

and parallel volumes of illustrations by the photographer Leonore Mau, who had been living and working with Fichte since 1963, are devoted (*Xango: Die afroamerikanischen Religionen: Bahia, Haiti, Trinidad, 1978/84, Petersilie: Die afroamerikanischen Religionen: Santo Domingo, Venezuela, Miami, Grenada, 1980/84*)—but also on traditions and phenomena of European culture with the same perspective of the ethnologist and anthropologist. In these works high culture (*Sappho, Homer, August von Platen, Genet*) is treated and depicted with the same attentiveness as the world of the Hamburg "Palais d'Amour." After Fichte's death there appeared *Homosexualität und Literatur: Polemiken*, vols. 1 and 2 (1987–88).

What is new, different, and rewarding in Hubert Fichte is more than his range. It is stimulating to observe how the new standpoint, which probably even without "gay consciousness," leads to new forms of verbalization and to open forms (even the format of Fichte's novels on the printed page—with much blank space—is open). His use of text collages at the macro and micro level can be read as the reflex of a process "of fragmentation and rebirth." In this process Fichte brought together a broadly conceived interpretation of "purity" and "religion."

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### FICINO, MARSILIO (1433–1499)

Italian philosopher and humanist. The son of a physician, he preferred to take up the study of philosophy rather

than to follow in his father's footsteps. The arrival in Italy of learned Byzantines fleeing Constantinople after it had fallen to the Turks in 1453 gave Italian humanists the opportunity of studying Greek works which had been previously unknown to them. In this way the young Ficino discovered Platonism, learning Greek in order to study its texts.

Having gained the favor of the Medici family in Florence, Ficino was protected by them for the rest of his life; they presented him with a precious gift of Greek manuscripts, which he translated. Ficino quickly became a respected personality, attracting various pupils in a kind of Platonic Academy. In 1473 he took priestly orders, while continuing his philosophical speculations and taking on the responsibility of showing that the philosophy of Plato was in accord with Christian doctrine, as St. Thomas Aquinas had done earlier with Aristotle.

Among his most important works is the *Theologia platonica* (published in 1482), to which must be added strictly religious works (e.g., his Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul), and philosophical disquisitions (e.g., his Commentary on Plato's Symposium of 1469, in which he revived the form of the Platonic dialogue), as well as an impressive number of translations from the Greek of works of Plato and other ancient Greek thinkers. These translations made available to a scholarly public works that for the most part had been inaccessible up to that time in the West.

Marsilio Ficino is one of the most representative personalities of the Italian Renaissance. His fame is inseparable from his love and painstaking work of rediscovery, translation, commentary, and advocacy of the works of Plato.

Of special significance in this regard is his resurrection of the Platonic ideal of love, as it is known from the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. In the sixteenth century Ficino's version was elabo-

rated in countless treatises on love, becoming the prototype of a new concept of "courtly love."

Under the rubric of *amor socraticus* Ficino set forth a paradigm of a profound but highly spiritual love between two men, perhaps linked by their common devotion to the quest for knowledge. According to his statement in the above-mentioned Commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, this love is caused, following Plato's conception, by the vision of beauty vouchsafed by the soul of the other individual—a beauty that reflects the supernal beauty of God. Through the physical beauty of a young man—women were incapable of inciting this rapture, being more suited to stimulate copulation for the reproduction of the species—the prudent man ascends to the Beauty which is the archetypal Idea (in Plato's sense) on which the beauty he sees depends—hence to God himself. Thus contemplating the physical and spiritual beauty of a young man through love is a way of contemplating at least a fragment of Divine Beauty, the model of every individual terrestrial beauty.

Ficino practiced this love metaphysic with the young and handsome Giovanni Cavalcanti (ca. 1444–1509), whom he made the principal character in his commentary on the *Convivio*, and to whom he wrote ardent love letters in Latin, which were published in his *Epistulae* in 1492. It is an ironic fact that the object of his love always remained (as Ficino himself laments) in a state of embarrassment.

Apart from these letters there are numerous indications that Ficino's erotic impulses were directed toward men. After his death his biographers had a difficult task in trying to refute those who spoke of his homosexual tendencies.

Fortunately the universal respect enjoyed by Ficino, his sincere and deep faith, as well as his membership in the Catholic clergy, put him outside the reach of gossip and suspicions of sodomy—which, however, such followers as Benedetto Varchi were not spared.

After Ficino's death the ideal of "Socratic love" became a potent instrument to justify love between persons of the same sex; during the high Renaissance many persons were to make use of this protective shield. Yet this use served ultimately to discredit the ideal in the eyes of the public, and with the passage of the years it was regarded with increasing distrust, until—about 1550—it became simply identified with sodomy itself. Consequently, in order to save it, from the middle of the sixteenth century the ideal was heterosexualized, and in this guise it long survived in love treatises and in Italian and European love literature in general.

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Giovanni Dall'Orto

## FICTION

See Novels and Short Fiction.

## FIDENTIAN POETRY

This minor genre of Italian poetry originated as a vehicle for homosexual themes that within the larger context of burlesque poetry have given rise to **Burchiellesque** and **Bernesque** poetry. The initiator of Fidentian poetry was Camillo Scroffa (1526–1565), a jurisconsult of Vicenza, in his *Cantici di Fidenzio* published in 1562 (but composed about 1545–50).

The *Cantici*, which probably come from Scroffa's student days at Padua, are supposed to have been written by an "amorous pedant," one Fidenzio Clotto-crisio Ludomagistro, who is hopelessly in love with the handsome Camillo Strozzi. It is possible that the *Cantici* began as a student prank at the expense of a pedantic teacher at the University of Padua, Pietro Giunteo Fidenzio da Montagnana.