

# Stage and Actors in Plato's *Symposium*

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AMONG PLATONIC DIALOGUES, the *Symposium* has always enjoyed the widest appeal. It contains no difficult or tedious argumentation; it is not about intellectual problems; it seems easily comprehensible to all readers. It proceeds swiftly, with dramatic force and poetic persuasiveness, and holds the reader captive and enthralled. Lofty thoughts and entertaining tales follow one other and intermingle; irony and good-natured humor provide comic relief. Courtesy and easy manners characterize its participants as members of a civilized, educated society, into which each appears introduced as a welcome guest, and to which each reader would be flattered to belong. The *Symposium* is perhaps the one long and important Greek text that contains nothing forbidding, strange, remote, or alien to us. No other Greek text can be appreciated so immediately as a great piece of literary art; its timelessness is not claimed by tradition but is personally experienced at each reading; its poetic power shines forth always fresh; no dust of millenia has gathered, no patina has to be removed: it is made of pure, solid, and imperishable gold. Yet it does overwhelm us. What has been wrought by a master craftsman has as much grandeur as intimacy, as much beauty as vitality, filled with grace and charm; and it lets us contemplate what we all know as the center of our existence: love. The shock that some may feel at hearing love discussed as love between men can easily be overcome. The praises of love quickly appear to raise it to a level that transcends the attractions of the sexes; rather than passionate feelings between two unique individuals, love seems to be absolute, a natural force and a divine gift.

But when we approach the text more closely and begin to ponder the meaning of each sentence, each paragraph, the construction of the whole and its 'message', everything that appeared so easy and simple reveals difficulties, complexities, questions, problems—and thus the *Symposium* has inspired a veritable library of exegesis and interpretation.

Every attempt at interpretation must proceed from an account of setting and persons as precise and complete as possible. One has first to understand the platform on which, and the background against which, events and speeches occur, *i.e.*, the stage of the play, the special character of its place and time, and the *dramatis personae* and their relationships. In all these aspects the *Symposium* is different from other Platonic dialogues, and this difference is significant. In a text so carefully composed and structured, no point made, no information offered can safely be left unexamined; every single detail has to be considered, because none is accidental. All this could easily be the theme of a seminar throughout an entire term, and yet it is but preparatory work. Without it, however, any interpretation may be little more than a house of cards. An initial attempt at some such preparatory work will be presented in the following.

Some of the dialogues are reports of past events, and so is the *Symposium*. But in this case the report is twice removed and lacks the foundation of a written record. Apollodorus, a companion of Socrates for no more than three years, tells what he had heard from Aristodemus, one of the participants at a banquet that was given a long time ago. For when Aristodemus gives his report to Apollodorus, it has been many years since the host, Agathon, has resided in Athens (172C). A rumor has spread that Apollodorus had been the recipient of a report more reliable than other accounts of that banquet about which many incorrect notions were in the air, and this rumor led others to appeal to him for information. The source is not Socrates, but Socrates has corroborated the correctness of some parts (173B). The text we read is the report of a report of an event long past, at a time when the narrator Apollodorus and his interlocutor were children and Aristodemus was a young man. About the actual date, however, there is no uncertainty. Agathon gave the banquet the day after he had celebrated his first victory in a dramatic contest—and this was in the year 416. We know when Agathon left Athens: 407. Thus, Apollodorus' report can be dated to the very end of the fifth century. What significance such an elaborately-involved description of the event and its recounting in much later times may turn out to have, Plato impresses upon the reader the importance of both the date of the event and its remoteness, of its actual occurrence and its legendary fame, of what we can know and of what we cannot know for certain. The reliability of the report is even

more doubtful if we consider the character of Apollodorus as described both in the *Symposium* and in *Phaedrus*: he is emotional to the point of madness. How much can we trust the testimony of such a man when he repeats what he had heard from another?

Plato is writing, as it were, a historical novel or play, pretending to give the truth about the past. He is not a historian describing historical events as they actually happened. The *Symposium* resembles a portrait by a great artist; it is not akin to a photograph or a recording. We may say, therefore, that had such a banquet happened in 416 it would, according to Plato, have been as he describes it.

