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**Reeser, Todd W. Setting Plato Straight: Translating Ancient Sexuality in the Renaissance**

**Kenneth Borris**

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[See table of contents](#)

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Catherine Durant wrote novels and poetry as well as the ten delightful proverb plays Gethner has chosen for this collection. Originating as a popular parlour game, the proverb play presents a short, usually humorous sketch with largely stylized characters; the participants try to guess what proverb is illustrated. These privately-performed entertainments were not restricted by the increasingly rigid rules for classical dramaturgy, and could include risqué themes and satires of powerful people. Women are depicted here as intelligent and often independent characters. Students will find most of these plays amusing, and they could be performed as dialogues without elaborate staging.

For his translation, Gethner has aimed at, and achieved, readability and performability. He uses a loose, un-rhymed iambic pentameter to render rhymed alexandrines in the verse plays. For my taste, a few of Gethner's choices fail to respect the level of language. For example: "deadly embarrassment" (204) for "funeste embaras" ("discomfiture", or even "agony", are closer); "I intend to push you into a pleasing match" (205) for "sous d'agréables lois j'entends vous réduire"; "Can't figure out how to calm" (227) for "ne sait par où calmer" ("Is powerless to calm"); "gesturing indifferently to one or the other" (260) for "en faisant des mines indifféremment à l'une et à l'autre" ("addressing both women without distinction"). The translation of "Mademoiselle" as "miss," mainly in the proverb plays, is awkward and changes the tone; why not just use "Mademoiselle"? I also began to count the multiple reoccurrences of "in short." These are minor flaws in an otherwise admirable and useful collection.

JANE COUCHMAN  
Glendon College, York University

**Reeser, Todd W.**

***Setting Plato Straight: Translating Ancient Sexuality in the Renaissance.***

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. Pp. xii, 390 + 3 ill. ISBN 978-0-226-30700-8 (hardcover) US\$45.

For the study of same-sex love in the Latin West after around 1440, when Plato's prohomeroerotic dialogues on eros began to become accessible again, inquiry into his early modern reception is a great scholarly opportunity. Despite some contributions on that topic from Giovanni Dall'Orto, James Hankins, myself, and others, no such comprehensive study yet exists. Plato's dialogues on love

(the *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, and *Lysis*) and some passages elsewhere (as in the *Charmides*) valorize love between males. In the *Phaedrus*, male couples whose sex is not intemperate attain heavenly bliss in afterlife; in the *Symposium*, some male couples are inspirationally heroic, and this dialogue posits three fundamental and equivalently natural human amorous affiliations, of which each individual possesses one engrained from birth: male-female, male-male, and female-female. In the fifteenth century, these and related Platonic sexual ideas contrary to Christian orthodoxy re-entered the West underwritten by Plato's prestige. With some assistance from his other writings, especially the *Laws* (wherein sex between males is condemned), many then sought to misrepresent Platonic love as if it were male-female or simply asexual. But the distinctive story here for same-sexual history, and the one still largely unexplored, is how Plato's dialogues on love helped newly authorize and promote favourable conceptions of same-sexual love in early modernity.

By focusing instead on various early modern Italian, Dutch, French, and German efforts to appropriate Plato for heteronormativity, Reeser rewardingly canvasses that aspect of Plato's complex reception. The ten chapters mainly address Leonardo Bruni, Marsilio Ficino, Symphorien Champier, Erasmus, Rabelais, Janus Cornarius (Johannes Hainpol), French male poets who wrote some poetry from Sapphic perspectives (such as Ronsard and Tyard), and Montaigne. Learnedly delineating not only their characteristic strategies of heteronormative appropriation but also the failings of these projects, Reeser argues that "the Renaissance" thus "creates a type of heterosexuality" (ix). The tenth chapter tells a refreshingly different story by attending to Montaigne's skeptical critique of efforts to make ancient Plato subserve contemporary sexual orthodoxy. By assessing varied strategies for (mis)representing Plato on sex and love, Reeser means "this book [...] to be a contribution to understanding Renaissance hermeneutics as much as to understanding sexuality" (7).

