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Review of *Gay and Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology from Sappho to Michelangelo* by J. J. Wilhelm

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Publication Date

1996-10-01

Peer reviewed

Wilhelm, James J., ed. *Gay and Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology from Sappho to Michelangelo*. New York \ London: Garland, 1995. Pp. xii, 330. \$. ISBN: ISBN 0-8153-1887-1 (cloth) \ 0-8153-1886-3 (paper).

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In this ambitious anthology of translations, James J. Wilhelm has assembled over 700 poems ranging from the Greek lyric tradition to humanist authors of Latin and Italian (and, with Politian, Greek), including not only generous Classical and Medieval Latin selections but examples from several medieval European vernaculars and soundings in the Hebrew and Arabic traditions as practiced on the European continent. Wilhelm is responsible for the editing of the whole volume, which is handsomely produced, as well as for the Latin, Late Medieval Vernacular, and Renaissance sections -- the Medieval Latin selection in credited collaboration with Thomas Stehling. The Classical Greek section was the responsibility of Dennis Kratz, while Arthur Wormhoudt and Norman Roth took charge of the Arabic and Hebrew portions, respectively.

The volume is, all in all, a success, although one that leaves some disappointments in its wake. My greatest disappointment is unabashedly subjective: that much of the "poetry," particularly as translated, is so unpoetic. This needs to be addressed in some detail below, and with an eye to the various traditions and translators. More problematic, and I think more easily soluble, was the decision to print so many individual items at the expense not only of some longer and potentially more interesting pieces but of a fuller set of explanatory notes, which might have helped many readers appreciate more fully what is interesting or valuable about the poem in question. Wilhelm's brief preface (xi-xii) describes the thinking that went into setting the geographic and temporal limits of the volume -- it is what it is! -- and some of the other selection criteria. Nonetheless, one might well wish for a true introduction. For example, Wilhelm says that the collaborators "were determined to print as many women as possible, but we soon found that the number before 1500 is extremely small" (xi) -- Sappho apart. But even as he notes that "it is only in recent times that lesbian literature comes to full bloom" (xi), he could have helped those interested in the topic by noting that he does include some remarkable expressions of female-female sexuality (likely) by women (pp. 174-76) as well as some devastating descriptions by men of female lovers of women (e.g., pp. 119, 125f. -- by the way, there is not only no through- numbering of items but no complete table of contents or index of all the items to help find such pieces). Likewise, "We include some homophobic literature, but we felt that a little of that goes a long way": a point nicely put, but users might have profited from a handy list of at least the most egregious pieces (e.g., the excerpt from Bernard of Cluny's "de contemptu mundi," pp.166-7).

Perhaps readers will have inferred as much from the above comments about "lesbian" and "homophobic literature," as from the "Gay and Lesbian" of the title, but let me be clear: no attention is paid to the problematic application of such categories and labels to persons, attitudes, behaviors or literature over this sweep of cultures all different from our own. Though Dennis Kratz briefly characterizes some of the salient elements of classical Greek homoerotics (pp. 3-4), throughout modern terms are used without apology, embarrassment, or explanation. I can well imagine that in the face of so seemingly intractable a problem, Wilhelm might have made a tactical decision not to engage the debate at all and to offer poems that were intended to reach a range of modern readers without mediation; and yet, since the book so clearly intends to inform persons about earlier times and places, I would have thought some discussion of the problematic was called for. Then again, the brief "General Bibliography" (pp. 327-8) seems to try to steer readers away from the more sophisticated and challenging scholars of LesBiGay or Queer Studies -- no Halperin or Winkler for Greece, no Dinshaw for the Middle Ages, no Goldberg for the Renaissance. But this list lacks many a basic historical work, like Richlin's *Garden of Priapus* for Rome or Ruggiero's *Boundaries of Eros for Renaissance Venice*, to name a few of the works that leap to mind.

