

# *IRIS*

## *The Newsletter of the Lambda Classical Caucus*

### *Spring 2012*

#### LCC Round Table at Fem Con VI

Sponsored by the Lambda Classical Caucus  
Organized by Ruby Blondell and Deborah Kamen

This round table will focus on the intersections--both boundaries and their crossings--between the concerns of feminist scholars and those engaged with ancient and modern sexualities more broadly. Given the multiple crises with which we are faced today, both in the humanities and in the world at large, the focus will be politics: whether academic, intellectual, or “real” world.

The discussion will be initiated by brief presentations from three speakers who will draw on different personal and professional experiences to present three varied perspectives.

Bruce Frier is a Professor of Classics and Roman Law at the University of Michigan and a co-chair of the Lambda Classical Caucus. He chaired UM’s Task Force on the Campus Climate for Transgender, Bisexual, Lesbian, and Gay Faculty, Staff, and Students, and has served on the Advisory Board of the Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Affairs. He will talk about his experiences with the Spectrum Center (the student LGBT office at Michigan) and its relationship with the Women’s Studies Program.

Nancy Rabinowitz is a Professor of Comparative Literature at Hamilton College, and served for eight years as the director of the Kirkland Project for the Study of Gender, Society and Culture. Focusing on the intersection of “real”-world politics and pedagogy, she will use Dan Savage’s “It gets better” project to initiate a discussion of ways in which we, as classicists,

can help “make it better” for young gays and lesbians through our teaching.

Brett Rogers is an Assistant Professor at Gettysburg College, with a joint appointment in Classics and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. He will use the extraordinary vantage point of his joint position to address the conflicts within and between multiple feminist and queer communities within Classics and academia more broadly.

---

#### Congratulations!

Rehak Award: Amy Richlin, “Old Boys: Teacher-Student Bonding in Roman Oratory.” *CW* 105 (2011): 37-53.

Graduate Student Paper: Craig Russell (UCLA), “Boy Interrupted: Liminalities of Gender and Genre in Statius’ *Achilleid* and *Silvae* 3.4” (APA 2011)

Visit our website [www.lambdacc.org](http://www.lambdacc.org) for details on the awards, photos from the Philadelphia Opening Night Reception, and so much more!

Also, please consider nominating your favorite paper from Philadelphia for the next Graduate Student Paper Award! And remember to send your own news to Iris editor at [klake@wayland.org](mailto:klake@wayland.org).

## Dirty Stories

Alastair J.L. Blanshard, *Sex: Vice and Love from Antiquity to Modernity*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Reviewed by H. Christian Blood, Underwood International College, Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea (hchristianblood@gmail.com)

Prurient readers, aroused by this book's provocative mononym, might find themselves ultimately unsatisfied, since Alastair J. L. Blanshard's *Sex* is less about ancient erotic activities than it is about stories and storytelling—specifically, all the “juicy” stories that the West has been telling itself about Greek and Roman sexual behavior (xi). Students of the classical tradition and its reception, however, will be pleased by *Sex*'s steady focus on “the erotic desires that have been projected onto the cultures of classical antiquity,” which reveal “the ways in which cultures have used classical erotics to locate and articulate their own erotic discourse” (xi). *Sex*, then, is not an introduction to the sexual relationships between two Athenian males of different ages, the relative liberty with which a Roman woman of means might have conducted herself, or the theoretical underpinnings of reception studies. Rather, *Sex* is an archive of the dirty stories we've been telling about the Greeks and Romans, not to learn about sex in the past but to untangle all our own strange, unnerving desires.

Blanshard hopes that *Sex* will contribute to “two distinct conversations” (xii). The first is “about the role of sex and sexuality in western culture,” since “one of the important theoretical breakthroughs made in the twentieth century was the realization that sex was more than just a mechanical act” (xi). Second, Blanshard hopes that *Sex* will participate in “the burgeoning field of classical reception studies” (xii), which he notes is “less interested in quantifying high culture's debt to ancient Greece or Rome” (xii) than in “developing genealogies of ideas in which concepts mutate, evolve, or, sometimes, completely fail to have any epigone at all” (xi).

