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ARS EROTICA

The term *ars erotica* refers to the styles and techniques of lovemaking with the honorific title of art. But in what sense are these practices artistic, and how do they contribute to the aesthetics and ethics of self-cultivation in the art of living? In this book, Richard Shusterman offers a critical, comparative analysis of the erotic theories proposed by the most influential premodern cultural traditions that shaped our contemporary world. Beginning with ancient Greece, whose god of desiring love gave eroticism its name, Shusterman examines the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition and the classical erotic theories of Chinese, Indian, Islamic, and Japanese cultures, before concluding with medieval and Renaissance Europe. His exploration of their errors and insights shows how we could improve the quality of life and love today. By using the engine of eros to cultivate qualities of sensitivity, grace, skill, and self-mastery, we can reimagine a richer, more positive vision of sex education.

RICHARD SHUSTERMAN is the Dorothy F. Schmidt Eminent Scholar in the Humanities at Florida Atlantic University. His books include *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (published in fifteen languages), *Body Consciousness*, and *Thinking through the Body*. For his pioneering work in philosophy and somaesthetics, he was awarded the title of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques by the French Republic.

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Ars Erotica
Sex and Somaesthetics in the Classical
Arts of Love

RICHARD SHUSTERMAN
Florida Atlantic University



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For A.G.

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Preface

I greet the publication of this book with a strange blend of relief and anxiety. The reason for these mixed emotions is the book's untimely character. It is untimely in two senses. First, it took far much longer to complete than I originally promised my publisher and myself, so I am relieved that it is finally finished though embarrassed that it was not on time. More troubling, however, is the untimeliness of the book's interest in erotic desire and lovemaking, an interest decidedly not in tune with the current cultural atmosphere, particularly in the academic world to which I belong. In recent years, increasing revelations of persistent patterns of deplorable sexual predatory behavior have cast a dark cloud of suspicion around the very idea of erotic love and sexual pursuits. Such despicable behavior reflects long established and deeply rooted cultural attitudes that are not sufficiently respectful to women and that both presume and serve patriarchy's essential stance of male dominance. Sex is an arena where men have traditionally felt the need to assert their dominance (in theory and in practice) by objectifying and using women for pleasure and progeny, probably because they implicitly have felt or feared their own inadequacy when compared with the erotic and generative powers of women. This need to assert male dominance also contributed to the sexual abuse of boys.

Whatever its reasons (and even if it sometimes extends to the love of boys), erotic theory of the major philosophical traditions has contributed to the objectification and subjugation of women through ideas that foster exploitative misogynistic attitudes. With today's attempts to eradicate sexist prejudice, there is understandably great sensitivity to examining these erotic theories in a thoughtful, careful, even if critical, way. One worries that even merely making them a subject of serious study risks condoning the troubling attitudes they express, and that it might be best to simply eschew such study, as I was often tempted (and advised) to do. These feelings of internal

resistance, compounded by worries of how this research would be received, contributed to the delays in the book's completion. So too did the not surprising unwillingness of grant-awarding bodies to fund such research. However, the topic of erotic love and the aesthetics of lovemaking seemed too important to ignore, not simply for my particular research project of somaesthetics but also for more effectively treating the traditional issues of predatory sexism that continue to shape erotic mindsets today. Besides objectifying and subjugating women, traditional theories of *ars erotica* sometimes offend through their dominant heteronormativity. There are, however, important exceptions. The influential Platonic theories of love are firmly grounded in Greek homosexual erotic theory and practice, while Asian erotic theory likewise examines same-sex love. Today's trends of sexual and gender diversity that break with the simple binary model of male and female could find interesting roots in some classical theories the book examines, even if most of its discussions reflect the traditional privileging of heterosexual lovemaking.

In any case, we can better handle the problems of sexism and heteronormativity by understanding their foundations in the history of erotic theory in the world's most influential premodern cultures, whose fundamental concepts and views still pervade contemporary sexual attitudes. Critical study of these classic erotic theories provides genealogical tools to analyze and neutralize the complex and multiple roots of sexist thinking, while allowing us to recover whatever positive, redeeming elements these theories may contain. It seems unwise to assume that they contain nothing at all worthwhile, given their wide-ranging diversity, scope, and influence. Condemning them all in their entirety risks losing useful ideas. This book explores the aesthetic dimension of traditional *ars erotica* where I believe we might find some fruitful insights. The aesthetic, as I understand it, includes not only matters of beauty and art, but also countless other attractive qualities (grace, elegance, harmony, refinement, sensitivity, intelligence, charm, style, care, expressive meanings) that pertain to one's person, character, and conduct of life. Moreover, building on its etymology (from the Greek word for sensory perception, *aisthesis*) and its founding formulation by Alexander Baumgarten, I see aesthetics as very much concerned with the cultivation of sensory perception and the improvement in performance that enhanced perception can bring. Such enhanced performance includes conduct that expresses the beauties of virtue. Classical theories of *ars erotica* propose many techniques for improving one's personal form (in appearance and conduct) and one's perceptual and performative skills that enable a more sensitive awareness of the feelings

of others (even if one could, in principle, use this greater sensitivity to exploit rather than help those others).

