

What's Love got to do with it? *Eros*, Democracy, and Pericles' Rhetoric

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THE PURPOSE of this paper is to analyse the political meaning and use of the notion of *eros* in fifth-century Athenian democracy,¹ as a contribution to the study of emotions in ancient history and historiography.²

Eros is often translated as “romantic love,” “sexual desire,”³ or

¹ On the notion of *eros* in Greek politics see P. W. Ludwig, *Eros and Polis: Desire and Community in Greek Political Theory* (Cambridge 2002).

² For other perspectives on the topic see D. S. Levene, “Pity, Fear and the Historical Audience: Tacitus on the Fall of Vitellius,” in S. Morton Braund and C. Gill (eds.), *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature* (Cambridge 1997) 128–149 (including Aristotle). J. Marincola, “Beyond Pity and Fear: The Emotions of History,” *AncSoc* 33 (2003) 285–315, and M. Tamiolaki, “Emotions and Historical Representation in Xenophon’s *Hellenika*,” in A. Chaniotis and P. Ducrey (eds.), *Unweiling Emotions II Emotions in Greece and Rome* (Stuttgart 2013) 15–52, both point out the relative scarcity of studies dealing with emotions in historiography; recent remarks in C. Damon, “Emotions as a Historiographical Dilemma,” in D. Cairns and D. Nelis (eds.), *Emotions in the Classical World: Methods, Approaches, and Directions* (Stuttgart 2017) 177–195. On Thucydides see also M. Fragoulaki, “Emotion, Persuasion and Kinship in Thucydides: The Plataean debate (3.52–68) and the Melian Dialogue (5.85–113),” in E. Sanders and M. Johncock (eds.), *Emotion and Persuasion in Classical Antiquity* (Stuttgart 2016) 113–153 (emotion and kinship), and M. Zaccarini, “Thucydides’ Narrative on Naval Warfare: *epibatai*, Military Theory, Ideology,” in G. Lee et al. (eds.), *Ancient Warfare* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2015) 210–228, at 216–223 (courage as an Athenian vs Peloponnesian characterization). For methodological remarks see D. L. Cairns, “Look Both Ways: Studying Emotion in Ancient Greek,” *Critical Quarterly* 50 (2008) 43–63.

³ E. Sanders and C. Thumiger, “Introduction,” in E. Sanders et al. (eds.), *Eros in Ancient Greece* (Oxford 2013) 1–12, at 4–5.

“passionate sexual attraction.”⁴ While its use is always based on the original meaning of a strong, externally-induced passion for something desirable, attractive, and currently inaccessible,⁵ as early as Homer *eros* and its cognate words can be employed in both non-sexual (*Il.* 2.607, 9.64, 16.208) and sexual (*Il.* 3.446, 14.315; *Od.* 1.366, 11.238, 18.213) contexts.⁶

As we shall see, the notion of *eros* held great importance in the field of Greek politics, mostly in a metaphorical, non-sexual meaning. My analysis will start from what is possibly the most famous passage in this respect: Pericles’ exhortation in the funeral oration to become *erastai* of Athens. Through a number of comparisons, I shall set Thucydides’ passage in the wider contemporary context, arguing that Pericles’ rhetoric presented his audience with a refined metaphor which produced a striking and memorable effect.

1. *Erastai of the city*

In the funeral oration, after praising the Athenians fallen in battle, Pericles employs a visual and emotional metaphor to lift the spirit of his fellow citizens, urging them to “behold the power

⁴ D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto 2006) 169–170, with remarks on the different Greek terms for love; cf. D. L. Cairns, “The Imagery of *erôs* in Plato’s *Phaedrus*,” in *Erôs in Ancient Greece* 233–250, at 234–236, on the common Greek (vs the Platonic) conception of *eros*.

⁵ Cf. Ludwig, *Eros and Polis*, e.g. 7–10, 124–125; R. Vattuone, *Il mostro e il sapiente: Studi sull’erotica greca* (Bologna 2004) 199 (with bibliography), on the verbs ἐρώω, ἔρωμαι.

⁶ Pace S. S. Monoson, “Citizen as *erastes*: Erotic Imagery and the Idea of Reciprocity in the Periclean Funeral Oration,” *Political Theory* 22 (1994) 253–276, esp. 255, following J. K. Dover. On the many fields of agency of *eros* see C. Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece* (Princeton 1992) 22; J. N. Davidson, “Eros: Love and Sexuality,” in A. Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient History* (Oxford 2009) 352–367, at 352–353, on sex as an optional feature of both *philia* and *eros*; E. Leontsini, “Sex and the City: Plato, Aristotle, and Zeno of Kitium on *Erôs* and *Philia*,” in *Erôs in Ancient Greece* 129–141, at 131–132 and n.10.

of the city day by day in action, and become her *erastai*” (2.43.1 τὴν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ’ ἡμέραν ἔργω θεωμένους καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς; cf. §2). These words are generally seen by the scholars as genuinely Periclean;⁷ regardless, given that they are known to us only through Thucydides, any following reference to Pericles’ speech should be understood as—at best—Thucydides’ representation, possibly reporting *verbatim* a peculiar expression heard by the audience. It is worth examining in depth the main components of this section of Pericles’ speech.

