

Reviews of *Ficino in Spain*:

“This is an interesting example of the kind of book that can result when someone takes a commonly received scholarly opinion and tests it against the actual data. All of us view the world through our various heuristic filters, some of which we construct ourselves and some of which we inherit from our teachers, but as this book shows, these filters can keep us from seeing important facts that are literally right in front of us. Once we set aside the idea that Ficino could not have had much of an impact in Renaissance Spain because our ideas about the Renaissance in Spain do not have a place for him, then we can see what there is to see. And if that forces us to revise one of our heuristic filters, then so be it.”

[Craig Kallendorf, Texas A&M University, *Neo-Latin News* 63.3-4 (2015).]

“As a whole, Byrne’s volume is an authoritative compendium of classical and Renaissance philosophical, historical, literary, and scientific currents. The informative introduction carefully dissects every facet of Ficino’s intellectual makeup to reveal a powerfully influential mind, reflected time and again in a plethora of Spanish writings. ...

Byrne enriches her volume with inclusion of important graphic material that includes illustrations from the first folio with a marginal note attributed to Christopher Columbus in the 1497 edition of Ficino’s translation of Plotinus, a schematic of angelic hierarchies in Ficino’s *De Christiana religione*, and the title page of the 1630 *Pimander* edition with Christian iconography. There are in all twenty such illustrations, well reproduced in Byrne’s book, and all pertinent to the study at hand. Equally pertinent and enlightening are the nearly one hundred pages of explicatory notes that further expand and cement the author’s expository prose. Byrne’s textual analysis and interpretations are further supported by some thirty pages of works cited, all examples of the finest scholarship to date on the subjects treated by the author.

In conclusion, Byrne should be commended for her scrupulous study and cogent analysis of relevant literary texts. With critical insight and a solid analytical methodology, the author explores the multifaceted genius of Marsilio Ficino and the impact of his writings on Spanish letters. Byrne has unquestionably lent a signal service to students and scholars alike in their efforts to understand better the depth and breath of Ficino’s creative genius.

[Bruno Damiani, Catholic University of America, *Modern Philology* 114.1 (May 26, 2016).]

“Susan Byrne’s *Ficino in Spain* is a book that was waiting to be written. ... 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. ...

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 Niremburg'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 de Armas, University of Chicago, *Renaissance Quarterly* 69.2 (Summer 2016).]

"In this rich, well-researched, and thought-provoking volume, Susan Byrne rightly holds that the influence of Marsilio Ficino's thought on Spanish culture has not received the critical attention it deserves. It is true, as she explains in the introduction, that "from the fifteenth through the seventeenth-century Marsilio Ficino was the fulcrum, the main filter through whom ancient Platonic and Neoplatonic thinkers" became know to Western culture (4-5). Byrne shows a remarkable knowledge of Ficino's Latin treatises... After a detailed examination of the Ficinian volumes held in Spanish libraries (chapter one), Byrne offers an exhaustive analysis of the Italian philosopher's presence in early-modern Spanish culture.

In my view, chapters two and four are the best and most convincing sections of Byrne's book, because they show concrete borrowings from Ficino's texts through close readings in which Ficinian echoes are clearly detectable. The initial sub-sections of chapter two tackle central issues such as Ficino's view of medicine, astrology, melancholy, and mathematics, and how important Spanish thinkers and writers, Cervantes included, appropriate and reinterpret them. With great acumen, Byrne addresses the thorny topic of Ficinian love philosophy and shows how pervasive Ficino's *De amore* was in sixteenth-century Spanish culture.

... Byrne's erudite and original work deserves to be considered a landmark in the history of Ficino's reception in Spanish culture."

[Armando Maggi, University of Chicago, *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 50.2 (Junio 2016).]

