loving men out of a “masculine strength and manly nature (Ficino version),” all three Latin translators use the biological masculus to describe “strength,” but the cultural virilis to describe “nature.” The translators were well aware of the conflict, and their decisions to usually describe “homosexual” men as loving the vir rather than the mas is telling of their thoughts on what it means to be a “man” in their own Christian culture.

Women, and especially what we today would call “lesbians,” are more frequently classified solely according to sexual acts or feelings. This is important in tracing the beginnings of our modern system of sexual identification. Stephanus refers to women who love their own using the very offensive term fellitrices feminae, or “oral-sex women.” Cornarius refers to them using the rather more common term tribades, the Greek root of which means “to rub.” Neither of these terms can be read in the Greek, which uses a word which is found only in this dialogue and is thus unintelligible outside of context, though it is safe to say from morphological analysis that the same notions of specific sexual behavior are not present. Finally, Ficino refers to these women simply as those “who desire women.”

This is Ficino’s bend. It is one in which choice and natural desire take a precedent. Women are not objectified and men who love their own are in no way shameful. Where Cornarius or Stephanus use passive language or terms such as “stumble upon their beloved,” Ficino writes “choose.” This tolerance and open-mindedness is very striking in Ficino, and it is probably what inspired the later, rival translations to attempt to “set Plato straight,” a process which ultimately had tremendous, and largely negative, impacts on our modern notions of sexuality.