The αὐτῆς in Pericles’ words is generally taken to refer to the polis rather than to the *dynamis*, although disambiguation is probably impossible.⁸ The main body of Pericles’ exhortation deals with an obviously metaphorical use of the word *erastes* as a way to qualify the ideal role of the citizen in regard to Athens. The occurrence of similar expressions especially in Aristophanes has reasonably led to the belief that such a use of *erastes* occurred in contemporary politics as a somewhat fashionable device.⁹ However, we shall see that Pericles’ use of the term diverges significantly from that found in his predecessors and contemporaries, not so much in the semantic field but rather in its (commendatory) tone. Pericles’ exhortation has been interpreted in a number of ways which involve love and sometimes sexuality.

⁷ R. Brock, *Greek Political Imagery from Homer to Aristotle* (London 2013) 115–116, and 148 n.72 on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* acknowledging Pericles’ apparently typical use of metaphors.

⁸ Bibliography in V. Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens* (Princeton 2002) 57 n.61. Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* 321 n.1, although acknowledging that *autes* may refer to both polis and *dynamis*, across the study consistently regards it as referring to the former. On *dynamis* see §2.

⁹ Cf. S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides I* (Oxford 1991) ad loc., for sources and studies, following Connor’s belief that the expression belongs to the ‘new’ vocabulary of politics; cf. Ludwig, *Eros and Polis*, esp. 141–169 and ch. 7 (fashionable political expression). Also see A. Scholtz, “Friends, Lovers, Flatterers: Demophilic Courtship in Aristophanes’ *Knights*,” *TAPA* 13 (2004) 263–293, esp. 265–271, proposing to regard the *erastes*-expressions in Thucydides and Aristophanes as a blame-motif against a political opponent.

I cannot agree with those who view it as an invitation to civic reciprocity and to a vigorous, active engagement motivated by the (sexual) arousal produced by the beauty of the city,¹⁰ or as a way to adopt Pericles' vision of an elitist, self-sufficient demos who loves the city, itself and, ultimately, Pericles as its ideal paragon.¹¹ The interpretation of the speech as a reference to Pericles' ideal city in which private interests are subordinated to public welfare¹² seems contradicted by other uses of *eros* that we shall consider. I find it difficult also to believe that through *erastes* Pericles somehow alluded to Aphrodite's well-attested civic agenda,¹³ both because the civic duties of Eros (the god), in relation to Athena and the Panathenaea, are attested only by late sources,¹⁴ and also because other fifth-century sources tend to connect Eros with madness and conflict, rather than with social order (cf. below). I agree with those who regard Pericles' words

¹⁰ Monoson, *Political Theory* 22 (1994) 56–57, esp. 260–261 (followed by Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins* 57), argues that the metaphor has clear sexual connotations and that it alludes to a dominating, physical penetration, although, as far as I can understand, she does not explain how this image is supposed to express a commendable relationship with the 'penetrated' (?) polis; on reciprocity in *paiderasteia* proper see Vattuone, *Il mostro*, esp. ch. 1.

¹¹ Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins* 57–62; V. Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens* (Princeton 2014) 95–98, interprets Pericles' words as an invitation to gift the city with one's life, time, wealth, etc., as well as Pericles' own aspiration to be eventually regarded as the real object of love.

¹² D. Leitao, "The Legend of the Sacred Band," in M. C. Nussbaum and J. Sihvola (eds.), *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Chicago 2002) 143–169, at 168 and n.67.

¹³ Cf. Leitao, in *The Sleep of Reason* 160 and 167 n.63.

¹⁴ See M. Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of City* (Chicago 1991) 49–50; Leitao, in *The Sleep of Reason* 167 n.66. A (rather weak) connection between Aphrodite and democracy might be found in Xenophon's account of the overthrow of the Spartans and their oligarchic supporters ("tyrants" in *Hell.* 5.4.9; on this word in relation to *eros* see §3) from Thebes during the Aphrodisia festival in 379/8 (5.4.4).

in more generic terms, as a reflection of an imperialistic impulse¹⁵ and of an ‘erotic’, i.e. passionate, patriotism.¹⁶

