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Conflicting Desires and Unstable Identities:
Tensions in the Greek Symposium

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I. Introduction

The Greek symposium, or private drinking party, was a formal context for the consumption of wine, often accompanied by the enactment of ritual activities or other associated forms of entertainment.¹ The tradition of symposia seems to have evolved from group feasts in the Archaic period and from the traditional gathering of *hetaireiai* in the late Archaic period.² Generally, men would congregate in the *andron* of a private home and recline on *kline* for a night of drinking, singing or poetry composition, discussion, or other games.³ While meals that shared aspects of the Archaic symposium were held in public spaces in Athens by the fifth century, symposia remained the preserve of the elites: the aristocracy had a monopoly on sympotic symbolic capital, despite any popularizing elements of *polis*-wide feasting.⁴

The term “symposium” is often used synecdochically for the series of ritual activities that takes place over the course of a single gathering; however, it more accurately relates to the time when wine was consumed during a private party. If food was prepared before the drinking began, this meal, the *deipnon*, was a distinct and separate ritual element of the party.⁵ After the consumption of food, a hymn was sung in honor of the gods and libations were poured. At this point, the master of ceremonies, called the *symposiarch*, would decide the proper ratio at which

¹ I would like to thank Kate Gilhuly for her support and invaluable comments on drafts of this paper. Also, thanks are due to Carol Dougherty for her comments on an early draft of the third chapter.

² Murray (1990: 150) is more specific about the potential aristocratic institutions that perhaps provided the precedents for the Classical symposium: “I would myself argue that we can trace a line of descent, perhaps from the Homeric poems, and certainly from the activities of *synomotai* of Alcaeus and the aristocratic factions of sixth-century Athens, through to the late fifth-century political and aristocratic groups, which, somewhat ineffectually under normal circumstances, tried to maintain an influence in the world of mass democracy.” Morris (1996:19-48) understands the development of the symposium as an aristocratic space where elites tried to preserve their privileges in the face of a growing “community of ‘middling’ citizens.”

³ For the furniture used at the symposium, including the *kline*, see Boardman (1990); see Pellizer (1990: 177-184) on entertainment at the symposium.

⁴ Schmitt-Pantel (1992) discusses the distinctions between sacrificial meals and public banquets.

⁵ See Murray (1990: 6) for a discussion about how the *deipnon* as a ritual practice differed from the ritualistic consumption of wine at the symposium.

to dilute the wine; he might also confer with the guests about whether the party would be a raucous one, or if a more serious topic would be up for discussion. As the participants continued to consume wine, they might enjoy drinking games such as *kottabos* or musical performances by hired entertainers playing instruments such as the *aulos*.⁶ Finally, after the party came to an end, the guests would exit the *andron* and reenter public space as they made their way to their homes in a procession called the *komos*.⁷

Thus, the symposium, while a setting for entertainment and occasionally for drunkenness, can be understood as a space for highly symbolic ritual activity that can define relationships of power. Throughout the following chapters, I make reference to anthropological research as a means towards more thoroughly understanding the intricacies of the power structures at play in the symposium. Briefly, I contend that the symposium should be understood from the perspective of social functionalism, where the sympotic ritual cements the shared identity of individuals in a community.⁸ This common identity is then passed from father to son, as the son becomes part of his father's sympotic group, as an extension of his political network. Thus, the elite community recreates itself with each generation by passing on knowledge about sympotic practice, knowledge that is socially acquired through participation in established ritual settings. Within this community of sympotic participants, the symposium is a space where relationships of power are also negotiated among members of the same class.⁹ As Oswyn Murray suggests, the symposiasts in effect created a space where distinctive laws and customs are established as compared to those in the democratic *polis*.

⁶ Lissarrague (1990: 80-86) for images of *kottabos* on drinking vessels.

⁷ Murray (1990: 7) contends that the development of the *komos* at the end of the night reinforced the group's status as separate from the laws and conventions of the *polis*.

⁸ Bellah (2005) on the work of Emile Durkheim and structural functionalism as a means of understanding ritual practices.

⁹ Dietler (2010).

While participants in the symposium would have strived to share in an environment of conviviality and *euphrosyne*, the symposium could also be an antagonistic space. The competitive nature of Classical Greek society, particularly between elites, is expressed in the symposium through contests. Each symposiast might be expected to participate by demonstrating some kind of skill. For example, poems in the priamel form that appear to be composed for the sympotic setting seem to reflect the actual game of competitive poetry composition.¹⁰ Of course, one must distinguish between poetry that is composed for the sympotic setting, and poetry or literature that is itself set at the symposium. My research focuses on Aristophanes' *Wasps*, Xenophon's *Symposium*, and Plato's *Symposium*, all of which depict scenes that take place at a symposium, though these works were not necessarily performed in symposia.

Nevertheless, though the following chapters focus on literary representations of symposia, there is a great deal that can be elucidated by looking at historical corollaries through the archaeological record and material culture. For example, the images that appear on sympotic vessels seem to reinforce the notion that the symposium is a separate space, apart from "normal" society. The embrace of Eastern objects or items of clothing like a *barbitos* or *sakkos* calls upon Dionysus' own ties to Lydia and his status as a liminal god—both in terms of his foreign origins and because his youth positions him on the precipice of adulthood.¹¹ Dionysus was the god of drama, which is parodied when the masks that appear on some vessels alter the appearance of those drinking from them in this space of changeability.¹² It is against this backdrop that the

¹⁰ Burnett (1983: 281-282) on the contest to compose verses among Archaic lyric poets.

¹¹ Osborne (2007: 37-38). For the most part, I have used Latinate spellings for proper nouns for the purpose of continuity, but please excuse any inconsistencies between Latin and Greek spellings.

¹² Lissarrague (1990); see also Lynch (2011) for a more recent archaeological study on sympotic vessels and their context.

participants must play social roles, but they also project their desired identities in an attempt to fit into these acceptable social roles.¹³

Performance has an important pedagogical role in the symposium, where theatrical elements like costume or dancing can also heighten the participants' emotional experience—not unlike the role of tragedy in educating young men.¹⁴ Jean-Pierre Vernant has explained how tragedy, as a genre, expresses a particular type of human experience while inherently linked to the social conditions in which tragedy developed—namely when there was a pervasive tension between the responsibilities and desires of the individual versus those of the many, which is the essential conflict amid the development of democracy.¹⁵ Similarly, the sympotic setting and the tensions that it articulates are linked to the social conditions of the fifth century. Authors describing the fifth century use the symposium as a means of exploring different tensions in the Athenian *polis* related to class, politics, and education. In these texts, the symposium is used to articulate conflicting opinions related to these issues. I argue that the sympotic setting in literature is particularly well suited to discussions of education and the figuration of the student or young man as heir to an inherited set of principles and behaviors. Thus, the role of the symposium in education and the transmission of knowledge from father to son or from student to teacher becomes a central theme in what follows.