The book fulfills both goals. *Sex* will undoubtedly be appreciated for its contribution to reception studies, which turns out to be articulated through its subtitle-cum-heuristic, “vice and love from antiquity to modernity.” Blanshard repurposes these common words, not only to “highlight clichés” that often govern our thinking about sex, but also as technical terms that “signify two different modes of reception” (although only time will tell whether they secure a place alongside *Nachleben* and *Rezeptionsgeschichte*) (xiii). Love, technically, refers to the aspects of Greece and Rome that have been naturalized into our cultural thought “a sustained encounter over time in which each subsequent engagement reacts to, and builds upon, all previous encounters” (xiii). Vice, as a technical term, connotes the disruptive power of the newly discovered, which “enters, apparently unmediated, straight into the cultural bloodstream,” such as the rediscovery of Plato in the Italian Renaissance. Thus, *Sex* productively offers a paradigm that will be welcome to those just learning about reception studies as well as those who wish to deepen their understanding of this approach. Plus, *Sex* uses an accessible technical vocabulary. No obfuscatory jargon here.

*Sex* covers an impressive range of material, both classical and modern, from high culture to the very low, and it is clear that Blanshard is impressively learned and fully in control of his material; it would be impossible to cover such a breadth of material so clearly if he were not. In the “Introduction” to Part I, Blanshard mobilizes the idea of the Roman orgy that served to establish Rome as “the locus of the West's sexual fantasies” (5), and the clear and nimble discussion moves through a wide range of subject matter, from post-9/11 “terror sex” to a hardcore porn set in Rome.

Chapter 2, “Naked Bodies,” opens with the story of an 1832 statue of George Washington in the Capital Rotunda that turned heads because its depiction of a shirtless, Zeus-like president (11). The chapter moves to an analysis of nudity in Greece and Rome, and closes with a reading of the Pygmalion story from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Also included are two “snapshots,” that is, separate anecdotes set off from the rest of the discussion, one on Aphrodite of Cnidus, another on the “Secret Cabinet” of Pompeii.

The third chapter, “Obscene Texts,” tells the story of Aubrey Beardsley’s illustrations of Juvenal’s *Sixth Satire*, “the most complete catalogs of female misbehavior in Roman literature” (40). Given the extent to which the discussion centers on visual arts, some illustrations would have been welcome. The second half returns to the source material, offering a reading of gender and gendered behavior in Roman satire.

Chapter 4, “Erotic Rites,” discusses how the Roman orgy—which represents all the excesses, promises, and threats of pagan sexuality—has defined the West’s thinking about Rome, even though “Romans never routinely engaged in sexual orgies and would have been appalled that we thought they did” (49). Of special interest is the orgy’s impact on the rise of 19th-century sexology. The second half of the chapter considers the thin line between sex and religion in Greece and Rome in Euripides, Aristophanes, and Livy.

Chapter 5, “Imperial Biography,” claims that “part of the pleasure of stories of vice is the potential that they will allow us to look into a person’s soul” (65). To that end, the chapter discusses 18th-century French pornographic rewritings of Suetonius, Guccione’s infamous 1979 film *Caligula* (in a “snapshot”) and Roman gossip, as it functioned as a mechanism of asserting, consolidating, and undermining power.

Sex’s second section, “Greek Love,” begins with the following claim: “Democracy could have come into being without Athens, philosophy would have continued without Socrates, the laws of physics have no real need of Archimedes, but modern western homosexuality without the Greeks is impossible” (91). The introduction focuses upon how Oscar Wilde’s trials helped to fashion Greek love as a “transmission of knowledge” and “a way of thinking” as much as “a way of acting” (96).

The seventh chapter, “Greece,” is almost exclusively dedicated to Platonic dialogue, and opens with a claim that might startle many students of ancient sexuality: “The notion that homosexuality was in some senses intrinsically Hellenic would have come as a surprise to the Greeks” (97). In this way, Blanshard’s interventions are most refreshing—especially for those teachers who sometimes worry that their undergraduates have an unrealistically idealized notion of Athens as a proto-Castro gay liberation paradise. One “snapshot” is dedicated to *Charmides*.

In Chapter 8, “Rome and the West,” Blanshard reminds us that the “first moment in the reception of Greek love belongs to Rome,” as Greek same-sex acts arrived in Rome as a “stowaway, hidden amongst a cargo that included rhetoric, philosophy, and mathematics” (109). The chapter’s second half addresses the medieval period, when, irony of ironies, the rise of Aristotle through Aquinas killed off Greek love in Europe as “anti-sodomitical laws of the late antique Roman empire” were revived and adopted across Europe (123). There is a “snapshot” discussing Antinous.

Chapter 9, “Renaissance and Enlightenment,” analyzes how early-adopters of Plato in the Italian Renaissance struggled with Plato’s queer content, recuperating the philosopher by transforming the love of men for boys into “the gentle love of God the father and his shepherding son” (127). The second half of the chapter begins with Voltaire’s *Philosophical Dictionary* and the reception of Greek love in the Enlightenment, and touches on Frederick the Great’s “reputation as one of the world’s most famous homosexuals” (139), and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s ambivalent researches into Greek philosophy. Chapter 9’s “snapshot” discusses Ganymede.