Instead of trying to propose an alternative definition, I am interested in locating more precisely the Periclean speech in its wider cultural context. We should start from the audience’s reception: why would Pericles invite his fellow Athenians to become *erastai* of their city? In fact, it does not seem obvious that talking about *erastai* in a patriotic speech could be readily and obviously perceived as inspiring. This use of *erastes* may sound estranging, not so much because the object of *eros* (the polis) qualifies as the *eromene*,¹⁷ but certainly because, on the one hand, it extends a private sentiment to an abstract, public context and, on the other, it implies that the competitors in *eros* (the citizens) become *anterastai*, that is, rivals (cf. §§3–4).¹⁸ The range of possible interpretations of Pericles’ words is, then, quite ambiguous. It is convenient to analyse some thematic and lexical parallels both within Thucydides’ work and with other contemporary (or roughly so) authors. In any case, we should keep in mind that there was likely no widespread, shared theory of (political) *eros* between the late fifth and the early fourth century, and we should not expect agreement among the sources.¹⁹

¹⁵ Tamiolaki, in *Unweiling Emotions* II 24–25.

¹⁶ Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* 19 and 132 (with other examples). See also §4 on *eros* and military service.

¹⁷ The common assumption that the *erastes* is the one in power over the *eromenos* is misleading, for often sources show the opposite: see Vattuone, *Il mostro*, esp. ch. 5, and Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens* 96–97, with bibliography.

¹⁸ Broadly speaking, from the fourth century (virtuous) rivalry and competition within a public ‘economy of honor’ was a desirable feature of Athenian civic life, as expressed by the notion of *philotimia*: see M. Canevaro, *Demostene, Contro Leptine* (Berlin/Boston 2016) ch. 10, esp. 86–90; in the latter half of fifth century, however, the common meaning of *philotimia* seems pejorative: M. Zaccarini, *The Lame Hegemony: Cimon of Athens and the Failure of Panhellenism* (Bologna 2017) 263–264.

¹⁹ Cf. Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* at 121–122.

2. *Eros and the visual metaphor*

Pericles first invites the citizens to behold the *dynamis* of Athens in action (2.43.1 τὴν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ' ἡμέραν ἔργω θεωμένους). This visual metaphor finds parallels in the same oration: shortly before Pericles had remarked that Athens is worthy of admiration (39.4 ἀξίαν εἶναι θαυμάζεσθαι),²⁰ and shortly thereafter he mentions the μνημεῖα of the Athenians (41.4) at home and abroad (43.3), which should be interpreted as both physical and symbolic achievements and forms of memory.²¹

A number of lexical and thematic affinities are found in the Platonic dialogue *Alcibiades I*, specifically in relation to *eros*. Here Socrates declares himself to be the only *erastes* of Alcibiades (that is, his soul), while others are *erastai* of what Alcibiades possesses (131E μόνος ἔραστῆς ἦν σός, οἱ δ' ἄλλοι τῶν σῶν, the latter referring to Alcibiades' body: cf. 131C). Socrates fears that Alcibiades could become a *δημεραστῆς* (132A)—a rare word otherwise unattested in the Classical period—and invites him to behold the attractive, fair-of-face (εὐπρόσωπος) *demos* stripped of its charm (ἀλλ' ἀποδύντα χρῆ αὐτὸν θεάσασθαι): Socrates fears that the sight of the might of the polis might eventually overcome both him and Alcibiades (135E ἀλλὰ τὴν τῆς πόλεως ὄρων ῥώμην, μὴ ἐμοῦ τε καὶ σοῦ κρατήσῃ). Similarly, in the

²⁰ Some observations in Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins* 58, who connects this passage to the *theama* at 39.1.

²¹ Cf. a partially similar interpretation in Monoson, *Political Theory* 22 (1994) 259–260. Consistently, in Thucydides *dynamis* is associated with Athenian identity and imperial ambition: Zaccarini, *The Lone Hegemony* 187–188. Often, translators seem to ignore the ἔργω at 2.43.1 (cf. Hornblower, *Commentary* ad loc.); it seems that Pericles here is contrasting the previous phrase about trusting only λόγῳ the value of fighting for the country (σκοποῦντας μὴ λόγῳ μόνῳ τὴν ὠφελίαν etc.): the citizens should be inspired not just by ideals or words, but also by Athens' practical achievements that they can behold “in action,” or perhaps “actively” (which might be attached to both the *dynamis* itself and to the beholders). I thank Dr K. Mantzouranis (Edinburgh) for profitable discussion on this passage.