To begin, the first chapter focuses on Aristophanes' *Wasps*, a comedy first produced in 422 BCE.¹⁶ Although the dramatic setting is the home of the protagonist's son, the protagonist attends a symposium off-stage. The son spends a great deal of energy trying to prepare his father for this sympotic gathering, dressing him properly, demonstrating how to recline, and teaching

¹³ Osborne (2007: 49-50).

¹⁴ Winkler (1985).

¹⁵ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1969).

¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all dates are BCE.

him stories to tell his fellow symposiasts. Thus, sympotic activity comprises a set of behaviors that a son teaches his father, in an inversion of the conventional Athenian educational paradigm. The young son seems to have been introduced to sympotic activity through economic opportunities that allowed him to purchase the symbolic items associated with sympotic practice, rather than through a patrilineal relationship where the father teaches his son about the symposium through the learning of non-explicit and non-material knowledge in a highly ritualized social context. Ultimately, Aristophanes thematizes the symposium as a means of highlighting the tensions between the young men who came of age during the first few years of the Peloponnesian War and their fathers, when issues of class, age, and politics were intensified.¹⁷ Aristophanes presents the symposium as a progression in three distinct units: the preparation, the symposium, and the *komos*, where together they become markers of elite practice. When presented before the *demos* in a public space, the symposium is shorthand for elite practice as opposed to civic participation, while the conflict between these institutions becomes an important theme in the next chapter.

The second chapter turns to Xenophon's *Symposium*, a dialogue written around 380 BCE—though it is set just a year or two after the *Wasps* was produced. The text relates an evening of conversation and entertainment at the home of a wealthy Athenian. Given that Socrates is among the symposiasts, the conversation naturally turns to philosophical topics; namely, the participants all take turns describing what skill they can use to make men better. Socrates of course wins the competition. He redefines the terms of the question posed to the group and he offers by far the most complex and convincing speech; however, as I will demonstrate, many of the symposiasts offer compelling responses throughout the dialogue. As it

¹⁷ The generation gap between the sons of the 420s and their fathers becomes a prominent theme throughout this project; see Ostwald (1986: 229-250); Forrest (1975); McGlew (1996); and Strauss (1993) for more on this topic.

turns out, a number of the relationships in the text present problematic iterations of father-son relationships where there seems to have been a breakdown in the transmission of knowledge about virtue from father to son. When Socrates says that he is most proud of being a pimp, in an odd way he justifies this assertion: the philosopher is able to align the needs of elite individuals with the civic good in a reformulated expression of homosocial activity. This new model reinvents the elite practice of pederasty; having been stripped of its sexual connotations, a young man would now learn from an older man about how best to serve the *polis*. This is an apology of sorts by Xenophon on behalf of Socrates, as it attempts to justify the philosopher's role in educating the sons of Athens at a moment of profound historical importance.

Much like the dialogue of Xenophon, the *Symposium* of Plato also looks back to an important period of Athenian history. The dramatic date is the year 416 BCE, although Plato most likely wrote this text as many as three decades later. The symposium becomes the answer to a nostalgic question: what if the young leading men of Athens had actually learned how to love and to live virtuously from Socrates? The chapter focuses on one of Athens' most famous sons, Alcibiades, who in the years before the disastrous Sicilian Expedition still seemed to be courting Socrates. While Socrates unquestionably "wins" the sympotic priamel in Xenophon's dialogue, the outcome in the Platonic text is more ambiguous. Socrates offers a profound answer in response to the task of offering an *encomium* to Eros; yet, when Alcibiades interrupts the symposium, he changes the rules of the game once again. Alcibiades' *encomium* to Socrates proves to be incredibly moving. I argue that it is only by integrating these two perspectives can the student of philosophy come to a closer understanding about the nature of *eros*—and about the nature of philosophy itself.

In effect, I will chart the movement of the symposium from the public to the private sphere. It appears on the stage for the entire *demos* in Aristophanes' incarnation; in Xenophon's text, the symposium is deeply invested in issues of civic participation, but the dialogue is set primarily in the home of a private individual; finally, in Plato's *Symposium*, the ritual retreats to a private space almost entirely. Plato does not seem to be interested in mediating issues of class that might have caused tensions in the *polis*, while class is a topic of concern for Aristophanes, and to Xenophon, though to a lesser extent. Of course, a reading of a literary form across multiple genres creates certain complexities. Yet, I would appeal to the final scene of Plato's dialogue, where Socrates argues that no dramatic poet can write a tragedy without a knowledge of comedy, and vice versa. Indeed, no genre emerged or existed in a vacuum; to understand comedy, one must take into account other forms of poetry. By the time philosophical dialogue emerges, it is clear that Plato adapts elements from other genres in order to stake a claim to philosophy's supremacy and dialogic form as the vehicle for that message. As the literary symposium moves from the stage to the private home, different issues are raised about the nature of the ritual as a means of negotiating concerns about mass versus elite. Yet, throughout this movement the symposium clearly remains an important space for raising questions about education and the types of knowledge that can be passed from one generation to the next.

II. The Scurrilous Symposiast in *Aristophanes' Wasps*

Aristophanes' *Wasps*, produced in 422 BCE, describes a son's efforts to prevent his law court addicted father from serving on the Athenian jury. The son, Bdelycleon, eventually manages to restrain his father, Philocleon, for long enough to teach him about elite social customs, including about how to behave among symposiasts. Aristophanes' text indirectly relates the events of a symposium, whereas the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon place the reader within a sympotic conversation. The sympotic scene in the *Wasps* does not dominate the dramatic action on stage, but the symposium does represent an important milestone in the development of the characters. The ritual is a foil for the Athenian jury system, and its participants have a number of political affiliations. Further, the symposium is shorthand for private as opposed to civic practices and educational institutions. All of these factors contribute to a reading of the sympotic scene as a space for the comic poet to explore its function as part of the education of young men, but where an inversion of the father-son relationship sets the stage for a son teaching his father. Aristophanes ultimately does not condemn the symposium outright; rather, the *Wasps* brings to light the deracination of sympotic practice by a generation that suffered from a breakdown in the transmission of knowledge from father to son.