The book's concern for *ars erotica* derives from my research in somaesthetics, the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as a site of sensory appreciation or perception (aesthesia) and of creative self-fashioning in which one uses one's bodily appearance and conduct to express one's values and shape oneself. This focus on somaesthetic cultivation derived in turn from my long-standing interest in the practice of philosophy as an art of living, a conception of philosophy that was very prominent in the ancient world but that lost its centrality with the professionalization of philosophy as a university subject in modern times. If philosophy is a way of life, then the soma (the sentient, purposive, lived body) is the necessary medium through which one practices philosophy as an art of living. Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault pioneered the late twentieth-century resurgence of this vision of philosophy, with Foucault emphasizing and thematizing its aesthetic dimension through his notion of an "aesthetics of existence" that extends into ethics and politics.

Foucault, moreover, insisted that this lived aesthetics had a crucial somatic dimension in which one's sexuality (one's erotic desires and the way one expressed and managed them) played an important role. He therefore devoted his final years of research to an extensive study of sexuality in Western culture, but died before completing the project. Initially, Foucault planned a six-volume project entitled *The History of Sexuality*, with the first introductory volume published in 1976, together with a list of the five planned subsequent book titles. None of those titles, however, ever appeared, because of the difficulties he faced in pursuing this initial project. The research was incredibly demanding, and it required moving in unanticipated directions. Finally, eight years later, shortly before his death in 1984, Foucault published two other volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (*The Use of Pleasures* and *Care of the Self*), together with a revised and abridged program of only four volumes for the entire work. The final volume, *Les aveux de la chair*, was posthumously published only in 2018, reconstructed from manuscripts.

My book on *ars erotica* owes a deep debt to Foucault's ideas, though I diverge from them in important ways, as the reader will discover. Foucault's extensive delays and difficulties in completing his project, which was limited to Western thinking in ancient Greco-Roman culture and early Christianity, should have warned me against undertaking my study of *ars erotica* in a more global, multicultural way. However, in our age of progressively transcultural globalization, it is important to look beyond Foucault's

focus on the West and its ancient thought. This broader focus enormously complicated my research efforts, as I increasingly realized the vast amount of relevant material for my inquiry and the severe limits of my knowledge. Each chapter here treats topics worthy of book-length studies, even if one limits oneself to theoretical texts and neglects (as I have largely done) the fictional literature and visual art concerning *ars erotica*. Foucault always arouses my admiration for his powerful work as an advocate, activist, and theorist of homosexual erotic life. His trailblazing study of eroticism, however inspiringly insightful, understandably reflects his own personal interests and enthusiasms, as it should. Because my erotic experience has been mostly heterosexual, this book presents a somewhat different perspective than Foucault's, but one that hopes to complement rather than replace his impressive work.

The book is a blend of philosophy and cultural history of ideas because I think we cannot properly understand the philosophical meanings and arguments concerning *ars erotica* without setting them in their historical, cultural context, even if our viewpoint on that distant context is inextricably that of our own time. My immense debts to historians of philosophy and culture I register in the book's bibliography. Many colleagues have offered helpful information, commentary, and critical advice with respect to the book's various chapters, even if discussing these matters occasionally caused them some embarrassment. In order to spare these friends further embarrassment, I offer here a general expression of thanks and will refrain from the academic ritual of naming names. However, I must specify my abiding gratitude to the Schmidt Family Foundation, which most generously supports my work at Florida Atlantic University, and to Beatrice Rehl, my editor at Cambridge University Press, for her gracious and patient understanding in waiting for me to deliver this book, at last.

Abbreviations

- AC *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. Trans. Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont.
- AE Abelard, Peter. *Abelard: Ethical Writings*. Trans. P. V. Spade.
- AR Kalyanamalla. *Ananga Ranga*. Trans. F. F. Arbuthnot and Richard Burton.
- ART *Kautilya's Arthashastra*. Trans. Rudrapatna Shamasastri.
- BC Castiglione, Baldesar. *The Book of the Courtier*. Trans. George Bull.
- BS Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*.
- BW Ibn al-Arabi. Muhammad. *The Bezels of Wisdom*. Trans. R. W. J. Austin.
- CG Augustine. *City of God*. Trans. Henry Bettenson.
- Char Plato, *Charmides*.
- CL *Andreas Capellanus on Love*. Trans. P. G. Walsh.
- CM *The Life of Christina of Markyate*. Ed. S. Fanous and H. Leyser. Trans. C. H. Talbot.
- CON Cassian, John. *The Conferences*. Trans. Boniface Ramsey.
- CWZ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi)*. Trans. Burton Watson.
- DGH Dover, K. J. *Greek Homosexuality*.
- DIL D'Aragona, Tullia. *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*. Trans. Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry.
- DJ *Tao Te Ching (Daodejing)*. Trans. D. C. Lau.
- DL Ebreo, Leone. *The Philosophy of Love (Dialoghi d'amore)*. Trans. F. Friedeberg-Seeley and J. H. Barnes.
- DL1 Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 1. Trans. R. D. Hicks.
- DL2 *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2. Trans. R. D. Hicks.