Gorgias eros for the demos prevents Socrates from entirely persuading Callicles (513C ὁ δῆμος γὰρ ἔρωσ, ὦ Καλλίκλεις, ἐνὼν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τῇ σῆ ἀντιστατεῖ μοι).²² Passages from the *Phaedrus* help clarify this perspective: Plato points out that the forces related to *eros* travel back and forth between the *eromenos* and the lover through the eyes (255C διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων), until eventually the former sees himself in the latter as in a mirror (255D ὥσπερ δὲ ἐν κατόπτρῳ ἐν τῷ ἐρῶντι ἑαυτὸν ὀρῶν). The idea that *eros* flows διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων is also in the *Cratylus*, along with an imaginative etymology of the term (420A–B), and probably draws upon an archaic tradition according to which *eros* manifests itself through physical organs that include the eyes (for example, Archil. fr.191 W.) but not the organs of the intellect, since *eros*/Eros operates by obfuscating reason.²³

There seems to be a strong relation between the civic meaning of *eros*, the sight as a channel for obfuscating passions, and the related idea (especially in Plato) of an alluring charm exercised by the demos, in turn presented as a tempting object of *eros* for educated and virtuous men. The image of the *erastes* laying his gaze upon the object of his *eros*, and potentially being misled by its charm, recalls the words used by Pericles urging to behold the *dynamis* of the polis and become her *erastai*. It seems that Pericles consciously appealed to a familiar notion in order to prepare the audience for the following *eros*-based metaphor. However, while Socrates/Plato regards this *eros* as a dangerous and corrupting temptation which must be resisted, Pericles presents it as a drive to which each citizen should abandon himself. It may be that the notion of *demerastes* developed in an anti-democratic tradition as a criticism of Pericles' metaphor and of the dangers it entailed

²² On this passage see Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins* 149–150.

²³ Cf. Calame, *The Poetics of Eros* 19–21; specifically on the eyes see D. L. Cairns, “Bullish Looks and Sidelong Glances: Social Interaction and the Eyes in Ancient Greek Culture,” in *Body Language in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Swansea 2005) 123–155. A similar perspective is also found in Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1157a6–8); cf. D. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge 1997) 39, and Vattuone, *Il mostro* 45–61 and 137, also on sight as an important component in (homo)sexual attraction.

by pandering to the people's desires. But evidence is scant, and in the *Menexenus* Socrates rather praises Pericles' (Aspasia's) rhetorical skills and funeral speech (e.g. at 235E–236B): yet, as we will consistently find more ambiguities in other treatments of political *eros*, we shall note that Pericles' speech further stands out in its own deviant way.

3. *Eros and tyranny*

A most ancient and varied relationship exists between *eros* and tyranny or, sometimes, kingship. It can take the form of either *eros* for tyranny, the tyranny of *eros*/Eros, or personal *eros* in relation to a tyrant. These themes can range from a sexual, physical drive proper, to more nuanced, metaphorical contexts.

For example, *eros* for tyranny expresses a desire which only retains sexual connotations in its extremely strong features: besides Archilochus' lack of any "desire for tyranny" (fr.19.3 οὐκ ἐρέω τυραννίδος), we find relevant examples in Herodotus: Deioces, who re-established monarchy among the Medes, was a "lover of tyranny" (1.96.1 ἐρασθεὶς τυραννίδος)—a wicked and obsessive person who became a tyrant himself. Lycophron was warned by his own sister that "tyranny is a slippery thing: many are its *erastai*" (3.53.4 τυραννὶς χρῆμα σφαλερόν, πολλοὶ δὲ αὐτῆς ἐραστοὶ εἰσι),²⁴ which we might as well translate as "suitors."

Sometimes, Eros or *eros* as sexual desire proper is found in relation to monarchic power, and often as a source of disgrace for the powerful: consumed by *eros* for another man's wife, king Ariston of Sparta betrayed a close friend, disowned his own son Demaratus, and paved the way for Demaratus' future disgrace (Hdt. 6.61–65). Eros is a "tyrant of gods and men" to a character in Euripides (*TrGF* F 136 θεῶν τύραννε κἀνθρώπων Ἔρωσ), and rules over gods and (wo)men alike in Sophocles (*Trach.* 441–444 οὗτος γὰρ ἄρχει καὶ θεῶν ὅπως θέλει). Again in Sophocles, Eros could be addressed as a force associated with madness, injustice, and outrage (*Ant.* 790–793), consistently with a meaning, also

²⁴ A few remarks in Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* 141.

found in archaic poetry, of *eros* as a form of obsession, bordering on insanity and lack of control.²⁵

As for the peculiar relation between Eros/*eros* and a tyrant himself,²⁶ Hereas of Megara famously reported that Pisistratus had expunged Hesiod's verse about Theseus' δεινὸς ἔρωσ (FGrHist 486 F 1). Various tales tied the Athenian tyrants to the foundation of the very first altar to Eros in the Academy: it was established by Charmos (Davies, APF 11793.IX), Hippias' *erastes* according to Cli(to)demus (FGrHist 323 F 15) or Pisistratus' *eromenos* according to Plutarch (Sol. 1.4). Athenaeus (561F–562A) mentions a barely-known Erxias (FGrHist 449 F 1) who claimed that the Samians celebrated an *eleutheria* festival in a gymnasium dedicated to Eros; either Erxias or Athenaeus himself (the text is unclear) adds that the Athenians also gained freedom through Eros, and (because of this?) the Pisistratids first attempted to discredit the activities related to the god.²⁷ This seems to be a retrospective explanation based on the idea that *eros* itself, and specifically *paiderasteia*, was considered a common cause for the fall of tyranny, the most famous example obviously involving Athens, where tyranny had been overthrown by Aristogiton's