The pretended historicity of that banquet is emphasized by the actual historicity of its participants. The persons in many Platonic dialogues are, of course, actual and identifiable people, most of them known in other contexts, some appearing in more than one dialogue. But nowhere else do two poets appear, one of tragedies, the other of comedies; nowhere else are occasion and setting so richly described; nowhere does the narrative include so much atmosphere and so many novelistic details that seem at first to have no direct bearing on the speeches. Although the setting of each dialogue is significant, that of the *Symposium* is even more so. In neglecting the setting we always suffer a loss, little in some, not unimportant in others, essential in few, crucial perhaps only in the *Symposium*. The texts themselves indicate the importance of setting and dramatic date. The latter may be lacking altogether, but this is rarer than one might think; the former may be just barely mentioned or may be clearly determined; and the proportion between the core of a dialogue and the length and precision of the description of setting and dramatic date signifies the degree of their importance for the dialogue proper. This seems to me obvious, and this is why we have to visualize the setting of the *Symposium* in all its details and at the same time keep in mind the historical situation in 416 in relation to the participants. About these we must, of course, learn as much as can be known, first with respect to the information found in other Platonic dialogues, second as regards their position, character, and biography gleaned from other sources.

Eight people are mentioned by name; more were present. Four are famous Athenian personages: Socrates, Aristophanes, Agathon, and Alcibiades; two others are known both through Plato and other sources: Phaedrus and Eryximachus; one,

Pausanias, is mentioned in one other Platonic dialogue but is not otherwise identifiable; and the eighth is the silent, uninvited guest, on whose account the dialogue is based: Socrates' young companion Aristodemus. The guest most famous at the time arrived after the speeches: Alcibiades. Only a year later, in 415, he succeeded in persuading the Athenians to embark for Sicily. Suspected of complicity in the profanation of the Mysteries, he was recalled for trial, escaped to Sparta and committed high treason, to return to Athens only once, briefly in 407/406, before he was assassinated in 404.

Athens' tragedy begins with that year, 415. Two other guests at Agathon's banquet, Phaedrus and Eryximachus, were also involved in the scandal of the mutilation of the herms. They were convicted and exiled; it is uncertain whether or not they ever returned. Agathon's banquet, then, is the last happy occasion for a social gathering of this particular group on the eve of catastrophic events that contemporary readers of the dialogue could and would remember. They would in all likelihood also be conscious that it was the last time Socrates and Alcibiades met. Before we turn to a closer view of Agathon and his guests, let us try to gather some information on the setting.

How much can be deduced from the text as regards the room in which the banquet takes place and the arrangement of the couches? Agathon's house is that of a well-to-do gentleman, with entrance, courtyard, and many servants. We may assume that such a house would have a room designated as a dining room. It must have been large enough for more than the six named guests. After the first speaker, Phaedrus, "some others" spoke (180C), but Aristodemus did not remember their speeches. At the very end, a crowd of newcomers (223B) rushed in, caused some disturbance, but did recline, as the text says explicitly.

Evidence for special dining rooms in private houses in fifth-century Athens does not exist, to my knowledge. There are edifices for public dining, of which the Prytaneion—examined in detail by Stephen Miller<sup>1</sup>—is the best and most common example. There is a certain variety in the shape of such public dining rooms; but one type, found both in Prytaneia and in private houses from the fourth century on, appears to be

<sup>1</sup> Stephen G. Miller, *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (Berkeley 1978).

standard. It is the plan in which the couches are placed on a slightly raised platform lining all four walls of a rectangular room. On one wall the space for one couch is left free for the door. It follows that the doorway is off-center and the number of couches is an odd one. An odd number of couches also prevails in the literary sources. Private dining rooms of this type have been identified in Athens and elsewhere; the largest Athenian example, from the end of the fourth century, is oblong and could take nine couches.<sup>2</sup> Smaller rooms for seven couches are more frequent both in Athens and other places. According to archaeological evidence and literary sources, especially Demosthenes, private houses in fifth-century Athens were very modest, in contrast to the opulence of public buildings (as Thucydides implies at 1.10.2f). Even though Agathon's house was a stately residence, it was surely not immense.

There are many representations of reclining feasters on Attic red-figure vases. The evidence is rich, and I have not examined all of it. But from what I have seen, we can, I think, learn the following. The couches were placed in a row of two to three alongside each wall; single occupancy is more frequent than double; three to a couch is highly exceptional. In a double occupancy it is rare that both are bearded, mature men. In the very rare instances of three males on one couch, they are youths, not mature men. Double occupancy consists, as a rule, of the combination of a bearded man and either a youth or a woman. This means, of course, that such a banquet is an erotic one: the two are lovers. This type seems almost as frequent as single occupancy. One may therefore conclude that, where possible, one man to a couch is the prevailing custom unless feasting and drinking are combined with lovemaking.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. E. Jones, "Town and Country Houses of Attica in Classical Times," in H. Mussche, P. Spitaels, and F. Goemaere, edd., *Thorikos and the Laurion in archaic and classical times. Papers and contributions of the Colloquium held in March, 1973, at the State University of Gent (=Miscellanea Graeca I [Ghent 1975])* 79.