The tenth chapter, “Nineteenth Century and Beyond,” discusses the veritable apotheosis of Plato in Anglo-American educational programs, from Great Books programs to classics departments, beginning with Benjamin Jowett’s successful education reforms and translations. The second section, “Sapphic Love,” takes up the problems of studying female-female sexual relationships in antiquity, and then recounts how Marie Antoinette’s political enemies mobilized homophobic discourses of tribadism to discredit her, before turning to the Daughters of Bilitis.

The book’s epilogue is a 1.5 page summary of Martha Nussbaum and John Finnis’ juridical debates about Greek love for a 1993 court case in Colorado.

Depending on a particular reader’s preferences and proclivities, what I saw as the book’s weaknesses could be its strengths. Intended for a multiplicity of readers, *Sex* aims to be “as general and accessible as possible,” as much for the modern historian interested in the long history of ideas or the classicist wanting to know what happens to her material after antiquity (xvi). The aim is admirable, but I found *Sex*’s tone too breezy at times; eager to tell stories, the author might have sacrificed too much depth, critical engagement, and detailed analysis. When *Sex* is covering material I didn’t know, its approach served as a congenial introduction. I would be completely comfortable using sections of the book with undergraduates. However, when *Sex* addressed the antique texts and critical debates with which I am familiar, I found myself wanting more out of *Sex*. The body of the text has no footnotes and few internal citations, and consequently, it can be difficult to determine which scholars Blanshard is engaging with, or how he sees his discussion fitting into the existing, extensive literature about Greek and Roman sexuality. At the end of the book, the author provides a “Notes and Further Reading” section, but it too is short. For example, for readers wishing for more information about “Plato on love,” Blanshard offers three citations, each of them for different works by David Halperin; likewise, for readers seeking general information on “Plato’s *Symposium*,” the author recommends two general introductions and one translation (181). Of course, the bibliography on *Symposium* is too huge to fit in a book like this, but even a general reader might want more guidance. Reading, I often felt as if the author presumed two things about his readers: that the general reader had *no* knowledge of the secondary literature, and therefore probably wouldn’t want more, or, alternately, that the specialist reader brought *such extensive knowledge* of the literature to *Sex* that any recap was unnecessary.

As well, I wanted to hear more from Blanshard about recent critical controversies in the field. LCC members are hotly aware of those surrounding James Davidson’s 2007 *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece* (e.g., Jeffrey S. Carnes’ review in the most recent issue of our own *Iris*, Thomas Hubbard’s February 2009 review for *H-Histsex*, and the heated discussion via BMCR with Eric Brooks, Beert Verstraete, Kirk Ormand, and Davidson himself). With a 2010 copyright, *Sex* was likely in production when most of the controversy about Davidson’s book exploded. All the same, *Sex* lists *The Greeks and Greek Love* in its bibliography and further reading sections without comment, and I was interested in hearing Blanshard’s thoughts on Davidson’s contentious argument, which is itself a fascinating piece of reception. The dissent that Davidson’s book has caused elsewhere accentuates Blanshard’s general silence toward the work of other classicists. But since every other monograph on ancient sexuality provides more than enough citations, a novice reader won’t be without resources.

Aside from my own citation fetishes, my quibbles are minor, and probably reflect more about my own desires for the kind of *Sex* I fantasized about. *Sex* remains an impressively accomplished book, from which I learned a great deal about the seemingly unending potential for reception studies. Because he’s a skilled storyteller, Blanshard succeeds in creating something rarely encountered in scholarly literature: an accessible, wide-ranging study that engages the specialist without discouraging the general reader. Good *Sex* indeed.

## Report of Michael Goyette, Recipient of this year's LCC's graduate student travel award

At the 2012 meeting of the American Philological Association, I presented a paper entitled "Quis docebit ipsos doctores?: A Graduate Student Perspective on Learning to Teach Classics" on the panel Teaching About Classics Pedagogy in the 21st Century, sponsored by the APA Committee on Education. As the only graduate student on the panel, my role was to discuss skills for teaching Classics that I wish I had begun to hone before entering the classroom as an instructor for the first time. I also offered a couple of concrete suggestions about some ways the field could provide more pedagogical training to graduate students. This panel was decidedly a success, with an audience spilling into the hallway at the back of the room. I received positive feedback about my paper from both graduate students and senior faculty members, and made new connections with various people in attendance. I recently found out that the papers from the panel are going to be published in the Paedagogus section of an upcoming issue of Classical World, so you can look to see my work there!