²⁵ Cf. Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* 129–135; K. Gutzwiller, “Eros and Amor: Representations of Love in Greek Epigram and Latin Elegy,” in D. Cairns and L. Fulkerson (eds.), *Emotions between Greece and Rome* (London 2015) 23–44, at 24 and n.6. On *eros* in the *Antigone* see D. Cairns, *Sophocles: Antigone* (London 2016) 104–106; as a destructive force in tragedy see also Konstan, *The Emotions* 175–178.

²⁶ See M. C. Nussbaum, “*Erōs* and Ethical Norms: Philosophers Respond to a Cultural Dilemma,” in M. C. Nussbaum and J. Sihvola (eds.), *The Sleep of Reason. Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Chicago 2002) 55–94, at 62–63. See also M. A. Lucchesi, “Love Theory and Political Practice in Plutarch: The *Amatorius* and the *Lives of Coriolanus and Alcibiades*,” in *Erōs in Ancient Greece* 209–227, at 212–213.

²⁷ Some remarks in P. J. Stronk's *BNJ2* Commentary, pointing out that the only known Athenian *eleutheria* festivals rather seem connected with the battle of Salamis and do not include Eros. Note, however, that again from Athenaeus we learn that Zeno regarded Eros as a god of *eleutheria*: §5.

eros and Harmodius' *philia* (Pl. *Symp.* 182c).²⁸ In fact, with regard to the tyrannicides it is worth recalling that the only other instance in which Thucydides employs the term *erastes*—here, in its most common social meaning—is for Aristogiton himself (6.54.3). His (irrational and bold: 59.1 ἀλόγιστος τόλμα) attack on the tyrants was undertaken δι' ἐρωτικήν ζυντυχίαν (54.1) and specifically due to the pains of love (59.1 δι' ἐρωτικήν λύπην), as *erotike* fuelled Aristogiton's anger in striking down Hipparchus (57.3 ὡς ἂν μάλιστα δι' ὀργῆς ὁ μὲν ἐρωτικῆς): Thucydides depicts very clearly the blind, raging jealousy of the *erastes* who sees the object of his love—which *belongs* to him and him only: 54.2 ἐραστής ὃν εἶχεν αὐτόν (sc. Harmodius)—threatened by a rival.

By Thucydides' time, *eros* is normally found as a destructive, divisive force in politics, often related to tyranny and rivalry, potentially leading to aggression and eventually civic instability. Why would Pericles ever desire to arouse such a sentiment among his fellow citizens? His metaphor seems even more out of place if we look at its cultural background: it is convenient to move to other forms of relation between *eros* and democratic politics. We will observe that some—especially philosophical—sources discuss *eros* as a potentially positive political or social force, but also that, for many others, it is even more clearly associated with obsession, competition, and generally divisive sentiments.²⁹

4. *Eros and democracy*

Its few other occurrences in Thucydides do not qualify *eros* as a positive disposition, as they almost invariably express a dangerous sentiment. In his attempt to defend the Mytileneans, Diodotus warns that hope, *elpis*, and (predatory) desire, *eros*,

²⁸ Itself related to the wider idea that *eros* could easily lead to *stasis* and civic upheaval (as in Arist. *Pol.* 1303b20–23 on *metabole* in archaic Syracuse taking place περὶ ἐρωτικῆν αἰτίαν); other sources in Leitao, in *The Sleep of Reason* 157–158. See also §5 on *philia*.

²⁹ On this form of “tension” see Nussbaum, in *The Sleep of Reason* 55–65.

always cause the greatest damage (3.45.5).³⁰ Before the Sicilian expedition, Nicias appeals to the older citizens not to tolerate a specifically wicked form of *eros*, the “sick desire” (*duseros*) of the younger for the enterprise (6.13.1).³¹ Slightly later, *eros* itself is employed in a very clearly pejorative meaning: in the agitation following Nicias’ opposition to the expedition, the Athenians all alike, irrationally, give in to *eros* (24.3 καὶ ἔρωσ ἐνέπεσε τοῖς πᾶσιν ὁμοίως ἐκπλεῦσαι). So far, apart from (and in contrast to) Pericles’ speech, Thucydides seems to provide only dangerous to disastrous occurrences of *eros* in a political and civic context, by drawing on familiar associations of the word—consistently with the sources analysed so far. The possible presence of the verb *er(a)o* in Athenian treaties on stone is too unclear (at best) to provide any relevant contemporary evidence:³² we shall rather turn to Plato and Aristophanes as major parallels close to Thucydides’ time.