To conclude my general comments: different types of readers will find Wilhelm's anthology useful in different ways. Advanced scholars will certainly want to consult these translations to compare with their own analyses and interpretations -- for with language that is often difficult and frequently intentionally obscure, it is helpful to study others' solutions. (Consistent reference to the enumeration of the originals in the standard editions would have been helpful; frequently scholars will have to track through previously published work by Stehling, Wilhelm, or Roth, e.g., to find the reference. Getting to the originals of Baudri of Bourgueuil's poems in Hilbert's edition [not "von Hilbert"; so Wilhelm, p. 154] will be particularly trying, since Stehling, to whom Wilhelm sends readers, uses Abrahams' numeration!) Teachers of pre-modern sexuality will certainly be able to use this anthology of translated source material in undergraduate and in more general graduate courses (as I intend to do), but the instructor will have to be prepared to provide both the requisite conceptual framework and the social context(s) and literary conventions for the various items. Finally, I would imagine general readers who are interested in "gay and lesbian history" may well pick up this book. If they are looking for historical documents, they will be rewarded and satisfied throughout. If they bring more literary expectations, they will be, I suspect, more drawn to some of the Greek and Classical Latin material, as well as to some of the Renaissance selections (especially the burlesques); of the medieval matter, however, I imagine the Arabic and Hebrew material will be more attractive than the Latin.

Now, comments on the various sections:

I. Classical Greek Literature (pp. 3-84).

Fortunately for Sappho's sublimity, Dennis Kratz is more successful as a translator of archaic lyric (e.g., Ibycus) and bucolic poetry than of the later epigrams. Unfortunately for the reader, roughly two-thirds of the section is devoted to those epigrams, for the rendering of which Kratz has no particular gift. It is, on the one hand, well and good to have Strato's *Musa puerilis* (book 12 of the "Greek Anthology") in its 258-poem entirety. On the other hand, much of it is banal and trivial and, without the sparkling wit of the epigrammatic style, ultimately boring. There are insights to be had. It is good to hear the voice of an unabashed pederast like Strato himself, but a few poems like #208 (p. 74) would have sufficed to fix him in our minds as a Hellenistic Humbert Humbert pursuing his Lolito. Some of Asclepiades and Meleager's epigrams leap off the page, but readers who want the best should not miss Callimachus' poems (numbers 43, 51, 102, 118, 134, 139, 148-50, and 230). The *Greek Anthology*, and this book in particular, is already an anthology of anthologies. Might it not have been more revealing of what poetic personalities are in evidence here to have culled and then grouped all attributable epigrams by author?

II. Classical Latin Literature (pp. 85-134).

In contrast, Wilhelm presents a fine culling of Martial's epigrams (pp. 117-29). Moreover, Wilhelm is a more stylish and vigorous translator, especially of Catullus (pp. 88-98), though I don't particularly like "father of all forced diets" in the first line of Catullus 21 (p. 91), and in rendering the first and (identical) last lines of Catullus 16, he does not convey the important point that the poet is threatening to outrage *Furius* and *Aurelius* both anally and orally (p. 93 ["pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo"]). In a collection that begins with Sappho, Wilhelm might have at least mentioned that Catullus 51 (not printed) renders Sappho 31. What I missed from this section are anonymous invective and graffiti, some of which are fragments of verse (if that be the requisite criterion for poetry, though by another standard many of the least polished graffiti are more poetic than much of what Wilhelm prints from standard authors). For example, "Cosmus Equitiae magnus cinaedus et fellator est suris apertis", which Amy Richlin translates "Equitias' slave Cosmus is a big queer and a cocksucker with his legs wide open" (*Garden of Priapus*, p. 82 [Diehl 648]). (Richlin renders the frequent misspellings of the originals brilliantly; so "Sabina felas, no belle faces" becomes "Sabina, you give blojobs, you don't do good"; for this single line I'd trade the *Marathus* poems of Tibullus Wilhelm does print.) Returning to the top drawer, I wonder why (since Wilhelm includes bits from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) he doesn't give us the *Nisus* and *Euryalus* episode from Book 9 of Vergil's *Aeneid*, a thematic picked up not only by later epic poets but by medieval Latin writers (e.g., Stehling's 18 and 19, also omitted by Wilhelm). Still on Vergil, Wilhelm informs the reader that "it is not known whether Vergil was gay himself, but this *Eclogue* [2] made it easy for later generations to proclaim him so" (p. 107) but doesn't actually refer the reader to, much less cite, those passages in the ancient lives which explicitly describe Vergil as inclined towards the love of boys, naming names. One last surprising omission: the poems from Statius' *Silvae* that praise or memorialize *pueri delicati* (e.g. 2.1 -- though that might have been dictated in part by the editorial decision to include more shorter poems than longer productions, 3.4).