To begin, while the next two chapters describe texts that relate sympotic events through dialogic form, a discussion of sympotic representation in a comedic text requires a broad—though not exhaustive—outline of certain considerations related to the dramatic production of comedies. Firstly, the *Wasps* was performed for an audience of thousands in a theatrical space;

specifically, it was first staged for the Lenaia in the Theater of Dionysos.¹ The actors wore costumes and masks, and would have used props; thus, when the protagonist is dressed in an ornate cloak, he undergoes a tangible transformation on stage, and when his son brings out drinking vessels, there is a materiality associated with the impending sympotic scene. These objects partake in a vocabulary of symbols where certain items, such as the *tribon* or *krater*, are shorthand for sympotic activity. In addition, while Platonic dialogues demand a certain amount of literacy on the part of their readers, the citizens of the *polis* would have had unmediated access to the content of the dramatic performance of the *Wasps*.² Given that the members of the audience represented a diverse range of socio-economic perspectives—despite a general principle of political equality among citizens—class appears to be a much more important focus for Aristophanes than for Plato.³ One final consideration relates to the general sense of historical immediacy; Aristophanes makes jokes that are potentially damaging to politicians who are his contemporaries, and he parodies current policies of the state. While Plato and Xenophon’s depictions of symposia are nostalgic, when Aristophanes satirizes the actions of Cleon, his criticism could have informed—if not swayed—public opinion.⁴

Consequently, the civic setting of Aristophanes’ comedy provides a social context where the values of the *demos* are affirmed or contested within the framework of dramatic performance.⁵ As such, dramatic texts cannot be divorced from their political contexts. In festival

¹ Dover (1972: 121). I have relied upon Alan H. Sommerstein’s (1983) translation of the text, as his notes are particularly comprehensive and insightful.

² Though, it should be noted that Schmitt-Pantel (1992) argues that dialogues were performed in banquet setting at Plato’s Academy.

³ For more on social inequality in the fifth century see de Ste. Croix (1981).

⁴ Slater (2002) suggests that Aristophanes agreed to stop putting characters inspired by Cleon on the comic stage.

⁵ Kurke (2007).

settings such as the Great Dionysia or the Lenaia, political imagery pervaded dramatic ritual.⁶ The names of civic benefactors were read prior to the performances before an audience that sat according to their *deme*, meaning by their political identity.⁷ The physical landscape of the theater shares a similar construction to the courts or the assembly, spaces where citizens heard speeches from politicians and litigators. Just as citizens judged their peers in political or legal settings, they also passed judgment on dramatic performances. In practice, drama was a competitive event, where only one poet was crowned the winner and garnered the esteem of the public. Democratic political culture constantly reinforced this figuration of citizens as spectators—whether in the assembly, the agora or the theater.

In addition to its setting and audience, the content of Aristophanic comedy also has political implications, partly because it is deeply invested in mediating, or at least confronting, social conflicts.⁸ In the *Wasps*, Aristophanes appropriated sympotic activities to represent elite culture, where the symposium is at odds with the *polis*. This binary of mass versus elite maps onto the comedy's two protagonists. Philocleon is an elderly juror and a veteran of the Persian Wars. His son is young—though mature enough to have received his patrimony and to run his own *oikos*.⁹ It is in this house where Bdelycleon has imprisoned his father, in an attempt to prevent the old man from spending all of his time as a member of the jury at the law courts. In his analysis of the intersection of political and familial ideology in fifth and fourth century Athens, Barry Strauss pinpoints the decades of the 420s as a time when the representation of conflicts between fathers and sons symbolized a number of pervasive tensions in the *polis*.¹⁰

⁶ For a discussion of the connection between the citizen gaze and democratic institutions in Classical Athens, see Goldhill (1998).

⁷ Ober and Strauss (1990).

⁸ Ober and Strauss (1990: 237-238).

⁹ For the rituals and legal rights associated with paternal inheritance see Strauss (1993: 66-74).

¹⁰ Strauss (1993).

Obviously, it is problematic to infer historical trends from a very limited textual record; in reality, the relationships between Athenian fathers and their sons may have been no more strained during this decade than in the ones that preceded or followed it. Nevertheless, dramatic and oratorical texts of this period thematize and problematize the social drama between fathers and sons—in certain cases through the use of sympotic motifs. The conflict between Philocleon and Bdelycleon, adapted to the stage in 422, makes light of tensions between ambitious sons and their more conservative fathers, which seemed to be heightened during this early decade of the Peloponnesian War. This chapter focuses on that kind of relationship as a contemporaneous poet regarded it, while the next two chapters focus on authors who looked back on this period and re-imagined this generational tension against the backdrop of symposia.

Although the father-son relationship is a concern primarily in the private lives of Athenians, the stability of the *oikos* had public importance because it was vital to the health of the state. A young man's transition into an active and mature citizen at the age of 18 corresponded to certain liberties in terms of private property and patrimony and his formal introduction into his father's *deme*.¹¹ The process of generational procreation is inherently political because the *demos* reproduced itself by passing on its values from one generation to the next. Thus, the stability of the state required that its sons adopt both their fathers' technical knowledge and skills, and also their political and moral beliefs, processes that were partially facilitated by indoctrination through civic and private institutions. This generational transmission reinforced normative values in the state, often by contrasting the ideals and behaviors of the adult male Athenian with an "other," whether this construction was a foreigner, a woman, or a slave.¹² However, Aristophanes' dramatization of the problematic relationship between a father and his

¹¹ Strauss (1993: 82-89).

¹² See Zeitlin (1990).

son thematizes different dualities than Athenian versus “other,” because both men theoretically have political equality and agency.