<sup>3</sup> Here are examples of each arrangement: men with youths, Munich inv. 8935, by Euphronios (*ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1619, 3 bis; *Paralipomena* 322, 3 bis; *Beazley Addenda* 152; *Euphronios der Maler* [Berlin 1991] cat. no. 5); men with women, Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig Kä 415, by the Tarquinia Painter (*ARV*<sup>2</sup> 868, 45; *Paralipomena* 426, 45; *Beazley Addenda* 249); men with men, London, B.M. E 49, by Douris (*ARV*<sup>2</sup> 432, 52; *Beazley Addenda* 237).

Agathon's is a banquet of mature men. We read that two couches are occupied by two persons each. The uninvited guest, Aristodemus, the only youth present, is asked to lie on Eryximachus' couch; Socrates is to share a couch with the host, Agathon. What about the others? Do, for instance, Pausanias and Aristophanes share one couch or has each his own? Does Phaedrus, the first speaker, share his couch with one of those whose speeches have been forgotten? Or does he recline by himself?

Some considerations seem to favor one alternative over the other. We should expect either double or single occupancy throughout unless there is a special reason for a mixed arrangement. The text gives us such a special reason for the double occupancy of two couches. Agathon wishes to be near Socrates for reasons he mentions explicitly (175C). There is no space prepared for Aristodemus, who is not expected and must be accommodated somewhere. He is Socrates' companion and that is why, I think, he is asked to take his place on Eryximachus' couch, which is next to Agathon's. Originally Eryximachus must have been the sole occupant. It follows that in all probability each guest had his own couch. Given the composition and character of the banquet and the host's civilized and considerate manners, this is what we should expect anyhow. But there are other points that make this arrangement more probable: (1) it agrees with the prevailing visual evidence; (2) between Phaedrus and Pausanias there are some unnamed guests; in a double occupancy scheme it would be strange that two lifelong friends, Phaedrus and Eryximachus, were not placed together, but Phaedrus is paired instead with an unknown, and Eryximachus, originally alone, later with Aristodemus; (3) when Alcibiades detects Socrates with Agathon he chides him for reclining with the κάλλιστος instead of with Aristophanes or any other γελοῖος (213C); Aristophanes and each of the others must then have been by themselves on their couches; (4) Alcibiades appears with a flute girl and some others (212D). We do not know if these stayed with Alcibiades, who was urged to remain. But we read that at the end quite a few komasts suddenly entered (223B) because someone left the door open. All these reclined; and heavy drinking began. Such additional guests could not have reclined if the couches had been occupied by more than one originally. True enough, Eryximachus, Phaedrus, and some others then left, clearly not

to surrender their places but because the party became too drunk and disorderly for their taste.

How many guests did Agathon invite? How many couches were in his dining room? We cannot be sure. In addition to the five couches the occupants of which we know, there was more than one between Phaedrus and Pausanias. We have to arrange an odd number of couches in a sizable but not enormous room; and thus we have, I think, the alternative of seven or nine couches. Rooms of both ἐπτάκλινοι and ἐννεάκλινοι are mentioned in literature. The larger number seems to me less probable, for the number of unnamed guests whose speeches were not memorable would then be four, *i.e.*, almost as many as those mentioned, and the size of the room would have been quite large. The atmosphere of the banquet seems to me more intimate, arguing for fewer than nine guests. I therefore prefer seven couches, which means only two unnamed guests.

Recently, an edifice has been excavated in Eretria that may have been a private residence, as the excavators suggest,<sup>4</sup> or a public one. Its date, affirmed by a find of Panathenaic amphorae, is the first half of the fourth century, Plato's time, earlier than Athenian examples. It contains two dining rooms, one very large, said to be suitable for eleven couches, a square of 6.7 m. × 6.7 m. The other, with a small anteroom beautifully decorated with mosaics, is much smaller, about 5 m. × 5 m. This is the size for seven couches. Both rooms have slightly raised platforms for the couches. The entrance to the smaller room is off-center. Just such a dining room was located in Athens at the South Stoa of the Agora and has been reconstructed by Piet de Jong.<sup>5</sup> I am inclined to imagine Agathon's dining room just like this one.

As hypothetical as all these considerations must remain, they are not, I think, irrelevant and useless. A more concrete image of setting and arrangement helps us to explain the meaning of the double occupancy of the host's couch. Eryximachus shares his couch with Aristodemus in an emergency; Agathon shares his with Socrates by plan. The entire setting plays an important rôle in helping us better understand the actors on this stage. What more do we know about them?