III. Medieval Latin Literature (pp. 135-92).

This section Wilhelm derives largely from Thomas Stehling's *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship* (Garland, 1984), not only crediting Stehling as co-editor/translator of this portion but dedicating the entire volume to his memory and that of William Harper. Stehling's collection remains indispensable for students of this poetry -- the original Latin faces the translations, it has considerable material not in Wilhelm. That said, Wilhelm well represents the corpus Stehling collected, offering roughly 50 pages of translation compared to Stehling's 70 pages of English, and providing several poems Stehling does not include (e.g., a portion of Alcuin's beautiful "cuckoo" poem, Gottschalk's lovely "Why do you order, little lad?"). Wilhelm often reproduces Stehling's translations exactly, sometimes alters them. The aim of both translators is fidelity, and whether it is due to that or to the fact that medieval Latin poetry in Classical (quantitative) meters -- the bulk of the material -- doesn't lend itself to flights of poetic fancy as opposed to rhetoric and wordplay, many of the poems will seem flat to readers. When Wilhelm strives for more colloquialism (e.g., p. 157: "plain fickle" for "inconstans" [Stehling #61 has "inconstant"]), it hurts rather than helps. (In this poem, Stehling and Wilhelm take "ac si" [v.6] as "And if" or "If"; "as if" would be better; consult the better punctuation of Hilbert #115.) It will not be possible to present here close analyses of Stehling and Wilhelm's work throughout this rich section, presenting a valuably representative selection of the existing material. It seems ungenerous to quibble, but such is the duty of the reviewer. I would have been happy to see at least one of Baudri's longer poems, say "ad juvenem nimis elatum" (Stehling 50 [Hilbert 3]), even in place of the two short Alexander poems Wilhelm does print. Among the highpoints: Abelard's "Dolorum solacium," in which David laments Jonathan (pp. 159-62), where Abelard's imaginative and formal gifts, obviously so extraordinary in the 12th century, come through as astonishingly modern. Hilary is well represented. Though it pains me to say it, the verses translated from Alain of Lille are beautiful (pp. 169f.). Wilhelm's introductory warning of the "voic[ing of] homophobic feeling in the most negative way possible" (p. 169) is, I believe, more aptly applied to the whole "de planctu naturae," not this one hymn. Leaving sexual politics aside, Alain is a brilliant stylist and wordsmith, and here he draws on the tradition of cosmic poetry running back, for the Latin Middle Ages, primarily through Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*. Wilhelm could have provided some counter to this had he included the lofty "Non est crimen amor, quia, si scelus esset amare, Nollet amore Deus etiam divina ligare", as relevant to same-sex as to any other kind of love (*Carmina burana* 121a; similar sentiments spoken by Baudri's Florus to Ovid [Hilbert 97.55f.] and Ganymede at the end of "Ganymede and Hebe" [vv.89-90]). As I noted above, at pp. 174-76 there are two wonderful poems giving voice to one woman's love for another. The language is vivid and fresh, evoking the erotic vocabulary (as does so much of the higher medieval Latin erotic poetry) of the Biblical Song of Songs. "The way you refreshed my little breasts with sweet words" (Wilhelm, p. 176; Stehling, p. 105) perfectly renders "Et quam iocundis verbis refrigerasti petuscula" (p.175), but no word can catch *all* the overtones of "refrigerasti". And how could one convey the rarity and delicacy of "pectuscula," itself playing on the sound of "kisses" ("oscula")? Again, one can't have everything, but it is a shame to do without "Cur suspectum me tenet domina?" (*Carmina burana* 95 = Stehling #116); though a denial of a charge of homosexual involvement, it is a fine poem. My own reservations about excessive colloquialism apart, "little punk" (Stehling, p. 131; Wilhelm, p. 188) for "pusio" ("Ganymede and Hebe," v. 29) is very clever. This is a poem I have tried to translate and thus appreciate the skill and talent Stehling and Wilhelm have employed in making it readable and fun. Readers should note: when Hilary ends his poem with mention of the handsome Joseph and a "queen" (p. 164), the volume's context notwithstanding, this is Potiphar's wife, now elevated to royal status, not an effeminate homosexual man.