In addition, I participated in a performance of *The Jurymen*, an Aristophanic take on the last days of Socrates' life, which was sponsored by the APA's Committee on Ancient and Modern Performance (CAMP). Playing a chorus-member, I participated in two days of rehearsals leading up to the performance on Friday, January 6. This play was my first hands-on theatrical experience, and enriched my interests in ancient drama with new perspectives on acting, staging, and the like. Along with our audience, I revelled in the hilarity of the play.

The Graduate Student Travel Award provided by the Lambda Classical Caucus offset some of the expenses to participate in such activities, including the costs of transportation from New York to Philadelphia, hotel accommodations, registration, and other incidental expenses. This funding is greatly appreciated due to the limited resources available for conference participation from my own university. This support from the Lambda Classical Caucus helped make my experience in Philadelphia a very fruitful one.

Conference Announcement: 'Romosexuality' will be held in Durham, UK, from 16th-18th April 2012. The website with programme, booking information, and more is at <http://romosexuality.wordpress.com/>

Getting What You Want: Queering Ancient Courtship  
Sponsored by the Lambda Classical Caucus  
January 6, 2012 – Philadelphia, PA

Panel Report, Submitted by H. Christian Blood  
Underwood International College, Yonsei University-Seoul, South Korea

The topic of the 2012 panel, queer approaches to ancient courtship, was proposed by H. Christian Blood and John P. Wood, and approved by the group's vote, at the Lambda Classical Caucus Steering Committee meeting at the 2010 annual meeting of the APA in Anaheim, CA. The organizers, Blood and Wood, drafted a call for papers, which was circulated via Iris, the LCC newsletter, the LCC and WCC email lists, as well as the APA's own calls for papers for affiliated groups. Abstracts were due on February 5, 2011 to Mary-Kay Gamel, who forwarded anonymous submissions to the referees. We are delighted to report that eleven abstracts were submitted—far more than could be accepted. Furthermore, the abstracts were all of a very high caliber. It was far from easy for the readers to select a final line up. Four proposals were selected on the basis of their individual quality, range of approaches and subject matter, and coherence as a group. Once the line-up was confirmed, the panel organizers invited Professor Marilyn K. Skinner to serve as panel respondent, and she happily accepted.

“Getting What You Want: Queering Ancient Courtship” was held during the first session on the first day of this year's APA: 8:30 to 11:00 AM on Friday, January 6. Despite the early time, the room was filled to capacity—no small matter, considering the raucous night many of our members must have had at the previous evening's LCC / WCC / CSWMG reception. Each paper was followed by a short question and answer period, and the final portion of the panel's time was dedicated to a stimulating discussion with all panelists and the audience.

Michael Broder, in “*Mentula quem pascit: Queering Courtship in Martial and Juvenal*,” argued that—as courtship is constituted as heterosexual and normative—a new form of courtship must be theorized, one that is queer, and thereby encapsulates deviant aspects of non-normative institutions and behaviors, as advanced via a camp reading of Roman lyric. In “*Queer Exchanges: Iphis and Ianthe in Ovid's Metamorphoses*,” Jessica Westerhold argued that this episode functions as a mechanism for queering other portions of the Ovid's larger narrative, “by undermining the assumption that an active, masculine participant in the exchange of women is necessarily a biological man.” Citing less familiar textual evidence, DJM Tremblay spoke about new models of same-sex relationships described in the *Anthologia Graeca*, arguing that the text's epigrams show “a shift in the past model of pederastic love, one which induces readers to consider new objects for their affections who will appreciate and enjoy their gifts, not only demand them and more.” Mark Masterson, in “*The Significance of Courting Paul*,” discussed the ways in which real and metaphoric courtship illuminates political and social constructions of masculinity in Jerome's *Vita Pauli*. Finally, Marilyn K. Skinner offered a generous and gracious response, in which she discussed each paper's strengths, and offered further ways to think about the problems discussed in each. Skinner concluded that, as the papers “investigate startling new ways of winning the favors of the beloved, and new kinds of beloveds to court, they illustrate that queerness and normalcy are not that far apart and that in antiquity one person's queer may be someone else's commonplace event. If, as Halperin suggests, queerness is relational, it must ultimately be a component of each and every courtship discourse, because in the process of courtship desire, in all its wayward uncertainty, is always the driving force.”

LCC members are urged to nominate their favorite papers for the LCC and WCC awards for best conference presentations, and to attend next year's LCC panel, “*Transgressive Spaces in Classical Antiquity*.”