<sup>4</sup> P. Ducrey and I. R. Metzger, "La maison aux mosaïques à Érétrie," *AntK* 22 (1979) 3–21, esp. 6.

<sup>5</sup> M. Lang, *Socrates in the Agora* (= *Agora Picture Book* no. 17 [Princeton 1975]) fig. 15.

No fewer than six of them—Alcibiades, Socrates, Agathon, Pausanias, Phaedrus, Eryximachus—appear in one other Platonic dialogue. Of the persons named in the *Symposium*, only Aristophanes and Aristodemus are missing there. This particular dialogue also includes the largest number of persons who are famous historically and otherwise: it is, of course, *Protagoras*. Athens' *jeunesse dorée* has gathered together in the large house of one of the richest Athenian aristocrats, Callias (whose sister, Hipparete, Alcibiades will marry), to listen to three famous guests: Protagoras, Hippias, and Prodicus. When Socrates arrives, three different groups surround each of them. In Hippias' circle there are Phaedrus and Eryximachus; with Prodicus there are, among others, Pausanias and with him a young boy of tender age and remarkable beauty, called Agathon (315D–E). Pausanias is said to be the boy's *erastes* ('lover'). Alcibiades arrives shortly after Socrates. In the opening sentence of *Protagoras* we are told that Alcibiades has now grown a beard, a recent event (309A). This provides a rough dramatic date: just before the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Many foreign luminaries are visiting Athens, and although Socrates is not yet famous, he is beginning to be known and respected, as Protagoras' closing words show, describing him as "the man I admire above any that I have met, and as quite an exception to men of your age; and I say I should not be surprised if you won high repute for wisdom" (*Prt.* 361 E).<sup>6</sup> These and other indications concerning the time of the gathering in Callias' house are consistent and lead to the year 432/31.

Agathon's banquet, then, is a reunion of old friends known to each other for more than fifteen years: Phaedrus and Eryximachus, whose friendship is also mentioned in *Phaedrus* (268A), and Pausanias and his *eromenos* ('beloved'), Agathon, the youngest of the group—though he too is now a mature man, perhaps just this side of 30, while Alcibiades, Aristophanes, and Phaedrus are in their mid-thirties; they all were born in or close to 450. Eryximachus was probably a few years younger, according to the evidence Davies has assembled.<sup>7</sup> Whether Phaedrus and Eryximachus once were lovers or always only friends we do not know for certain; the former seems intimated. But Pausanias and Agathon were and still are lovers.

<sup>6</sup> Tr. W. R. M. Lamb (Loeb Classical Library: London 1924) 257.

<sup>7</sup> J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families* (Oxford 1971) 462f.

The identity of Pausanias has not so far been established. None of the historically-attested Pausaniases can have been he. There is little doubt, however, that he is not a fictional character but, on the contrary, must have been known to Plato's readers just as well as the others. It would have destroyed the illusion of reality, so carefully created, had Plato invented the personage he presents as the lifelong lover of Agathon; and Aelian testifies (*VH* 2.21) that he accompanied Agathon when he left Athens for the court of King Archelaus. For his part, Agathon was sufficiently famous to be regarded by Aristotle as the first tragedian to have invented a plot (*Poet.* 9.7, 18.12–19). Our main source for Agathon's personality is, of course, the cruel caricature Aristophanes drew only five years after he was Agathon's guest. *Thesmophoriazusae* satirizes both Euripides and Agathon—'Αγάθων ὁ κλεινός, as Aristophanes makes Euripides say (29). At once, at the beginning of the play, even before Agathon appears, allusions are made to his effeminacy, allusions of the most obscene and graphic character. Agathon then appears in a woman's dress—a necessary aid, as he explains, for the piece he is about to write, but obviously quite suitable for his conduct and personality, as eloquently described by Euripides when he tries to persuade Agathon to mingle with the women, disguised as one of them (182–85). Euripides' companion makes vulgar remarks about Agathon's passive homosexuality. Although Agathon turns down Euripides' request, he is willing to lend his razor (217f)—associated with women, of course, not men—along with various female accoutrements and dresses he owns (247–50). In modern slang, Agathon is a drag queen.