"Byrne combines meticulous research into the textual and circulation history of Ficino's texts with equally attentive close-readings and analysis of the ways in which his writing and thought were transposed, reiterated and reimagined by Spanish authors. Byrne illuminated the Ficinian presence in authors such as Miguel de Cervantes, Francisco Aldana, John of the Cross, Luis de León and Juan de Pineda in such a way that she both augments the scholarly understandings of the Italian philosopher, and creates new hermeneutical insights into Spanish Golden Age authors... Her study is and should be viewed as an exemplary and pioneering work... She shows not only *that* Ficino was a foundational thinker in early modern Spain, but also *how* and *in what ways*"

[Gabrielle Piedad Ponce-Hegenauer, Wesleyan University, *MLN* 132 (March 2017).]

"In all the chapters, passages from authors such as Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Fray Luis de León, and Antonio de Guevara, are closely read to show their debt, explicit or not, to Ficino. Byrne's detailed analyses of these passages amount often to truly innovative interpretations of Garcilaso's poems and Cervantes' *Colloquy of the Dogs* and *Don Quixote*, to mention a few important cases. A complete and detailed index contains the names of the many authors and works that the author mines for traces of Ficino's ideas, be they Platonic, Neo-Platonic, Hermetic, or purely "Ficinian." The result is an encyclopedic monograph that will become the definitive book on the undeniable influence of Ficino in Spain, as well as providing myriad new insights into early modern Spanish texts and an argosy of data for those interested in Platonic, Neo-Platonic, and Hermetic ideas in the period"

[Enrique Fernández, University of Manitoba, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 86 (2017).]

“This excellent study, richly annotated and carefully argued, is the fruit of many hours of library research and archival digging. Professor Byrne demonstrates conclusively that Ficino’s translations of Plato, Plotinus, and others were already circulating in Spain by the late fifteenth century... Even more important than her concrete findings, however, is her demonstration of the far-reaching implications of Ficino’s presence in the cultural and intellectual worlds of Spain... we have to abandon the all too familiar notion that Renaissance Spain became *tout court* the bastion only of a conservative orthodoxy... Byrne properly confronts indeed, as others have recently done so, the old originally nationalistic, or at least peninsular, agenda that embraced, indeed at times rejoiced in, two related notions: Spain’s quasi isolation even backwardness intellectually, and its militant catholic orthodoxy, assumptions that persisted well into the twentieth century... The plenitude of archival references that anchors these important reevaluations makes them indeed the more credible. This is a significant book with an impressive list, not incidentally, of works cited”

[Michael J.B. Allen, UCLA, *Cervantes* 37.2 (2017).]

“Susan Byrne’s work, a clear extension of her earlier research on Iberian intellectual and religious trends during the Middle Ages and early modern period, as well as of her works on Cervantes and Neoplatonism in Spain, is a prodigious feat of translation and assessment that elegantly supports Spain’s claim to an active and accomplished Renaissance that used Plato and his principal translator and commentator for the understanding of an Iberian past, while formulating intellectual foundations for a Spanish future”

[Donald Kagay, University of Dallas, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 50.2 (2019).]

“Susan Byrne’s *Ficino in Spain* is an essential contribution to the study of the intellectual and cultural history of Spain and early modern Europe. Meticulously researched, artfully argued, and lucidly presented, it introduces an important but neglected philosophical and literary current. In fact, it breaks new ground and, through Byrne’s expansive scholarship and probing analysis, invites investigation and interrogation into a wide area of study that will substantially enhance appreciation and understanding of Ficino’s place and role in Renaissance Europe.

...Encyclopedic in expanse and depth, authoritative in examination, coherently argued, and elegantly expressed, Byrne’s research significantly advances our understanding of the intellectual and literary history of early modern Spain... Byrne’s archival investigations, assiduous attention to philological details, accurate readings of Platonic, Neoplatonist, and Ficinian texts that artistically reappear in Castilian literature, and an adroit untangling of ideas part and parcel of Ficino’s *pia philosophia* compel a revision of thought. As a highly useful reference tool, and as a serious critical analysis, this study, both seminal and foundational, deserves commendation and gratitude.

[Donal Gilma, Ball State University, *convivium: Revista de Filosofía* 34 (2021).]