

**Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio / Eros – A Journey of Multiple Loves**  
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### ***Eros in Academe: A Compelling Cycle of Conferences on Inclusive Love***

Author **Serena Anderlini D'Onofrio, Ph.D.**, has recently completed a cycle of conferences on love, bi and poly style, and what it can teach about the arts of loving, healing, and living in emotional sustainability. The cycle was based on her memoir, *Eros: A Journey of Multiple Loves* (Harrington Park Press, 2007) which is a finalist for the Lambda Awards this year. Anderlini's reading/workshop combination brings together a wide range of topics as does the memoir itself. Even before she knew about the recognition, Anderlini-D'Onofrio was ready to go out with her controversial messages and bring her views to the attention of interested students.

A well-respected Professor of Humanities at the University of Puerto Rico, Anderlini-D'Onofrio is an educator with a commitment to challenging the commodified sense of what knowledge is that many people feel they have to go along with. She invites others to reconsider--if they are willing. Her most recent cycle of conferences has been exhilarating, and more appearances are currently being planned for the Midwest and the West Coast.

"The book gives me a chance to talk about all the things that don't work in this world and about a different, queerer world where they'd work better," she said.

### ***Eros Workshop and Reading Highlights***

A high point in the cycle of conferences was "Memory, Outness, and Trauma," at North Carolina State University on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007. This workshop/reading was designed to open a space of creative expression for those among the local students who identify as queer. Anderlini presented her vision of trauma as a source of knowledge to expand one's possibilities for writing and for love. Students were enthralled by yoga exercises designed to revive their most intense, queer moments. The presentation did exactly what it was supposed to do. As a participant said, the workshop "has continued to spark interesting and soul-searching conversations with friends, partners, and my mother." "Meeting [the author] was an inspiration to me as a writer, queer person, and woman," she added. Organizers were quite pleased, too. As one said, "Having Serena here at State was a great way to push the envelope . . . through speakers like her, we are mak[ing] sure that all students are reached in our programming efforts."

At Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, Anderlini appeared on February 21, 2007. This long-standing progressive women's school had chosen *Eros* as the centerpiece of a campus-wide campaign and discussion about "taboo relationships and the eroticism of learning." Students' previous knowledge of the book was most conducive for Anderlini's appearance. The discussions focused on issues that are somewhat hidden in many progressive communities, though they are present all the time, including love when there is an age gap, love in connection with teaching and learning, and love in the face of institutional prohibitions.

### **The Controversy and Wisdom of *Eros***

The event provided exposure for some of Anderlini-D'Onofrio's most controversial views. Anderlini-D'Onofrio holds education in high esteem. She believes that, to the extent that the relatedness between learning and love is culturally acknowledged, education is "the way to multiply the joy and peace in the world." "As a teacher and student of many years," she writes, "I know that . . . learning is erotic" (4). About herself and others in her profession, she writes, "Of course we fall in love with our students. We all do. We have to. What is teaching if not love? Love of the person we see the student become . . . of what has passed over through the creative and intellectual energy generated in the learning process" (46).

Many invigorating questions followed her reading. Asked about her own taboo relationships, Anderlini said that she was proud of them and of the joy they had brought into her life. Another question was about her writing style, which combines theory, narrative, and erotica. "There are no preconceived genres," she said "as one can learn from comparative literary history." "My bi friends used to joke that 'our brain is our most important sexual organ,' and that suggested to me that our erotic, emotional, and intellectual lives are closely related. Integrating reflection, storytelling, and erotic scenes was necessary to share the wisdom I gained from thinking and writing about my life. I was fortunate to find a bi-friendly publisher willing to take the risk."

Other students were interested in her experience as a bodyworker and holistic healer. Anderlini shared her wisdom of using touch as a mode of knowledge, which is often overlooked. "Why are we so suspicious about what we learn from touch?" she asked. "Can you imagine a world where all knowledge from sight was invalidated?" This brought the point home for some participants. As one said, "in this society much has been conflated with love, and much that is so essential to loving has been pushed to the wayside." The absurdity of invalidating knowledge gained from one sense indicated the urgency of validating all senses as sources of knowledge--if the knowledge we want is to be conducive of love. Those who had liked the book found its author even more charming. As one of the organizers said, "with her glowing skin and honest eyes coupled with a fiery personality and gentle charm, I immediately felt connected to her."

### **About Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio**

Born in Rome, Italy with time as a student and educator in Italy, California, Illinois, Tennessee, and Puerto Rico, Serena Anderlini D'Onofrio, is an author, scholar, activist, translator, and public speaker. Her scholarship regularly appears in refereed journals. She was the editor of *Women and Bisexuality: A*

*Global Perspective* (2003), and *Plural Loves: Designs for Bi and Poly Living* (2005), and is working on more books.

Anderlini has been supported in her commitment by her own institution and by the Lambda Literary Award's selection of *Eros* as finalist in the new category - Bisexuality. She is very grateful to her press for its commitment to bisexuality, and to Lambda for the recognition the new category bestows on it.

The Lambda Literary Foundation, a leading organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender literature, sponsors the Lambda Literary Awards and provides resources for writers, readers, booksellers, publishers, librarians, and the entire literary community. The award ceremony will be held on Thursday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007 in New York City. For more information on the Lambda Literary Foundation, visit [www.lambdaliterary.org](http://www.lambdaliterary.org).

