

"I Am Forever Changed": *Chasing Amy* as Platonic Dialogue,
or Looking Outside the Canon for Pedagogical Inspiration
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The standard movie used by classicists to illustrate Plato's *Symposium* has been *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*; reasonably so, given that the film was directly inspired by Plato. Yet problems of accessibility remain. As the 2007 Beloit Mindset List (<http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/2011.php>) informs us, our students live in a world where the Berlin wall never existed. Nor does the transgender experience of *Hedwig's* protagonist speak readily to all audience members—a distinct problem when attempting to transmit Plato's transcendental philosophy to a modern classroom.

Frustrated by such considerations, as well as by my students' lackluster response to Plato, I tried a radical experiment in a recent course on gender in antiquity. Instead of *Hedwig*, I showed the class *Chasing Amy*, an R-rated comedy by the iconoclastic director Kevin Smith. In this film, the protagonists are Holden (Ben Affleck) and Banky (Jason Lee), male friends since childhood who now work together to produce a comic strip, and Alyssa (Joey Lauren Adams), the woman who comes between them. Though crude at times, the movie addresses questions of sexuality in a surprisingly sophisticated manner and interrogates the many different varieties of love: physical, spiritual, and philosophical; heterosexual, homosexual, and homosocial.

The students viewed the film after we had finished reading and discussing *The Symposium* and a scholarly chapter on sexuality (Parker 1990). As a part of the unit, I prepared a take-home assignment containing questions based on the two models we had discussed, namely, the Roman, quasi-biological model, and the Platonic model as expressed by any of the characters in *The Symposium*. The results were more than satisfactory. The majority of students successfully applied (and therefore understood) the models, showing a greater engagement with the ancient material than any of my previous classes had achieved.

In my talk, I will explicate the methods and results of this particular experience, as well as the reasons for its success. I will then speak about the general need to meet students halfway in the classroom. Sources like the Beloit report, though somewhat painful to acknowledge, should affect our choices of modern media for our classrooms. Otherwise, our attempts to show modern parallels will likely be informed solely by our own aesthetic preferences, which (as many of us have experienced) rapidly become out-of-date.