The father-son conflict depicted in the *Wasps* is indicative of a range of tensions that pervaded the Athenian *polis* during the fifth century. To begin, the names Philocleon (meaning “lover of Cleon”) and Bdelycleon (“hater of Cleon”) immediately alert the audience to the men’s political beliefs in relation to a figure who was a contemporary of Aristophanes, the demagogue Cleon.¹³ In addition to political allegiance, class appears to be another source of tension between the two main characters; while Philocleon is poor and dependent upon the jury for a daily subsistence wage, his son indulges in the expensive wines and luxury goods often consumed by wealthy aristocrats. In terms of military service, Philocleon defended Athens by serving as a hoplite abroad, an experience that he and the chorus of *Wasps* repeatedly discuss. In contrast, Bdelycleon does not assert an identity that is circumscribed by his experience serving in the military. In fact, he encourages his father to downplay his service as a hoplite, and urges him to pretend that he once served as a distinguished diplomat in foreign missions alongside statesmen like Cleisthenes (1187-1189).¹⁴ Philocleon appears at first to be politically unaware, economically dependent, and culturally ignorant; and although Philocleon is the parental figure, his age and his level of maturity undergo a drastic transformation over the course of the text.

The development of Philocleon is guided by his son, who faces a number of challenges while attempting to help his father become a sophisticated man of leisure. The trials that

¹³ Sommerstein (1983: 234) suggests that lines 1284-1290 of the *Wasps* indicate that Cleon actually brought charges against Aristophanes, who agreed to stop lambasting Cleon in exchange for the case to be dropped. Aristophanes’ most brutal treatment of the politician appears in *Knights*. For more information of the historical figure, see Davies (1971: 318-320) and Connor (1971: 91-198).

¹⁴ Ian Morris (1996) suggests that two distinct positions came into opposition in Archaic Greece, preserved through the literary record: firstly, the “elitist” position led to the aristocratic pursuit of a lifestyle of luxury and *habrosyne*, while the “middling” philosophy saw this lifestyle as useless to the community of citizens and was promoted by the proliferation of hoplite warfare.

Philocleon faces are essentially a “reverse *ephebeia*.”¹⁵ This *ephebeia* consisted of the three contests related to the responsibilities of adult male Athenians, including military service, civic participation, and private entertainment. The representation of these events or contests creates a dramatic structure in the text that maps on to the transformation from old man to *ephebe* for the young man in question, Philocleon, and unexpectedly not his son. The first event is a mock military contest, where Philocleon acts as a hoplite in the battle between his son’s household and the chorus, made up of his fellow senile jurors. After being defeated, Philocleon’s next challenge forces him to act as judge and juror in the court that Bdelycleon sets up at his home. Once again Philocleon loses the contest, this time because he acquits the dog that has been put on trial; it is an act of mercy that disgusts the old juror who always longs to convict those facing prosecution. The final challenge for Philocleon tests his ability to perform in the company of aristocratic men at a drinking party. By this point, his conversion into an *ephebe* is arguably complete: he is *neos*, immature, devious, volatile, and irrational. He has gone from the constant spectator, watching court cases every day as a member of the jury, to the ultimate performer, dressed up and singing for his audience of symposiasts and then dancing on the stage for the *Wasps*’ audience.

These three trials serve to emphasize the inversion of the father-son relationship. Bdelycleon must first overcome his father in physical strength in the short battle, then overpower him with his intellect in the domestic court of law, and finally educate him in the ways of sympotic activity. This education of father by son is highly problematic; for the purposes of comparison, an example of the more typical arrangement of a son’s education by his father can be found in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. In this comedy, first produced in 423 BCE, an older Athenian

¹⁵ Bowie (1993: 78-101).

father sends his son to a school run by Sophists.¹⁶ This father is hoping that his son can prevent his creditors from collecting the debts that he owes them in court. Of course, sending his son to the school run by Socrates ends up being self-defeating for the father; his son undergoes a transformation into a pale and feeble sophist, who has no moral compass and who is able to make the lesser argument the stronger without regard for what is ethical. The son learns a perverse form of sophistry that ultimately allows him to turn his father's phrases. Additionally, he does not cancel his father's debts, but instead commits an act of violence against the old man. In contrast, in the *Wasps*, this construction is reversed, as the son attempts to salvage his reputation by teaching his father a new set of skills. Of course, much like in the *Clouds*, despite the best efforts of Bdelycleon, once his student has gone through the process of instruction, Philocleon is unwieldy and arguably worse than when the story began.

The final contest in the text, where Philocleon is tested by his sympotic performance, is the focus my analysis. In Aristophanes' presentation, the symposium is presented as a ritual with three distinct phases: there is the preparation for the gathering, the drinking party itself, and then the *komos*. Although only the preparation scene and the end of the *komos* are portrayed on stage, the "actual" symposium is related by indirect discourse through the description of one of the household slaves, Xanthias. This first phase, the preparation scene, involves the dressing of Philocleon, his recitation of drinking songs, and the performance of an imaginary symposium between the father and son. All of these elements are associated with material objects and consumable goods; essentially, Bdelycleon is able to educate his father because the material components of sympotic practice are available to men who are not traditionally part of the

¹⁶ For more on *Clouds* see Dover (1972: 103-135); Strauss (1993: 157-162); Telo (2010).

aristocratic class.¹⁷ Bdelycleon somehow has the means to afford ornate clothing and proper drinking vessels, even though he did not inherit those prestige objects from his father. When offered a Persian cloak, Philocleon says that he prefers his dirty old cloak, which saved his life when he was freezing during his time in the military (1122-1124). In this scene, it seems that sympotic education is no longer based on patrilineal socio-political ties; that is, a son need not be inducted into his father's *hetaireia* in order to learn about the mysteries of the symposium. Consumption, in effect, has democratized sympotic practice. Yet, it has also dehumanized the tradition, as interpersonal relationships no longer foster the transmission of this practice from father to son. Instead, the process of education in this text not only demonstrates the collapse of personal relationships, but it also completely mocks that activity—as Philocleon turns out to fail spectacularly as a sympotic participant, despite his son's best efforts.

Even more offensive than the Persian cloak are the Spartan shoes that Bdelycleon implores his father to wear. Of course, when the comedy was staged, the Athenians had been at war with the Spartans for nearly a decade. Once again, Bdelycleon reiterates the expensive cost of the good in order to justify his father's use of it. Bdelycleon is far wealthier than his father, but he remains self-conscious about how he presents himself. In the first scene, the chorus of old men lament their poverty, while their sons plan on abandoning them and do not seem to suffer from the same economic hardships. Of course, this distance in socio-economic class between the generations is even more pronounced in the case of the protagonists. This incongruity in socio-economic class is made more dramatic to heighten the comedy of Philocleon's boorishness, but it also emphasizes Bdelycleon's vanity.