Although Aristophanes' description is a caricature and not a portrait, it is clear that Agathon must have been known as a notoriously effeminate man whose beard was so radically clipped that he appeared to be beardless, like a woman. He could be suspected of shaving his body hair like a woman, and might even be presented in women's clothing. His appearance, voice, and manners make it possible for him to be mistaken for a woman, even by other women on the occasion of their festival. Thus one may imagine him behaving like a woman sexually, as well as poetically and socially. In fifth-century Athens, Agathon is a figure of derision, contemptible and ridiculous: he is not a man. It is interesting to compare Aristophanes' satire of Agathon with his treatment of other intellectuals—Euripides or Socrates. Crazy, wrong-headed, and

even dangerous for the city as Socrates may appear in *Clouds*, staged in 423, his manliness is not questioned. Whether or not there was some truth in the attack on the natural philosopher Socrates,<sup>8</sup> *Clouds* merely shows how funny any philosopher must appear in public daily life. Thus you may invite to the same banquet both Aristophanes and Socrates—though it seems improbable that Agathon would have invited Aristophanes after 411, the year of *Thesmophoriazusae*.

If there is some similarity between Aristophanes' cruel caricature and the real Agathon—and there must be some—we ought to be more astonished than most readers seem to be that he is the host of this banquet, that Socrates and all the others came, that the speeches in praise of Eros were delivered in his dining room. The Platonic Agathon is, at first sight, a person very different from the Aristophanic one. Above all, he is exquisitely polite, civilized, and well-mannered. To the unexpected appearance of Aristodemus he reacts beautifully by saying that he had looked for him the day before to invite him. Obviously this is untrue, but it is the kindest, socially most accomplished manner of welcome. He is considerate in yielding to Aristodemus' request to leave Socrates alone wherever he may tarry. He asks Aristodemus to take his place near Socrates to make him comfortable. He is polite to his servants, perhaps ostentatiously so. We meet in him a perfect host, endowed with all graces, who at the same time betrays the calculation characteristic of a society host: he has invited both aristocrats (such as Phaedrus and Eryximachus, and surely the unnamed guests also) and intellectual celebrities—a combination typical of socially ambitious hosts in all times. There is some pretentiousness and vanity in such ambition; and this we sense at once in Plato's portrait of Agathon, for instance in Agathon's manner of flattering his guests in different ways, especially in urging Socrates to share his couch so that he may enjoy the benefit of the thought that had detained Socrates (175C). With Socrates' elaborate reply, a particular kind of banter begins (175D). It runs through the entire *Symposium* and its theme is Agathon's youthful appearance. Again and again Agathon is teased with unmistakable irony. His guests refer to him as if he were still a

<sup>8</sup> Plato reports in *Phaedo* (96A–98B) that the young Socrates was indeed fascinated with problems of nature, but in the *Apology* (19C–D) he makes him say that he has nothing to do with physical speculations and that the man Aristophanes calls Socrates is not the real Socrates.

νεάνισκος, still admired as a young beauty, a pursued object of desire. And this is clearly how he wishes to appear, his age—close to thirty—notwithstanding.

Here is the point where Plato's Agathon begins to have some relation to Aristophanes' Agathon. By sharing his couch with Socrates, Agathon pretends to be the *eromenos* of the *erastes* Socrates—*this* is what this arrangement really means and why it is important to visualize the setting. By taking the initiative, he behaves as no properly brought up *eromenos* would. Only one did indeed take the initiative, and surely we should think of him at this turn: young Alcibiades, a long time ago and in desperation. Agathon's conduct is a travesty in more than one way. His silly pretense is forced into the open by Alcibiades. When Alcibiades arrives and discovers Socrates with Agathon, his banter with both of them feigns with perfect irony an acceptance of Agathon's pretense. He came to crown a poet, he says, but now he flirts with a youth and chides Socrates as a rival, to which Socrates responds in kind by complaining of Alcibiades' jealousy (213B-D). Agathon's couch is a pretended erotic stage and the words exchanged are a travesty of pederastic situations. A proper *eromenos* is still beardless. Agathon's beardlessness is a mere counterfeit of youth. Once, at that gathering in Callias' house, he was an exceedingly pretty boy; now he is an aging, effeminate beauty, Pausanias' beloved, a passive homosexual. And yet his effeminacy and pretense cause only good-natured banter, ironic but never malicious. There is not the slightest sign of the customary Athenian contempt for such a person. This seems an important aspect of the *Symposium*, all the more so as Agathon's personality determines the pattern of the background against which the *Symposium* must be read and interpreted. The many little details, interruptions, and interludes are designed to remind us forcefully of the 'Agathonian' atmosphere: of the host's civility, vanity, and lack of manliness.