Various points could be challenged, corrected, or improved. Those Sapphic male poets, Reeser proposes, decorporealize love between women (19, 274–76). Yet Ronsard's Sapphic elegy of the turtle dove clearly attributes jealous physical passion to a woman about to lose her female lover to a prospective husband. "An Italian translation of Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium* was published by Ficino himself in 1544" (12), though he died in 1499. This bibliographically rich book should provide more evaluative comment on cited secondary sources and use some with more caution. On English matters it

promotes Sears Jayne's erratic *Plato in Renaissance England* (377n1), wherein Jayne claims, for example, that Martin Bucer's "reaction to Plato was very negative" (90), despite Bucer's frequent citations of Plato in *De regno Christi*.

This lengthy book's value for early modern sexual history would have been still greater if the introduction had clearly defined Plato's importance for this field. Reeser's particular agenda would thus have been contextualized by acknowledgment of the philosopher's capacities to serve same-sexual interests and purposes at that time, citation of the relevant prior scholarship on this matter, and a summary overview of Plato's early modern prohomeroerotic significance. To assess what Reeser thinks about Plato's potential for favourable same-sexual applications at that time, we have to collate and consider many incidental and sometimes rather contradictory comments scattered throughout the book (compare, for example, ix, 10, 20, 164), and more cursory readers may conclude that "bent" Platonisms were unlikely.

Plato's homoeroticism was not neutralized, because Greek editions circulated as well as many editions of Latin translations by Ficino and others that preserved much of the same-sexual content, and educated persons knew Latin well and sometimes Greek. Libertines, at least, could ignore Ficino's pious otherworldly commentaries (contrast Reeser 121–22). And as my handbook *Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance* explains, many contexts of Ficino's widely disseminated *De amore* (nominally a commentary on Plato's *Symposium*) could readily have been appropriated to serve purposes of same-sexual advocacy, despite Ficino's reproof of all sex between males (contradicting Plato's *Phaedrus*). For example, men amorously "catch men more easily [than women do]," Ficino advises, since "men [...] have blood and spirit which is clearer, warmer, and thinner, which is the basis of erotic entrapment" (173). If males were created in such a way as to desire males most, such sex would be providentially apt. The publications of those scandalized by Plato's homoeroticism, such as George of Trebizond, paradoxically *advertised* its forceful challenges to early modern sexual orthodoxy. In the myth that Aristophanes tells in the *Symposium*, George splutters, Plato "joins one man to another, as if almost in marriage" and "inflames" them with sexual ardour for male youths (117–18). Reeser does not apply those or other passages from Ficino and George as I have here. Early modern readers were not without agency, and prohomeroerotic notions could circulate orally across bounds of education and class.

Plato has especial importance for sexual history because Aristophanes's myth appears to posit male and female sexual affiliations with the same sex that are determined at birth and thus intrinsic to individuals. It is thus a central text for assessing the extent to which premodern same-sexual acts could only be experienced as such, as some have claimed, or as expressions of perceived same-sexual dispositions. This debate is central for same-sexual historicisms, and in a widely influential dispute John Boswell and David Halperin debated this Platonic myth's meaning in ancient Athens. But it had different implications in *early modern* culture that have not yet been adequately considered and factored into our conceptions of sexual history. Though acknowledging the myth's importance for that history (258), this book focuses on how some, like Ficino, sought to obfuscate its obvious same-sexual applications. Yet we should also reckon with its power at that time to disrupt Christian notions of sexual sin and heteronormative understandings of love and sex. As my and George Rousseau's *Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe* shows, various intellectual disciplines afforded complementary notions of innate same-sexual affiliation. Reeser could wonderfully complement *Setting Plato Straight* with a new venture: *Plato's Bent Renaissance*.

KENNETH BORRIS  
McGill University

**Residori, Matteo, H el ene Trop e, Danielle Boillet, et Marie-Madeleine Fragonard,  eds.**

*Vies d' crivains, vies d'artistes. Espagne, France, Italie. XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> si cles.*

Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2014. 351 p. ISBN 978-2-87854-624-8 (broch e) 26,50  .

Cette publication est le r sultat d'une initiative conjointe de recherche qui r unit des sp cialistes de trois aires culturelles (Espagne, France, Italie). Les questions abord es dans cet ouvrage collectif ont une vaste port e historique et favorisent une compr hension  volutive des enjeux abord s, de la Renaissance au XVIII<sup>e</sup> si cle. Les auteurs s'interrogent notamment sur le processus de l gitimation de l'institution litt raire, en commen ant par les notions d'« auteur » et de « cr ateur » au c ur des discours biographiques. L' volution du genre biographique de l'Antiquit  jusqu'au XVIII<sup>e</sup> si cle r v le d'abord un int r t de plus en plus