

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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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.

In fact the author seems to have forgotten this hoax of his youth; he decided to prepare an edition only after a series of unauthorized, and often enlarged, published collections had made the material popular.

The anthology amounts in the main to an anti-Petrarchan pamphlet, poking fun at well-worn conventions of love poetry, while at the same time it is a satire on the excessive preoccupation with classical antiquity into which the humanists had fallen, both from a linguistic standpoint and in view of their exaltation of the so-called Socratic love.

In fact not only is the fictitious author of the *Cantici* "Socratically" in love with his pupil "in the ancient manner," but he composes love poetry in a language in which immoderate love for the Latin language produces a thoroughgoing bastardization of the Italian, which has to bear an endless assault of Latinisms. The effect is comically pompous.

Scroffa's literary astuteness emerges in his having created a very human character, one who is pathetically caught up in the toils of an "impossible" love, set apart from the lives of normal people, and incapable of seeing anything wrong in the overwhelming sentiment he feels for "his" Camillo. The poems are tender and very candid, to the point that, the satire notwithstanding, the reader feels great sympathy for the hapless Fidenzio.

What came to be known as Fidentian poetry—which is technically the opposite of macaronic poetry, which mixes vernacular elements into Latin, instead of vice versa—was cultivated even before the first authorized edition of the *Cantici* in 1562, and lasted until the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Scroffa's first imitators kept close to his homoerotic inspiration. The finest among them are probably the anonymous author of "Jano Argyroglotto" (who also translated an anacreontic poem) and Giambattista Liviera (1565—early seventeenth century).

With the spread of Counterreformation ideas, the tone of the compositions was prudently and prudishly changed from homoerotic to heterosexual. Incapable of maintaining the subtle balance between irony and transgression, which Scroffa had exemplified, later Fidentian poetry became a sterile and repetitive poetic exercise, the equivalent of the mannered poetry which was in fact the original target of the *Cantici di Fidenzio*.

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FIEDLER THESIS

In a 1948 essay widely circulated in the 1950s ("Come Back on the Raft Ag'in Honey"), the innovative literary critic Leslie Fiedler argued that interracial male homoerotic relationships (not necessarily genitally expressed) have occupied a central place in the American psyche. Citing works by Fenimore Cooper, Richard Henry Dana, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain, he even spoke of the "sacred marriage of males."

Whatever the ultimate verdict on this thesis may be, it is probably true that male homosexuals—and lesbians—have for a long time been more open to interracial contact than the population at large. It has been suggested that racial complementation serves as a surrogate for the absent complementation of gender. Those who hold this view find a similar pattern in relationships that cross class lines. In the case of racial dyads, as seen typically in the "salt-and-pepper couple," the greater frequency may also be facilitated by the fact that no children will be born from the union, a question that heterosexual couples—in view of the lingering racism of our society—cannot ignore. That interracial gay relationships have been accompanied by some self-consciousness (and hostility on the part of bigoted individuals)