¹⁷ See Kurke (1992) on the external paraphernalia, like the Persian clock here, associated with elite sympotic practice.

Indeed, Philocleon's patriotism actually seems commendable when he begs his son not to make him step on enemy soil by placing his feet in Spartan boots. When Bdelycleon starts to instruct Philocleon about how to walk in the shoes, he suggests that his father strut properly, in exaggerated movements that appear foreign to Philocleon (line 1169). Bdelycleon, unlike his father, is deeply concerned about his physical comportment and the ways in which he carries himself. Philocleon does not master the walk, so instead Bdelycleon tries to get the old man to practice telling heroic anecdotes about his achievements. This is unsuccessful because Philocleon did not serve on any delegations and he is unable to relate stories about his youthful bravado. Bdelycleon's posturing exaggeratedly infantilizes his father—whom he dresses and then teaches to walk and to speak. Bdelycleon gains knowledge about the symposium through the acquisition of material objects, and not through interpersonal relationships with a sympotic group that he inherited from his father. Economic, rather than social acquisition, allows Bdelycleon to act like a symposiast, while Philocleon is barely an adult at this point—his son's treatment of him makes him into a child again.

The next tool that Bdelycleon uses to educate his father is an exercise in imagination, and it presents the most comprehensive description of the events that take place at an ideal symposium. The younger man asks his father to pretend as though they are among their drinking companions, who include Athenians of note such as Theorus, Aeschines, Phanus, and Cleon. In this scene Bdelycleon demonstrates proper sympotic behavior, where the democratic Athenian is cast as a king within his own home:

BDELYCLEON: Stretch your legs and pour yourself out lithely and athletically on the covers. [*Philocleon does his best to follow these directions.*] Then praise one of the pieces of bronzeware [*he points to one side of an imaginary dining-room; Philocleon looks in that direction*] –gaze at ceiling [*gesturing skywards*] –admire tapestries in hall. [*Bdelycleon's hand and Philocleon's eye sweep round the walls of the imaginary room. Bdelycleon pretends to call to servants outside.*]

Water for our hands! [*He holds out his hands to have water poured over them; Philocleon clumsily imitates this and his subsequent actions.*] Bring in the tables! Now we're dining [*he pretends to be eating, then to have his hands washed again*]; now we've washed; now we're pouring libations [*he tilts an imaginary wine-cup three times*]. (1212-1217)

Once again, the props associated with sympotic activity are emphasized, including the drinking vessels and the decorative elements of the *andron*. Bdelycleon suggests that in this imaginary setting, Cleon has begun to sing a drinking song called “Harmodius.” The suggestion of this *skolion* is somewhat provocative because it relates to the semi-mythological figure who, along with his older partner, Aristogeiton, helped overthrow Hippias, the last Peisistratid tyrant.¹⁸ What is striking about the tyrant-slayers though, is that they were involved in a pederastic relationship, the violation of which caused their revenge against Hippias’ brother, Hipparchus. Harmodius, the *eromenos*, and Aristogeiton, the *erastes*, obviously enjoyed aristocratic status. Yet, they are a strange pair to be revered as the heroes of the democratic tradition.¹⁹ Thucydides relates the myth of the two men in his *History*, immediately after describing the Mutilation of the Herms and the Profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, scandals that he reports occurred after a *komos* became violent.²⁰ Because of this sequence, Mark Munn suggests that there is a connection between the violence of the *komos* at the end of symposia and the destabilization of democratic ideology.

Philocleon proves to be a disappointing student for his son, even as Bdelycleon prompts his father to sing the next part in the well-known Harmodius *skolion*. When Bdelycleon begins the song with the line, “Never was such a man born in Athens—” the old man insults Cleon by

¹⁸ See Fornara (1970) for more on the *skolion* and the cult that developed around the mythology about the two tyrannicides.

¹⁹ Wohl (2002: 20-29) suggests that the mutilation of the *phalloi* of the Herms, which represented the principle of sexual dominance that was a key part in the figuration of male citizenship, was interpreted as a threat to the principle of political equality of the *demos*.

²⁰ Thucydides cites the myth at 1.20 and describes it more fully in Book VI, from 6.53-6.59.

replying, “Never was such a thief or such a scoundrel!” (1226-1227). Energized by his invective, Philocleon continues his version and sings to the imaginary Cleon, “You, fellow, that are eager for supreme power./ you’ll ruin the city yet; she is close to the turn of the scale” (1234-1235). Essentially, by asserting that Cleon is a greedy zealot, Philocleon transforms the song from one of praise for a tyrant-killer to one of condemnation for a tyrant. This accusation is a curious reversal from Philocleon’s original position; he began the day revering Cleon, even though he thought that he wielded power over prominent politicians as a lowly juror. Bdelycleon, who pointed out to his father that he was a slave to these demagogues, now reels from his father’s insult, not because the old man is wrong, but because he is acting inappropriately in the imaginary company of sophisticated men. It becomes apparent that Bdelycleon is more concerned with style and decorum than with content. Thus, it seems that the sympotic scene here along with the later “actual” symposium, described more fully below, have political connotations. More specifically there are anti-democratic elements to these gatherings, as evinced by the Harmodius song, the Spartan boots, the preference for imported Eastern luxuries and the veneration of military service in distinguished diplomatic missions rather than as part of the traditional hoplite ranks.²¹

Scholars have been divided over the question of whether or not the symposium in the *Wasps* is a political affair.²² Of course, this relates to a larger question about the nature of the symposium as a distinctly elite space within the democratic *polis*. Claims about the literary sympotic setting must confront both the limitations and the insights provided by their historical

²¹ Murray (1990: 7); see also Kurke (1992) for similar themes in the sympotic lyric poetry of Archaic Greece.