Thus the question arises why Plato made just this particular, unique, and truly baffling choice of setting for a dialogue about Eros. Why the dramatic date, why the presence of the two playwrights, why the appearance of Alcibiades, no longer young, at just this occasion? And how does Plato want the reader to understand the various speeches delivered on such a stage? One thing seems certain: a literal, straightforward reading of the speeches would miss many, conceivably most, important points. Compared with the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*—the other

Platonic dialogue concerned with Eros—is easy to understand. Both seem to have been written at about the same time. Whatever Plato may have wished to teach us about love, why did he find it necessary to write two such different texts on the same theme? One is a leisurely conversation at a lovely spot in the country outside the city; the other a complex narration of a social event, an intimate but interrupted party with speeches of aristocrats and poets in the elegant residence of an effeminate playwright. Nothing would have been easier for Plato than either to include in *Phaedrus* things said about Eros in the *Symposium* or to write another dialogue along the lines of earlier or later ones. What does it mean that instead he wrote a dialogue that differs so radically from all the others?

We have reached these questions after a very quick and superficial glance at the stage actors. We viewed them as if Agathon's banquet had actually taken place and the *Symposium* were a piece of historical information. Yet the opening lines warn against such an approach: we read a report of an event long ago. An actual event? It is tempting to believe that this banquet never happened in reality, that it is pure fiction. Are we then justified in dealing with the text in the manner we did? The simple fact that Plato wrote just this historical fiction means that he expected his readers to recognize the identity and character of setting and actors, and to apply that knowledge to their reading; and this in turn demands that we collect all the information, internal and external, that would have been a matter of course in Plato's time, if we wish to understand what Plato tells us. The more we know of persons and setting the better we will be equipped for the reading that Plato could and would have counted on. It will enable us to detect some—not all—jocular allusions and teasing jests that would otherwise remain undiscovered but may become essential for an interpretation. Those aimed at Agathon—more than I have mentioned—are designed to emphasize and remind us of his silly pretense of desirable youthfulness. They appear again and again up to the switching of places on his couch (222 E–223 A). Socrates insists on the change so that he may praise Agathon, and Agathon cries or titters in delight: *ιοὺ ἰοῦ* (223 A). But the reader is spared Socrates' irony, at least in this instance. In Agathon's own praise of Eros, however, we read descriptions of the god that every listener would have understood as a conscious or unconscious description of the speaker—or rather of the image Agathon had or pretended to have of himself. Eros is beauty

incarnate: κάλλιστον ὄντα καὶ ἄριστον (195 A-B); Eros is the youngest and escapes age that comes more quickly, alas, than we like (one really sees the smiles all around, doesn't one?). The terms Agathon uses for Eros are significant: πραότης ('gentleness') as against ἀγριότης, ('fierceness'); εὐμένεια ('kindness') as against δυσμένεια ('ill-will'). Eros is gracious, and so on (197D).

Such a description of Eros is self-serving and thus, in spite of its nobility, funny. But other speeches are hardly less so—that of Eryximachus for instance—and they too must have produced smiles and laughter on all couches. I shall cite only one instance because it gives us certain interesting hints. Pausanias emphasizes and keeps insisting that the right lover is and must be faithful throughout life (181D–183E), that the right pair of lovers will remain with each other always. All listeners (and therefore we as readers) cannot help but think of Pausanias and his perennial *eromenos* Agathon: the one in his mid-thirties, the other almost thirty years old, for all Greeks a preposterous—at best laughable, at worst contemptible—arrangement. Later, when Aristophanes tells his tale of the two halves that find each other and in their regained wholeness enjoy eternal bliss, he admonishes Eryximachus not to ridicule him by suspecting he alludes only to Pausanias and Agathon: his tale claims universal validity (193B–C). But in his own way, Aristophanes points out the grotesqueness of these lovers through the grotesqueness of his myth.

On each occasion the amusement of all present cannot be doubted. It is not, however, derisive, it is not malicious or derogatory, and hence the couple Pausanias–Agathon is, in the *Symposium*, not a source of contempt. Pausanias' speech is a noble one, as are those of Phaedrus, Eryximachus, and Agathon. Both Phaedrus and Pausanias use the vocabulary of noble pederasty and praise the mutual devotion of *erastes* and *eromenos*, but stress the difference between them (e.g. Aristogiton's ἔρωσ and Harmodius' φιλία, 182C). Thus it was especially noble of beardless Achilles to die for older Patroclus. Aeschylus is wrong to make Achilles the *erastes* and Patroclus the *eromenos*; it was the other way round. The implication is that the sacrifice of an *erastes* for his *eromenos* may be taken for granted (179E–180B). The two speeches have much in common in their description of the moral and human values gained by such an honorable pederastic relationship. Agathon finally asserts that Eros has and brings about all four 'Platonic'

virtues: σωφροσύνη, ἀνδρεία, δικαιοσύνη, σοφία (196C: temperance, courage, justice, and wisdom).