- EI Urabe, Kaneyoshi. *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō*. Trans. Donald Keene.
- EM Ghazali, Abu Hamid al-. *Book on the Etiquette of Marriage*. In *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam*. Trans. Madelain Farah.
- EOM Bruno, Giordano. *Cause, Principle and Unity: And Essays on Magic*. Trans. R. J. Blackwell.
- EP Katib, Ali ibn Nasr al-. *The Encyclopedia of Pleasure*. Ed. Salah Addin Khawwam. Trans. Adnan Jarkas and Salah Addin Khawwam.
- EW Erasmus, Desiderius. *Erasmus on Women*. Ed. Erika Rummel
- FC Ficino, Marsilio. *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's "Symposium": The Text and a Translation, with an Introduction*. Trans. S. R. Jayne.
- GL *The Four Books: Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean, and the Works of Mencius*. Trans. James Legge.
- GM Augustine. *De bono conjugali (On the Good of Marriage)*. Trans. C. L. Cornish.
- GY *The Gossamer Years: The Diary of a Noblewoman of Heian Japan*. Trans. Edward Seidensticker.
- HBW *Hanfeizi: Basic Writings*. Trans. Burton Watson.
- HF Bruno, Giordano. *The Heroic Frenzies*. Trans. P. E. Memmo.
- HS Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley.
- HS₂ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*. Trans. Robert Hurley.
- HS₃ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, vol. 3: The Care of the Self*. Trans. Robert Hurley.
- INS Cassian, John. *The Institutes*. Trans. Boniface Ramsey.
- JCM *St. John Chrysostom: On Marriage and Family Life*. Trans. C. P. Roth and David Anderson.
- KKS Kokkoka. *Koka Shastra*. Trans. Alex Comfort.
- KS Vatsyayana, Mallanaga. *Kamasutra*. Trans. Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar.
- LAH Bayle, Pierre. *Letters of Abelard and Heloise*.
- LLHA *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard*. Ed. C. J. Mews.
- LM *The Diary of Lady Murasaki*. Trans. Richard Bowring.
- LN Lucretius. *On the Nature of the Universe*. Trans. R. E. Latham.
- M Montaigne, Michel de. *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*. Trans. Donald Frame.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

xv

- MB Donner, Fred M. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.
- MC Augustine. *On Marriage and Concupiscence*. Trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallace.
- MCL *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Manava-Dharmasastra*. Trans. Patrick Olivelle.
- MG Danielou, Alain. *The Myths and Gods of India*.
- MR Musonius Rufus. *Lectures*. In *Musonius Rufus: "The Roman Socrates"*. Trans. Cora Lutz.
- N *The Natyaśāstra*, 2 vols. Trans. Manomohan Ghosh.
- NE Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- PA2 Aristotle, *Prior Analytics II*.
- PB Sei Shonagon. *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*. Trans. Arthur Waley.
- PDL Plutarch. *Dialogue on Love*. In *Moralia*, vol. 9. Trans. E. L. Minar, F. H. Sandbach, and W. C. Helmbold.
- PG Nafzawi, Umar ibn Muhammad. *The Perfumed Garden*. Trans. Jim Colville.
- Pol. Aristotle, *Politics*.
- Q *The Quran*.
- RD Ibn Hazm, Ali ibn Aḥmad. *The Ring of the Dove*. Trans. A. J. Arberry.
- Rep Plato, *Republic*.
- Rhet. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.
- RPA Aretino, Pietro. *The Ragionamenti, or Dialogues of the Divine Pietro Aretino Literally Translated into English*.
- SEA Doniger, Wendy. *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic*.
- SI Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab. *Sexuality in Islam*. Trans. Alan Sheridan.
- SL Van Gulik, Robert. *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.*
- ST Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa theologica*.
- Sym Plato, *Symposium*.
- TG Murasaki, Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*. Trans. Edward Seidensticker.
- TI *Tales of Ise: Lyrical Episodes from Tenth-Century Japan*. Trans. Helen Craig McCullough.
- Wile Wile, Douglas. *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts*.
- Xen Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield.

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