²² Bowie (1993: 99) notes the drinking groups are made up of men who were involved in political affairs, meaning that Philocleon has left the democratic sphere for something that is potentially more “sinister.” MacDowell (1971) and Storey (1985) attempt to amass more detailed biographical information on those named as symposiasts in the text.

corollaries.²³ Sean Corner adopts the valuable strategy of employing anthropological work that unpacks the dynamics of group drinking. He notes:

The conviviality of such drinking is marked in opposition to the stigmatization of drinking alone. It occurs in egalitarian communities and the feeling of transcendence is experienced in the context of sharing, equality and intimacy. Equality does not preclude, but rather is a condition for competition, and the drinking party provides a forum for competitive behaviour.²⁴

Corner interprets this anthropological research as support for his claim that the symposium is a context in which to transcend the *oikos* rather than the *polis*. This is a controversial stance; his theory is one that Oswyn Murray or Ian Morris would certainly contest, given that they interpret the symposium as a space for the expression of aristocratic practices beyond the prying eyes of the *polis*. Briefly, the traditional school of thought considers the sympotic institution as a space of aristocratic self-differentiation within the larger democratic *polis*. Leslie Kurke argues that *habrosyne* was associated with symposiastic activities as a result of a larger phenomenon where luxurious practices spread to mainland Greece due to changes in the distribution of wealth and political power that occurred during the Archaic Period.²⁵ Murray understands the symposium as a descendent of the Archaic *hetaireia*, emphasizing that the sympotic group was deeply invested in preserving these kinship ties among elites.²⁶ Morris understands the development of the symposium as an aristocratic space where elites tried to preserve their privileges in the face of a growing “community of ‘middling’ citizens.”²⁷ However, other scholars respond that the Archaic

²³ Given the tremendous amount of scholarship dealing with the historical Greek symposium, I have only touched upon some of the issues raised by these scholars.

²⁴ Corner (2010: 370); Corner specifically cites ethnographic research of Michael Stewart (1992: 137-155) concerning the customs of Rom Gypsies in Hungary.

²⁵ Kurke (1992: 93).

²⁶ Murray (1990: 150).

²⁷ Morris (1996: 19-48).

Greek symposium was not necessarily a space for strictly anti-*polis* participants or sentiments.²⁸ Corner argues that it is not possible to make a distinction between the symposium and the city. This objection does not prove to be as serious of a concern in a discussion of the literary sympotic space. Nevertheless, class distinctions—that is to say, issues of mass and elite—are clearly among Aristophanes’ concerns in his *Wasps*.

Before turning to the description of the father and son at Philoctemon’s house, the exchanges between the two men before they leave for the sympotic gathering create an interlude that is rich in dramatic irony. When Bdelycleon remarks that he is looking forward to being intoxicated (exclaiming *μεθυσθῶμεν*), Philocleon has a rare moment of clarity. He explains that drinking wine leads to the destruction of property, physical aggression, and the accumulation of high expenses caused from paying the people who have been harmed (1252-1255). But Bdelycleon disagrees; he says that in the company of *kaloikagathoi*, these concerns are void. Wealthy men simply buy off those victimized by their revelry, or they manage to turn altercations into laughing matters by reciting droll Aesopic tales. Bdelycleon claims that symposiasts are able to use the stories that they learn at drinking parties to avoid taking responsibility for any damage that they do to the state or to private property. This suggests that part of a young man’s education at the symposium involves preparing himself against accusations when he has committed anti-democratic acts like vandalism. Curiously, in a strange case of historical irony, the chorus then begins to sing about a man named Amynias who went to a symposium at the home of a man named Leogoras (lines 1265-1274). Leogoras would later be one of the men accused of being party to the Mutilation of the Herms and the Profanation of the

²⁸ Hammer (2004: 480). Corner (2010: 375) addressing the scholarship of Murray, states that: “the contrasts Murray and others draw between the symposium and the city—private versus public, exclusive versus inclusive, elitist versus middling—do not necessarily stand up to close examination of the terms by which the symposium structured itself and situated itself in society.”

Eleusinian Mysteries.²⁹ It turns out that Leogoras avoided prosecution and exile, unlike some of the accused, perhaps making him an appropriate authority on the dangers of the *komos* and the importance of learning to assuage those wronged in these violent processions. Of course, Philocleon's temperance is tested at the drinking party, and his discussion with Bdelycleon turns out to be premonitory regarding the violence that ultimately ensues.

In short, Philocleon's behavior at the symposium is overwhelmingly disastrous. He insults all of his fellow participants, who include Hippyllus, Antiphon, Lykon, Lysistratus, Thuphrastus and a group associated with Phrynichus (1299).³⁰ Xanthias describes how Philocleon ate too much, danced wildly, and beat his slave. When Lysistratus compared the old man to *nouveaux riches*, Phrygians, and to an ass, Philocleon retaliates by deriding his fellow symposiast. Another man accuses Philocleon of pretending to be smart, making rustic jokes, and telling ignorant stories. This behavior reveals an inherent danger for symposiasts; while they seek pleasure and collective gratification, they also try to outdo one another in the competitive atmosphere, thus running the risk of revealing the fragility of their identity.³¹ Bdelycleon's efforts to teach his father have obviously failed, and Aristophanes illustrates this failure to act appropriately by exaggerating Philocleon's transgressions in the extreme. Philocleon ends up stealing the flute-girl and bringing her back to his son's home, an act that harkens back to his *real* youth, when he used to commit acts of theft when serving as a hoplite in foreign territories. Essentially, when tested in the sympotic setting, Philocleon manages to do everything wrong, despite Bdelycleon's best efforts.

²⁹ Sommerstein (1983: 232).

³⁰ Storey (1985) has an extensive compilation of the epigraphic evidence related to these figures; according to Sommerstein (1983: 235), the name Thuphrastus is only recorded in *PA* 9271.

³¹ For more on the tension between individual and collective passions, see Pellizer (1990: 182-183).

When Philocleon returns to his son's home, a man is pursuing him because he claims that the intoxicated symposiast harmed him. The unnamed character describes the old man as a νεανίης, which is the term used for young men in their teens who are on the brink of manhood, but who still remain under their fathers' guardianship (1333).³² The use of infantilizing vocabulary continues as Philocleon addresses the prostitute Dardanis, and it becomes clear that his reversion to youth is complete; he says to her: νεός γάρ ειμι (1355). At this point, the inversion of the father-son relationship is also complete: the audience listening to Philocleon's tirade must in fact change every mention of "son" to "father" and vice versa. This is because Philocleon claims that he is waiting for his son to die so that he can finally do whatever he would like to do—an economic freedom and autonomy that might allow him to buy the freedom of Dardanis, for example. He claims that his son keeps a close watch on him and scrutinizes all of his activities. This statement was arguably true at the beginning of the text, when Bdelycleon locked up his father. But at this point, Philocleon barely resembles the feeble man he once was. His most distinguishable trait, his love of the law courts, has now dissipated:

PHILOCLEON: Yah boo! Summonses!
How old-fashioned of you! Don't you know
that I can't even endure hearing
of lawsuits? Yahoo, yahoo!
This is what I like. Blast voting-urns!
Go, won't you? Where's there
a juror? Out of my way! (1335-1341)

It seems Philocleon has finally traded his love of the voting urns for his love of the *krater*. In his speech to Dardanis, who flees from the old man when given the first opportunity, Philocleon entirely reframes his relationship with his son, characterizing his offspring as a stern father figure.