In Plato, a rather close parallel for our *eros*-metaphor is found in Socrates’ remark on Gorgias, who “won as *erastai* for wisdom” (*Meno* 70B ἐραστὰς ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ εἴληφεν) the leading Thessalians (including Meno’s own *erastes* Aristippus): the context is more philosophical than political (albeit it involves powerful aristocrats—likely ironically), and yet it obviously implies a strong persuasive, alluring power exerted by Gorgias, eventually able

³⁰ For *eros* here as a passionate disposition see Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* 10.

³¹ Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins* 171–173, points out Thucydides’ use of *eros* in regard to Athenian imperialism. The rare *duseros* is found, very close to Thucydides’ time, in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, in which the nurse laments the misery of human condition (193–194). On this kind of political *eros* see also Vattuone, *Il mostro* 150–151.

³² Brock, *Greek Political Imagery* 150 n.83, translates IG I³ 37.43–44 as “I will love th[e] demos of the Athenians],” and regards this expression as a result of Cleon’s political vocabulary. However, this reading seems venturesome: the oath is supplemented as δρᾶσο καὶ ἐ]ρῶ καὶ βολεύσο etc., based on the few known occurrences (among which is 48.21–22 δρ]ᾶσο καὶ ἐρῶ καὶ | [βολεύσο etc.) of a rather rare formula, whose ἐρῶ, in any case, is normally taken as “I shall speak” (i.e. from εἶρω): see S. Bolmarcich, “The Athenian Regulations for Samos (IG I³ 48) Again,” *Chiron* 39 (2009) 45–64.

to stimulate *eros*. The intensity of such sentiment is well exemplified by the tradition on *eros* and military prowess found in Plato's theoretical polis/army of lovers (*Symp.* 178E πόλιν γενέσθαι ἢ στρατόπεδον ἐραστῶν τε καὶ παιδικῶν):³³ however, this is Phaedrus' point only, which seems contradicted by both Pausanias (181A–183D)³⁴ and Socrates, who rather points out the obsessive nuances of *eros* (200E, 201B),³⁵ well before Aristotle's warning that, in political and civic terms, the Platonic desire τῶν ἐρώντων for unity could result in the destruction of at least one of the parts, that is, either the polis or its citizens (*Pol.* 1262b).³⁶ This last notion seems the closest to the kind of *eros* we find in the Thucydidean passages on the Mytilenean and Sicilian expeditions: an aggressive feeling, entailing fanatical passion and unrestrained desire to transform a pre-existing condition, motivated by a purely individualistic, if not abusive, attitude.

Aristophanes provides other important thematic parallels.³⁷ To express his anti-democratic sentiment, the chorus of the *Wasps* calls Bdelycleon *misodemos*,³⁸ associate of Brasidas, *erastes* of monarchy (474 μοναρχίας ἐραστά), and willing to impose

³³ On which see Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* 59–60, 341.

³⁴ Pausanias rather argues for a more ambivalent nature of *eros*: Nussbaum, in *The Sleep of Reason* 63–64.

³⁵ Plato himself tends to depict excessive *eros* as a form of *hybris*: D. L. Cairns, "Hybris, Dishonour, and Thinking Big," *JHS* 116 (1996) 1–32, at 24–31; and Xenophon's Socrates (*Xen. Symp.* 8.32–35) argues against the assumption that *eros* translates into military prowess: see Leitao, in *The Sleep of Reason*, esp. 151–152, on this idea probably having its roots in the early fourth century, and also demonstrating that most of the tradition on the Theban Sacred Band is much later.

³⁶ Although acknowledging some peculiarities, Leitao, in *The Sleep of Reason* 160–161, compares the Platonic argument with Thucydides' Periclean *eros*.

³⁷ On the political use of *eros* by Aristophanes see Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* 143–144. Also see Scholtz, *TAPA* 13 (2004) 263–293, along with *philia*, and Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens* 99–101, esp. on Pericles as 'satyr' in comedy.

³⁸ A term typically associated with anti-democratic sentiment and (in)famous oligarchs, or alleged so: Zaccarini, *The Lame Hegemony* 202–203.

tyranny (487). Xanthias denounces Philocleon's addictive love for serving as a judge (89 ἐρῶ τε τούτου, τοῦ δικάζειν).³⁹ In the *Acharnians* Theoros, a supporter of Cleon, refers to king Sitalces as a *philathenaios* and a true *erastes* of the Athenians (142–143 φιλαθήναιος [...] ὑμῶν τ' ἐραστής ἦν ἀληθής). In the *Knights*, to Cleon/the Paphlagonian's similar claim to *philein* the demos and to be its *erastes* (732 φιλω σ' ὦ Δῆμ' ἐραστής τ' εἰμὶ σός), the Sausage-seller replies by declaring himself Cleon's ἀντεραστής (734), that is, a contender for the object of sexual desire (here, the demos; normally, a boy: Pl. *Amat.* 132C, 133B; cf. also §3). Later, the Sausage-seller even implies that to declare “I am your *erastes*” and to *philein* the demos was a widespread way for speakers in the *ekklesia* to deceive their audience (*Eq.* 1341).⁴⁰