Such hyperbole is but the climax to a crescendo of assertion regarding the power of Eros. The first and second speech form the base, praising Eros as the Eros of pederasty. The second, Pausanias' speech, contains, as we have observed, some quite serious remarks that nonetheless produce smiles and laughter, as is the case with Agathon's. The cause for the hilarity is, essentially, the inadequacy of the traditional clichés of the old established pederastic pattern, which does not fit Pausanias and Agathon. But the comic aspect is perhaps no more than a minor one, for both affirm noble ideals, and Pausanias celebrates above all the great virtue of loyalty, of faithfulness that characterizes his relationship with Agathon. This relationship is, as it were, an analogy, an imitation of marriage. The presence of Socrates and the others and the nobility of the speeches seem implicitly to assert that the conventional contempt for such a relationship, and for the effeminate man, is wrong, perhaps just as wrong as—and so it will be shown—the conventional acceptance, even praise, for the physical relationship between *erastes* and *eromenos*. At the time when Socrates met Pausanias and Agathon in the house of Callias, they were classical *erastes* and *eromenos*. So perhaps were Phaedrus and Eryximachus, although they remained together not as lovers but as friends. They leave the banquet together and both become involved, a year later, in the scandal of the mutilation of the herms, are accused, convicted, and exiled. Phaedrus' speech is, as it were, the praise of something he once experienced, reflected upon, and recognized as good and noble because it led to a noble, loyal, and manly life. His friend Eryximachus says at the beginning that Phaedrus always complained about the lack of proper praise for Eros, and thus Phaedrus becomes the first speaker; the theme of the banquet is his choice (177). He is also Socrates' companion on that little outing in *Phaedrus*. We have then in the *Symposium* two couples: Phaedrus and Eryximachus, Pausanias and Agathon, the one pair loyal friends, the other lovers still. It seems significant that only the speeches of the latter pair produce smiles and laughter. Perhaps it is also important to note that Eryximachus praises Eros in his universal aspect, transcending pederasty and its clichés.

We come to realize that to a certain extent all the speeches contain in different disguises, in hints, implications, jests, and in various degrees and forms a critique of old-fashioned pederas-

ty. Yet they are all noble speeches, and the possibility of noble results of love between males is never doubted. Plato seems to say that something in pederasty is worth rescuing wherever one finds this love, even in such relations as Pausanias and Agathon's. Athenian conventions appear to be wrong both in praise and blame.

All the speakers seem to sense this: Phaedrus in emphasizing almost exclusively heroic willingness to die for one's friend; Pausanias in insisting on faithfulness throughout one's life; Eryximachus and Aristophanes in depicting the universality of the power of Eros; Agathon in his rhetoric on virtue. The most elevated statement of the values of pederasty we learn from Diotima. One ought not to forget that this doctrine is presented as Diotima's and not Socrates' own. Socrates' thoughts on these matters are presented in *Phaedrus*, where we read explicitly that those who could not entirely abstain from physical expression of love but have loved truly will eventually grow wings (256D). The two dialogues are linked by theme as well as by that person who is Socrates' sole companion in the countryside and at the banquet begins the speeches for whose theme he is responsible.

It seems to me not difficult to understand the reason why the old pederastic pattern has become questionable, like so many other traditional values. As soon as  $\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$  and  $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$  are seen not only as separate but as unequal, *kalokagathia* can no longer mean what it originally must have meant. Something similar happened to the term 'gentleman', often used to translate *kalokagathia*—correctly after Plato and Xenophon, but not before—for once it must have meant simply 'a gentle man'. Socrates was, of course, the model example of the difference between appearance and essence. The most dramatic, even tragic, consequence of the discovery of the separateness and inequality of body and soul is recorded in the *Symposium*, in Alcibiades' drunken report of his relationship with Socrates and the confession of his frustrated attempt at seduction (215–18). To understand how and why he says what he says, it is again necessary to be conscious of place, date, and persons present.

Consider first the banter as regards Agathon's pretended youthful prettiness, Alcibiades' pretense of jealousy that Socrates is Agathon's *erastes*, and Socrates' demand that Agathon protect him from that jealousy which had threatened him ever since he, Socrates, became Alcibiades' *erastes* (212E–213E): consider all this in the light of the ages of the three

(about fifty-five, thirty-five, thirty) and of the fact that Alcibiades, a husband and father, has been Athens' most powerful statesman for some time and has hardly seen Socrates for years (216A-C). More than in the preceding speeches the entire body of pederastic conventions is comically, ironically used for jests and fun—fun, to be sure, that has serious implications. The same theme is taken up later when it comes to switching places on Agathon's couch: now Socrates' irony does have a tinge of malice in his reference to Agathon *μειράκιον* (223A). Consider also that Alcibiades tells the story of his failure to seduce Socrates to his contemporaries, men in their mid-thirties. We can be sure that a twenty-year-old Alcibiades would not have told it, even in drunkenness. The confession has the character of a "Now it can be told" revelation—namely, the truth about the most gossiped-about romance in Athens many years before. It is a flashback to a time even preceding that gathering of many of the same personalities at Callias' house on the eve of the Peloponnesian War. And Agathon's banquet takes place on the eve of other events: the mutilation of the herms and the Sicilian Expedition, with their consequences for Alcibiades, Phaedrus, and Eryximachus, to say nothing of Athens.

