reedition of a much older German translation that was printed facing Raymond Marcel's 1956 edition of the Latin text. Even then, Blum's extensive notes and thoughtful introduction were indispensable for all scholars who were

interested in an in-depth understanding of the *De Amore*. The edition was a quiet contribution in a time when still relatively few works had appeared on Renaissance philosophy. (My 1984 copy has been literally read to pieces and is one of the most heavily annotated books I own.) Since then, vast amounts of scholarship have been done, not least thanks to Blum's edition. Now we have a new edition of the Latin text by Pierre Laurens and of Ficino's Italian version by Sandra Niccoli; and, of course, there is Sears Jayne's very useful English translation. The *De Amore* has also been translated into many other languages: for instance, *RQ* (67.3 [2014]: 935–36) published Krisztina Dull's review of Leo Catana's Danish version of the *De Amore*.

Blum's new edition comes with substantially augmented notes, now running to nearly 500, and a corrected and updated translation that is as indispensable for German readers because it incorporates the various readings of the Latin and the Italian versions of the text. And there is a very useful and comprehensive bibliography of secondary literature on the *De Amore*. The German publisher has to be thanked for publishing this book again at such an affordable price. This reviewer regrets only a couple of things: namely, that the Latin text has not been published again facing the translation, and that Blum's preface from the 1984 edition has not been republished. The new introduction is succinct and as witty as is to be expected, but it is mainly intended for specialists and students of philosophy who have already acquired some familiarity with the *Symposium*. Be that as it may, this book is a must have, not only for all Ficino scholars, but for all of us who are working with *kulturwissenschaften* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

SERGIUS KODERA, *Universität Wien*