

Ficino in Spain. Susan Byrne.

Toronto Iberic 18. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. xiv + 364 pp. \$70.

Susan Byrne's *Ficino in Spain* is a book that was waiting to be written. Starting with the late nineteenth century, there was a concerted effort to erase Ficino's profound impact on Spanish letters. He was often substituted for León Hebreo, whose impact was much less and who "re-biblicized and de-philosophized" Marsilio Ficino's Platonism (11). Ficino, on the other hand, used major doses of Neoplatonism and Hermetism in his commentaries on Plato. Even though a few modern critics have begun to reevaluate Ficino's impact in Iberia, this endeavor was still fragmented until the appearance of this groundbreaking book. To the charge that he was really not that well known in Spain, Byrne, through impressive archival research, points to the many volumes of his works that were present in Spain during the period. She then shows how he was a major authority during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

One of Ficino's most controversial books, *De Vita*, combines philosophy, theology, magic, medicine, and astrology in order to come to terms with Ficino's own problem: the importance of Saturn in his horoscope and how this planet also exacerbates his situation since it rules over people like him — students, scholars, and philosophers. It is a dry and faraway planet that often brings disaster, but Ficino shows how to temper its malignity and bring out its great gifts. Byrne clearly shows how Pedro Mexía utilizes many of the elements from Ficino's *Vita* for his *Silva de varia lección*, a miscellany that became immensely popular, with over 100 editions in 200 years. Those who did not read Ficino directly would learn here of the magic properties of stones and the curative powers of songs, substances, and even talismans. Treatises by Gómez Miedez and Álvarez Miraval underline Ficino's accomplishments in the field of medicine, while his astrological disquisitions reached across the Atlantic (*De Vita* and *Opera Omnia* were on a ship bound for New Spain in 1600) and impacted the writings of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Juan de Pineda and Bartolomé de las Casas are also names that come up repeatedly in Byrne's analysis of Ficino's impact. As to the Platonic idea, seen through Ficino, Byrne points to poets such as Francisco de Aldana and Garcilaso de la Vega. The uses of numerology, the existence of Atlantis, and the importance of talismans

precede a fascinating section on Ficino's views of love and beauty as echoed by Cervantes and Lope de Vega.

Byrne devotes a full chapter to Hermes Trismegistus and the *Hermetica* since Ficino delayed his translation of Plato and turned to translate the *Pimander* (*Corpus Hermeticum*) so that his patron, Cosimo de' Medici, could read it. Ficino's translation was then translated into Spanish by Diego Guillén de Ávila in 1463. A manuscript of this translation owned by Juan de Segura is found at the Escorial library, having been donated by Philip II. Byrne makes a careful study of the manuscript, showing a few alterations. The discussion of metempsychosis is particularly striking. Ávila accepts reverse metempsychosis (man to animal), even though Ficino does not. On the other hand, Ávila changes the term *daemon* into *angel* since it had begun to signify only devils. Such was the impact of the *Hermetica* that Juan de Pineda narrates the creation "per both Moses and Trismegistus" (131). Citations to Pérez de Oliva on man as miracle, to Alfonso de Valdés on the Christian Mercury, and to Cervantes on Mercury as guide serve to close this excellent chapter.

There is much more in Byrne's book that deserves attention: for example, Lope de Vega's sonnet on the three fires and its connection to Ficino; Sebastián Fox Morcillo's commentary on three of Plato's dialogues and how they parallel and veer away from Ficino; and Juan Eusebio Niremberg's assertion that the Jesuit order follow the four basic principles of Plato's *Republic* and the *Laws*: "Jesuit action has, as Ficino recommended, its beginning and end in contemplation" (210). As ever new interdisciplinary exchanges keep stressing that imperial Spain did not turn away from the innovative currents of the Italian Renaissance, Susan Byrne's book on Ficino will serve as new evidence of the many intellectual exchanges between Spain, Italy, and the rest of Europe during the Renaissance and early modern periods.

FREDERICK A. DE ARMAS, *University of Chicago*