All of these sources clearly show that Pericles' metaphor circulated as part of a sexually connotated political terminology.⁴¹ Yet, once more they all prove only derogatory meanings of feeling/declaring *eros* for the demos or the city, a device which comedy could easily mock through its not-so-subtle associations with deceit and exploitation of the people's lack of control, awareness, and competence. Before drawing conclusions, since several of the passages discussed so far employ *eros* or *erastes* along with compound words of *philos* or *philia*, it is worth examining a few more examples of this relation, which will clarify yet another facet of Pericles' rhetoric.

5. *Eros and philia*

Aristophanes' passages above (§4) employ *eros* and *philia* in close connection. Euripides' fragment on the tyranny of Eros (§3)

³⁹ As opposed to instances in which *philein* and its cognates express positive dispositions: cf. J. Robson, “The Language(s) of Love in Aristophanes,” in *Erōs in Ancient Greece* 251–266, esp. 262–263; in the same verses, Philocleon is also defined as *phileliastes*, a pejorative compound which Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* 205, would attribute to Aristophanes' conceptual confusion.

⁴⁰ See Scholtz, *TAPA* 13 (2004) 265–256, and §5 below on *eros* and *philia*.

⁴¹ Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins* 75–76, sees here the parodic transformation of Thucydides' Periclean *erastes* of the polis into political prostitution.

is handed down by Athenaeus who, in the same passage, witnesses that according to Zeno's *Republic* Eros was a god of *philia* and *eleutheria*, responsible for *homonoia* (Ath. 561C) and the salvation of the polis.⁴² Some scholars have interpreted Pericles' word in light of the Stoic vision of *eros* as both a passion to extirpate and a source of civic education.⁴³ Other philosophical treatments of the Classical period connect *philia* and *eros* in different terms, or rather regard them as mutually incompatible.⁴⁴

While we can hardly assume that Pericles' wide audience could be aware of contemporary philosophical debates, certainly *eros* and *philia* were notions which any Athenian of his time was familiar with. Thucydides does not treat *philia* in open connection with *eros*, but he provides a perspective on both in a relevant political context. Again in Thucydides' words, shortly before the *erastes*-metaphor Pericles had used compounds of *philein* to praise the Athenian virtues (2.40.1).⁴⁵ Aiming to reassure and appease the angry Athenians, Pericles declared himself a *philopolis* (60.5), and so did Alcibiades later (6.92.2). On the one hand, these statements sound plausible, as they are reciprocated by Xenophon's Socrates, who discusses the (good and bad) ways in which Pericles and Themistocles won the *philein* of the polis (*Mem.* 2.6.13

⁴² The close relationship between personal affection, sexual desire, and the government of the city, in Zeno and others, is also mentioned by Diog. Laert. 7.130–131. On Zeno in relation to the earlier tradition see Leontsini, in *Eros in Ancient Greece* 129–141.

⁴³ On the latter see Nussbaum, in *The Sleep of Reason* 56.

⁴⁴ For example, Xen. *Lac.* 2.13, on intellectual vs physical attraction; cf. §2 above on Socrates; Plato's *Symposium* (cf. §§3–4) addresses *eros* and *philia* together, and again in a political context, for example by describing *philia* as generated by *eros* (182C). Other sources and discussion in Konstan, *Friendship* 38–39; Ludwig, *Eros and Polis* 19 and 28–29. The semantic field of *philia* is normally much broader than that of *eros*: cf. Vattuone, *Il mostro* ch. 6, esp. 199–201.

⁴⁵ Of which esp. *philokaloumen* is so rare as to be considered authentically Periclean by O. Longo, *Tucidide. Epitafio di Pericle per i caduti del primo anno di Guerra*² (Venice 2009) 72.

πῶς ἐποίησε τὴν πόλιν φιλεῖν αὐτόν).⁴⁶ On the other, the fact that, in Thucydides, in order to prove his selfless and patriotic disposition Pericles would declare himself a *philopolis* rather than an *erastes* of the polis, casts further ambiguity on the meaning of his *eros*-metaphor in the funeral oration.

While *philia*-based political metaphors were still vulnerable to abuse, irony, and polemic, generally they seem more positively characterized and benignly received by our sources, than those which are *eros*-based.⁴⁷ *Philia* for the polis had to sound like a more ordinary and diluted notion: so far, we can only conclude that Pericles' choice of *erastai* was specifically aimed at provoking and, to some extent, surprising his audience. As we move to the conclusions, we can interpret Pericles' rhetoric in cognitive terms and realize how his *eros*-metaphor was a refined device aimed to strike a note in his audience.

