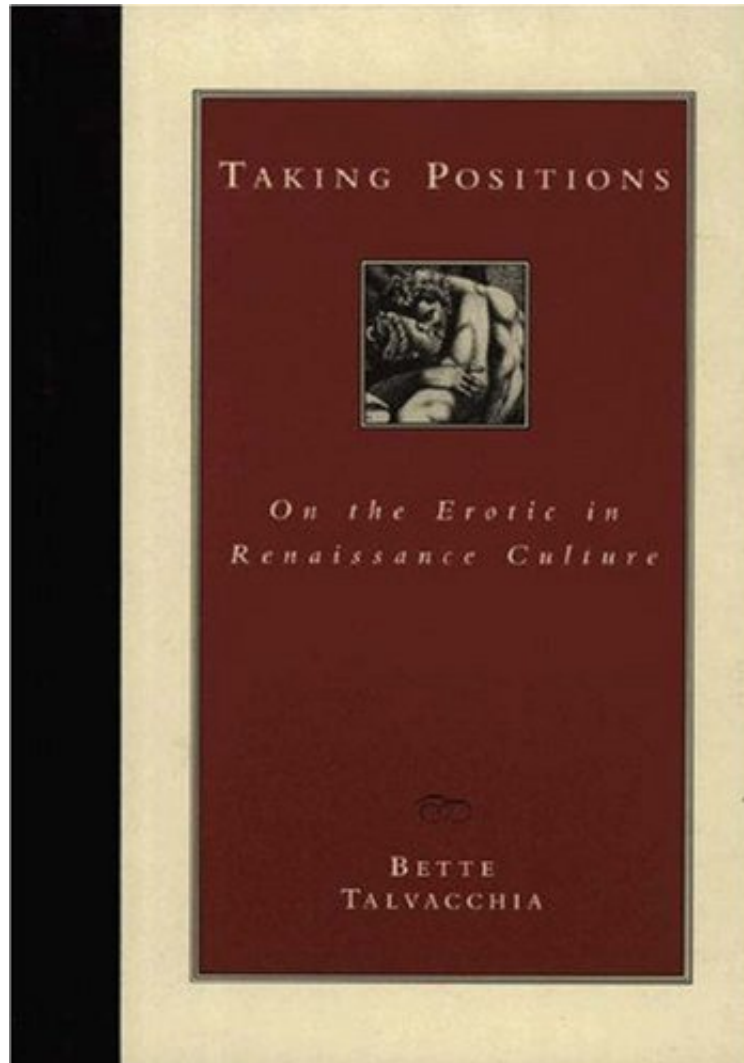


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## Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture

*Bette Talvacchia*

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**Bette Talvacchia : Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture:

0 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture By B. Gannongood book, i haven't got all the way through it yet but definitely a good read. i would recommend this book to others

Taking Positions is an innovative exploration of the place of the erotic in Renaissance art and culture, focusing on a notorious set of images created by the young Italian master Giulio Romano. In the early 1520s, Giulio made sixteen

drawings of couples in various sexual positions. Known as *I modi* ("the positions"), the drawings were modeled on classical sources and themselves became a model for erotica in early modern Europe. Bette Talvacchia presents the first comprehensive account of the origins, impact, and context of these drawings, discussing in highly original ways such issues as censorship, religious teachings about sex, and the influence of antique culture. Talvacchia presents evidence that Giulio modeled *I modi* in part on coinlike ancient Roman medals known as *spintriae*, which portrayed diverse sexual positions. She reconstructs how the drawings were first circulated privately and then made into engravings that were distributed publicly. She considers what it reveals about Renaissance culture that authorities began to consider *I modi* obscene and threatening--they went so far as to jail the engraver--only when the images became available to the public. More broadly, Talvacchia explores how sixteenth-century discourse used the terms *onesto* and *disonesto*--roughly analogous to the terms *natural* and *unnatural* in Catholic teachings about sexual sin--to distinguish between the erotic and the obscene. The book also traces the influence of Giulio's drawings throughout the sixteenth century. Talvacchia looks, in particular, at two related sets of prints: Jacopo Caraglio's *Loves of the Gods* and a manual of anatomy by the French doctor and printer Charles Estienne. In the former, she shows how explicit sexual representation was legitimized with a cover of ancient mythology. She then examines how Estienne transformed Caraglio's erotic images into strange anatomical figures of the female body and what this transformation shows about the place of women's sexuality in Renaissance medicine. The book is generously illustrated and includes full translations of the infamous sonnets that Pietro Aretino wrote to accompany *I modi*. Provocative, rigorously researched, and carefully argued, *Taking Positions* is a major contribution to our understanding of the erotic in Renaissance culture.

"This beautifully produced book is courageous in addressing aspects of the subject without without moralising or coyness."--*Burlington Magazine* "[Talvacchia] does an admirable job of setting the whole extraordinary episode [of Roman printmaking] in its historical context."--*Apollo Magazine* "In *Taking Positions*, Bette Talvacchia pieces together the dispersed fragments of the sixteen *Modi*, and with the same reconstructive skill she recomposes the society of the 1520s in which they were produced. . . . [A] fine essay."--Ingrid Rowland, *The New York of Books* "Talvacchia has produced a marvelous book of potentially broad interest and import that honors both scholarly rigor and the visual pleasures of eroticism."--Sharon T. Strocchia, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* "Talvacchia's particular contribution has been to reconstruct the material history of *I modi* through impeccable research, addressing questions of documentation, authorship, style, and form, and broadening this more canonical approach by integrating critical considerations around the issue of gender and the question of the impact of old and new media in Renaissance Italy. . . . [A] model of interdisciplinary research in the arena of Renaissance studies."--Sara F. Matthews-Grieco, *CAA*. s "Bette Talvacchia does some adroit scholarly detective work. . . . *Taking Positions* gives us the era at its mostly engagingly bawdy."--Ann Landi, *ArtNews* From the Back Cover "The picaresque story of these engravings includes some of the best-known artists and rogues of sixteenth-century Italy. Although little has been written about *I modi*, and certainly nothing of this scope. Talvacchia's many-sided approach to her material rises gloriously to the provocative subject."--Ingrid D. Rowland, *University of Chicago* "A fascinating case study in the uses and transmissions of images and in the multiple valences of the sexually represented body in the Renaissance."--Leonard Barkan, *New York University* About the Author Bette Talvacchia is Professor of Art History at the University of Connecticut. She has published widely on topics in Renaissance art and gender studies.