IV-V. Arabic Poetry (pp. 193-234) and Hebrew Poetry (pp. 235- 60).

These sections represent traditions I admire but do not know in the original, hence my more impressionistic commentary. Perhaps it's the appeal of the unfamiliar, even exotic, or the fact that the poetic style involves images and metaphors more than rhetoric, but for me as a reader of "poetry," these sections are the most purely pleasing. Again, I cannot judge the accuracy of the translations, but Wormhoudt is a gifted writer of poetry, Roth hardly less so. The poetry of Al-Sharif Al-Tabiq, for example, is simply ravishing. Or take Ibn Khafaja's "Long neck, jewels on perfumed/Pecs like a love prelude to a poem . . ." (p. 201) -- I've had thoughts like this in the gym, but never expressed quite this way! Wormhoudt presents 26 of Ibn Khafaja's poems, and not one too many (another stunner: "O like many a bright brow," pp. 202f.). Beautiful in a different register are the 15 poems of Ibn Sahl, a converted Jew, to two youths, the Muslim Mohammed and the Jewish Musa (pp. 213-21). The Hebrew verse comes across as slightly more restrained, slightly more muted, yet there is (and why?) little or nothing comparable to such poems in Latin. I cite two phrases from one poem by Joseph Ibn Sadiq: "the sun at Gibeon/is silent -- at his words it trembles" and "My Torah is the Torah of love/And against it I shall not rebel" (p. 242). The brief notes Roth includes after almost every poem (3 or 4 for a poem 24- 30 lines in length) are very helpful, and one wishes this had been the consistent editorial practice throughout.

VI-VII. Late Medieval Vernacular Literature to 1400 (263-76) and Italian Renaissance Literature to Michelangelo (pp. 277-326).

This review is overlong, so I will study briefness. As larger and more varied swatches of discourse are textualized (and a larger proportion survives for us to read), selection becomes that much harder. VI is an odd assortment comprising one poem by Beatrix de Romans and extracts from Dante and Chaucer. Here Wilhelm has helped out teachers of courses on medieval sexuality. Given the difficulty of choosing, it is hard to complain about omissions, yet one might well have included here (or near the end of the medieval Latin section) the brief comic *scena* in Latin elegiac couplets known variously as *De Cavicholo* or *Conquestio uxoris Cavichioli papiensis* (inc. "Quid si non fueram Cavicholo digna marito"), in which a wife complains about her husband who is indifferent to her because (so she has not discovered) he has considerably different tastes. This marital argument has a happy ending of sorts: the wife will remain (the husband needs to seem normal, itself an interesting social fact) and both can have boyfriends -- in common. (Cp. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 9.14-28 and Boccaccio, *Decameron* 5.10.) In the headnote to VI, Wilhelm remarks on the dearth of material in other European traditions, including Byzantine Greek (p. 261). This seems largely true, and yet, had he wanted something from the Greek tradition, he might have included the (likely sixth-century) "Hymn to Saints Serge and Bacchus" translated by Boswell in *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (pp. 285-88), certainly no more ambiguously apposite to the collection than some other pieces printed. In the final section of the book, it seems to me readers are best served by access to the very ribald, very funny, and often very opaque Italian burlesque poetry (pp. 279-85). It is also a great treasure to have even 16 short selections from Panormita's (= Beccadelli's) *Hermaphroditus* (pp. 286-88; more would have been welcome), and impressive are Politian's epigrams, once again written in Greek (pp. 308-10). Is it unfair of me to say that, at least in translation, Michelangelo's poetry, which caps the collection, seems to fall flat? For me, the volume's notional final section is comprised by a series of sonnets not printed here but easily accessible (hence no complaints) -- those of William Shakespeare.