³² Davidson (2006: 61).

The reappearance of Bdelycleon to the stage marks the young man's confrontation with a father who is more aggressive—and stronger—than ever. Philocleon actually fulfills the fable that his son suggested he memorize, the one about the old man who overpowered a younger competitor (1190-1194).³³ The old man beats his son, having become irredeemably belligerent. Yet, because Bdelycleon has acted as Philocleon's father throughout the course of the text, by dressing him and educating him, this feat appears to be tantamount to a son beating his father—an act that would have been exceedingly sacrilegious to the eyes of an Athenian audience. Once again, this relationship recalls Aristophanes' *Clouds*, where the sophist-educated son strikes his bewildered father. Taking into account Philocleon's violent act against his son, Niall Slater posits that the symposium failed to educate Philocleon properly.³⁴ He did not learn to behave properly, so his education must be supplemented by civic instruction. This final rite takes place during the last scene of the comedy, when Philocleon dances with the sons of Carcinus (meaning "Crab"), who was a tragic poet.³⁵ Slater does not take into account the full importance of the symposium as an educational institution. Instead, he bases his reading of the *ephebia* on John Winkler's discussion of ephebic participation in choral performances in Athenian tragedies.

Philocleon's misbehavior at the symposium and his violent procession in the *komos* do not represent a condemnation by Aristophanes of sympotic practice, as some have argued.³⁶ Oswyn Murray suggests that Aristophanes illustrates that the symposium is a threatening anti-democratic institution and that Philocleon's behavior demonstrates the need of the elite to

³³ The tale describes Ephudion, who although older, successfully competed against Ascondas in an Olympiad.

³⁴ Slater (2002: 107)

³⁵ Sommerstein (1983: 246) notes that Carcinus was a tragic poet who won the City Dionysia in 446 BCE, and was elected to a generalship in 432. Epigraphic evidence indicates that he had four sons, who appear to be characterized here in the *Wasps* as the opponents of Philocleon in the final scene.

³⁶ Slater (2002: 104-105); Bowie (1993: 93-96); Murray (1990: 149-150).

display their power publicly through the *komos*.³⁷ Murray asserts that the *Wasps* would have confirmed the *demos*' suspicions about drinking groups as oligarchic and anti-*polis*. There is no way to know if the audience was entertained by Philocleon's actions, or if they felt unease at his violent anti-populist beliefs.³⁸ Aristophanes' position is more nuanced, because he takes a similar stance to the symposium as he does the jury system. I instead suggest that the symposium should be understood as a literary trope that Aristophanes thematizes in order to dramatize the opposition between civic participation, represented by participation in democratic politics and service on the jury, and elite customs, represented by sympotic practice. Both institutions, Aristophanes demonstrates, are flawed; trial by a mob-like jury is not the best means to facilitate justice, just as the symposium is not the best means with which to educate Athenian youths.

Angus Bowie argues that the symposium functions in the comedies of Aristophanes in a similar way to mythology in Classical Athenian literature.³⁹ That is, the symposium is a literary tool to illustrate whatever Aristophanes chooses to satirize—here, elite activity or the appropriation of that activity by Athenian sons. The last choral ode provides some clues to facilitate this reading. The chorus has entirely changed their opinion regarding Bdelycleon, whom they now revere as a paragon of filial devotion. Wisdom and the love of one's father are directly equated, as Bdelycleon has earned praise because of his φιλοπατρίαν καὶ σοφίαν (1465).⁴⁰ Yet, in this drama, wisdom has been passed from son to father, rather than through the natural pathway of father to son. The chorus notes that Philocleon has moved from his old life-

³⁷ Murray (1990: 149-150).

³⁸ For a discussion of the sources of political conflict in the text, see Konstan (1985: 46): "In the restraints placed upon Philocleon when argument itself as a kind of charm and subversion, Aristophanes' *Wasps*—read politically—betrays the stubborn fact of class conflict within the citizen body of the Athenians."

³⁹ Bowie (1997: 3) explains the apparent lack of an all-encompassing explanation for Aristophanes' use of the sympotic motif, stating: "If one had to summarise, one could say that the basic function of the sympotic codes is to chart and so allow evaluation of changes in the comic world, via a shift from abnormal or non-existent sympotic practice to normal activity."

⁴⁰ For the connection between *sophia* and *philopatria* see Telo (2010: 286).

style and, “learning other ways instead of those,” he makes a change towards luxury and softness (1455). Bdelycleon relies upon material goods to try to teach his father this new lifestyle, an education that is based on consumption and a learned *habitus* rather than the transmission of non-material types of knowledge.

As I argued above, the theater is itself a political space. Thus, this alone would be enough to alert the audience to the potential politicizing of the symposium. The presentation of the symposium on the comic stage in this sequence is thematized by Aristophanes as a vehicle with which to voice the tensions between fathers and sons and the breakdown of traditional forms through which embodied knowledge was inherited. Surely, Bdelycleon is just as ridiculous a teacher as his father is a student. Aristophanes seems to point to Bdelycleon’s ineptitude, which is understandable because he himself never learned from his father how to interact in an elite environment through the social acquisition of non-explicit contextualized practices. That is to say, the over-eager, vain son is likely just as problematic as his gullible, poor father. I do not take the same stance as Murray, as the symposiasts here do not seem to be engaging in any brainstorming of anti-democratic plots. Instead, the symposium as it is shown in the *Wasps* acts as more of a marker of elite practice and customs, where these are at odds with normative forms of civic participation. Participation in the public sphere will become an even more prominent theme in the next chapter, where in his *Symposium* Xenophon offers a new model of civic participation where elite customs are refigured so that they may better serve the state and its citizens.