Conclusion

We have analysed a number of occurrences of *eros* in a political context. They all draw on the sexual connotations of the term to express a form of predatory, obsessive desire or lust. Internal and external parallels clarify the semantics behind Thucydides' Periclean passage in the funeral oration, as well as its metaphors of beholding the *dynamis* and feeling *eros* for the polis. However, contemporary sources also show how, in other instances in politics, *eros* and *erastes* invariably possess the pejorative—or at least ambiguous—connotations of a divisive sentiment.

⁴⁶ Brock, *Greek Political Imagery* 150 n.83, considers the possibility that Pericles' declaration of being a *philopolis* in Thucydides is anachronistic, but this seems unlikely given its parallels in Aristophanes and Xenophon; I cannot agree with the translation of Xenophon's φιλεῖν above as "love" given by Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens* 97, as it creates a misleading parallel with Azoulay's earlier treatment of *eros*.

⁴⁷ The term *philopolis* almost invariably has positive connotations in earlier sources (for example, Pind. *Ol.* 4.16; Aes. *Sept.* 176): a ruler—both kings (Isoc. 2.15) and tyrants (Xen. *Hier.* 5.3)—was generally expected to be *philopolis* either by virtue or by necessity. However, treacherous or questionable individuals and groups could always declare themselves *philopoleis*: cf. Pl. *Ap.* 24B on Meletus; *Resp.* 470D on rival factions; Aristophanes, §4.

Therefore, Pericles did not appeal to a settled, shared and commendatory notion, but rather to the widespread perception of *eros* as an impetuous, unrestrained desire and instinctive drive. We are unable to determine if the varied, often parodic and polemical tones of *eros*-metaphors found in other late fifth-century sources pre- or post-date Pericles' speech and, namely, if Aristophanes parodied Pericles or if, on the contrary, Pericles appealed to a figure of speech that the audience had already heard from different perspectives. But this, in fact, makes little difference: in either case, we understand that Pericles' words must have sounded rather odd in public, because he turned into a positive metaphor a notion that circulated as much less straightforward, and that was typically associated with tyranny, violence, deceit, and allurement.

Thucydides' own work not only seems to avoid picking up Pericles' metaphor elsewhere, but actually rather confirms that *eros* in democratic politics produced ill-fated outcomes. That Thucydides first reports Pericles' words in a passionate speech, and then contradicts them with the practice of the Mytilenean debate or the Sicilian expedition, is itself no surprise. We only need to recall that, again in the funeral oration itself, Thucydides provides Pericles' famous definition of Athens as a democracy (2.37.1), only to point out later that it was a democracy in name but in practice the rule of the first man (65.9): this is yet another example of Thucydides' account of how Pericles subtly exerted a strong personal power by hiding it behind his own charisma. Thucydides' intentions in attributing the *eros*-speech to Pericles might remain as ambiguous as the metaphor itself, but even if his intent was to criticize, he certainly highlighted Pericles' rhetorical creativity. The parallels we have analysed show that Pericles' overt metaphor must have sounded eccentric and unexpected to his audience: it rests on familiar social norms, roles, and behaviour, it awakens the audience's experiential memory, but, at the same time, it produces an unconventional image by deliberately highlighting certain features of *eros* and

suppressing others:⁴⁸ namely, it focuses on the cohesive unity between each citizen-*erastes* and the polis, while disregarding the divisive sense of possession that arouses conflict among competing (*ant*)*erastai*.⁴⁹ Pericles' use of *erastes* is thus deviant in the sense that it falls outside the normal political scope of the word⁵⁰ and constitutes an innovative urging to give up to *eros* in a way that *benefits* the polis. That his audience was able to perceive this deviation in its political context as a novelty is exactly the reason why Pericles' metaphor must have been effective, striking, and memorable: as perhaps Eupolis would have said, Pericles indeed "left the sting" in his listeners.⁵¹

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⁴⁸ Cf. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago/London 1980) ch. 21, on the process of creating new meanings for metaphors (using an example based on 'love' throughout the discussion); P. E. Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are. The Problem of Psychological Categories* (Chicago/London 1997) ch. 6, for a discussion of the theories about the social construction of emotions.

⁴⁹ On notions of possession and unity in the metaphorical conceptualization of love see Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling* (Cambridge 2000) 26–29 (esp. 27 on love as "perhaps the most highly 'metaphorized' emotional concept").

⁵⁰ On this notion of *trope*, and of metaphor as one of its two fundamental kinds, see M. Silk, "Metaphor and Metonymy: Aristotle, Jakobson, Ricoeur, and Others," in G. R. Boys-Stones (ed.), *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions* (Oxford 2003) 115–148, esp. 122–126.

⁵¹ Eupolis fr.102.7 K.-A. τὸ κέντρον ἐγκατέλειπε τοῖς ἀκρωμένοις (assigned to the *Demoi*).

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