Consider, finally, that it happens at Agathon's house. Alcibiades is quite astounded to see Socrates, but he is not surprised by and does not comment on Socrates' presence here, in the company of Aristophanes. On the contrary, he teases Socrates for not reclining with Aristophanes. Alcibiades seems to understand that neither the latter's attack nor the former's reputation means much to Socrates. Does he perhaps know him better than others may, did he perhaps love Socrates more deeply than anyone else? He did indeed, as his speech reveals. In it he claims to have clung to Socrates with unequalled persistence. Once more there appears the motif of faithfulness and loyalty that runs through the *Symposium*, illustrated by the two pairs of a different character, Phaedrus-Eryximachus and Pausanias-Agathon; but what we now hear, of course, applies to neither couple. Once more the old criteria of good and bad in the love between men and youths and man and man are being implicitly questioned and found wanting. The ultimate aim must be a non-physical relationship. *Alcibiades* I contains an extensive discussion of the difference and inequality of body and soul (129E-132A). One senses that this is a doctrine that Alcibiades can neither deny nor bring himself to accept; it is too alien to his character, to the formation of his personality. In his

own fashion Alcibiades has been faithful to Socrates all these years. His speech makes this abundantly clear, and all those playful games of jealousy corroborate it comically, even farcically. Socrates, however, is enamored with all beautiful youths. But in spite of his passionate appreciation of physical beauty, his love is not physical. In a strange reversal, individual faithfulness no longer appears as a virtue. Socrates' non-physical love of all beautiful youths shows how the values of pederasty must be transcended and transformed to be retained. Socrates is loyal to friends, but faithful he is not.

It is easy to understand why Alcibiades pursued Socrates more than Socrates pursued him, especially after that famous night. For Alcibiades, Socrates' refusal of his body could only mean, automatically, the rejection of his entire being. Alcibiades is the *eromenos* whom the *erastes* has refused and betrayed, the one *erastes* who was worthy of his beauty. Hence, Alcibiades' love/hatred—and, may we add, the character he became? A rather good case could be made for the theory that the trauma of that night set the pattern of Alcibiades' neurotic, destructive, and catastrophic character and life. Had Socrates slept with Alcibiades not "like a father or older brother" but as a true *erastes*, he might well have channeled the manifold gifts of this most gifted of all Athenians in a classical, a 'Periclean', direction and would have made him the best statesman Athens ever had. I think it entirely possible that many Athenians thought so and might not have forgiven Socrates, who failed to educate him properly but in fact contributed to the corruption of the most splendid son of their city. But Alcibiades was destined to become what may be called the human sacrifice on the altar of Socratic doctrine. It was, of course, an inevitable one. Reading the *Symposium* I cannot escape the impression that one of Plato's aims is to demonstrate both the magnitude and the inevitability of that sacrifice.

When the powerful thirty-five-year-old statesman Alcibiades tells his story, it is a remembrance of things past, not a foreshadowing of the future. For one last time all these friends have gathered to enjoy one another's company in mutual devotion to Eros (177C). A year later, no such occasion could arise.

When Apollodorus tells what he heard from Aristodemus about that legendary banquet, Alcibiades had just been murdered, Pausanias and Agathon had long left Athens, Phaedrus and Eryximachus may have still been in exile, and Athens was defeated. When all these were young and had met, about thirty

years before in Callias' house, Athens was at the height of her power, resounding with the voices of philosophers from all over Greece and of young Athenians, *kalokagathoi*, a gilded youth if ever there was one, eager to discuss and to discover new things about man and the universe, eager to enjoy life to the full but willing to face the inherently tragic fate of man, eager to appreciate beauty in word and shape, in tragedies as well as in the most recent work of art that represented the image of *erastes* and *eromenos* forever: the Parthenon frieze. Never again. Much had happened that changed their world for all time. How it happened, why it happened, and perhaps why it had to happen we may sense just a bit better by contemplating date, stage, and actors in Plato's *Symposium*. At any rate, we have to do so before we even try to interpret the text.<sup>9</sup>

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