III. Xenophon's Socrates: Civic Reimagining of the Symposium

Similarly to Aristophanes' *Wasps*, concerns about public life dominate the conversation in the *Symposium* of Xenophon: the narrative begins with a group leaving a public competition and ends as they declare their devotion to civil service. The text negotiates issues of civic versus private activities while also exploring tensions between a number of dualities, including those of philosopher and student, sophist and client, and father and son. These potential sources of conflict are related to the issue of education, and more specifically how the elite provided for the education of their sons. By focusing on the relationship between fathers and sons, Xenophon illustrates how new educational institutions shaped the ideals held by young Athenians, as compared to those held by their fathers. As part of a larger program to explain the life and philosophy of Socrates, the text provides a justification for Socrates' role in teaching Athenian citizens, where he encouraged the appropriation of elite culture in a refigured model of civic participation.¹

In Xenophon's text, the symposium is a private space where aristocrats discuss the values of the democratic *polis*. These elite *dramatis personae* embody sets of values associated with their social statuses. Each character ostensibly performs a stock role: Socrates is the wise philosopher, Callias is the typical aristocrat and Autolycus is the model *eromenos*. Yet their interactions do not merely depict representations of idealized social relationships between the philosopher and his student or the *erastes* and his *eromenos*. Apart from representing archetypal Athenian relationships, each character's historical outcome heightens the drama of the text.

¹ For a discussion on the Socratic authors and *Sokratikoi Logoi* see Clay (1994: 23-47). For more on the significance of the *komos* at the end of sympotic gatherings, see Murray (1990: 149-161).

Though set in 421/420 BCE, the dialogue was likely written in the late 380s or early 370s.² Thus, Xenophon's readers are aware, for example, that Socrates was charged with corrupting the youth, that Callias was *paranomos* in his appetites, and that Autolycus never outgrew his desire to be sexually passive.³ Despite the incongruity between how these literary characters are depicted and how their "real" lives turned out, by the time Callias' symposium ends, all of the relationships in the text confirm acceptable Athenian values.

While there was ambiguity about whether or not the sympotic gathering in Aristophanes' *Wasps* was anti-democratic, the symposium in this text is unquestionably concerned with politics and democratic ideology. In fact, the political atmosphere at the symposium is intensified as the complex social "performances" in Xenophon's narrative bolster the political statements attributed to each speaker. Performance and politics are linked in the matrix of social self-posturing at the symposium. Anthropological analysis can help enrich an understanding of symbolic structures and provide insight into rituals of commensality. Michael Dietler studies the ways in which feasting is an instrument for political action among the Luo peoples of Western Kenya. Feasts in particular provide a setting where social relationships do not necessarily reflect realities of daily life, but where they can be subject to contests over political and symbolic capital, as Dietler asserts:

In addition to this idealized representation of the social order, rituals also offer the potential for manipulation by individuals or groups attempting to alter or make statements about their relative position within that social order as it is perceived, presented, and contested. As such, feasts are subject to simultaneous manipulation for both ideological and more immediately personal goals. In other words, individuals can use feasts to compete against each other without questioning a

² See Dover (1965: 9-16) for a discussion of the relationship between Xenophon's dialogue and Plato's *Symposium*. Dover convincingly argues that Plato's text must predate that of Xenophon though Xenophon's was set in approximately 421 BCE while the dramatic date of the Platonic text is 416. I have relied upon Bartlett's translation of the dialogue (1996).

³ More comprehensive biographical details of these figures are highlighted in Higgins (1977).

shared vision of the social order that the feast reproduces and naturalizes, or they can use feasts to simultaneously struggle for personal position *and* promote contrasting visions of the proper structure of the social world.⁴

In short, feasting is a stage where the actors have the ability to question the status quo, particularly when participants seek to assert their supremacy or to differentiate themselves from the rest of the group. Alternatively, these individuals may confirm norms even when they hold opposing opinions, because they operate within a shared cultural framework and in accordance with a common set of principles. Those who feast together partake in the same media of exchange; they trade items including food and wine, they witness the same entertainment and ritual activities, and they learn similar types of socially acquired knowledge about how to behave at the symposia.

Xenophon's text might be understood in light of ethnographic insights about feasts or other consumptive rituals, despite the fact that the dialogue is a literary representation of this type of practice. What Dietler describes as political theater becomes *actual* theater when committed to the dialogic form. In this case, unlike other literary settings, the sympotic dialogue creates a distinct backdrop of conviviality. The *symposiarch* determines how much the group will drink, the topics of discussion, and the games or performers. Rituals are chanted, libations are poured and drinks are exchanged among the symposiasts. Thus, even though a sympotic gathering could be contentious at times, ritual activities reinforce the symposiasts' collective group identity.

Although I focus on the symposium as a setting for the education of young men, Xenophon's *Symposium* should also be considered against the larger backdrop of educational

⁴ Dietler (2010: 71-72) focuses his work on certain communities in Africa where he finds that feast activities have structural roles within their larger political economies. Thus, these feasts do not correspond precisely with the Greek symposium given that the consumption of food was not the central focus for Athenians; however, this work can inform our understanding of communal feasting as a highly constructed social performance.

practices in Classical Athens. These institutions provided young men with the opportunity both to confirm group identity and to assert individual superiority. In the fifth century, civic institutions served to bring together young men and to teach them about what it meant to be an Athenian. Young men might attend dramatic performances with their peers, train together for military service, or participate in religious or civic festivals.⁵ At the same time, the educational framework encouraged the *aristoi* to differentiate themselves through exceptional achievements.⁶ Athletic competitions in festivals or in the gymnasium fostered this drive to garner praise. This tension between institutionalized conformity and personal ambition was also apparent within the framework of the Athenian radical democracy. Members of the assembly shared common ideals and were regarded as equals; however, popular politicians strove to distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens.⁷

Those who wanted to stand out in the assembly might hire instructors specializing in *politike technē*. The Sophistic Movement of the fifth century brought new types of teachers to Athens, men who were drawn to the eager students and increasing wealth of the Athenian Empire.⁸ Sophists from across the Mediterranean world taught poetry, rhetoric, and natural science in a changing landscape that provided an alternative to earlier private and public instructional institutions. New avenues for education created instability in the Athenian *polis*, as monetary compensation was exchanged for tutelage in how to speak or argue as a means of persuading the *demos*. There is some evidence that this trend was a source of concern to later philosophers; in his dialogues, Plato takes great pains to differentiate between Socrates and the

⁵ For more on these rites see Winkler (1985) or Strauss (1983: 84-84).

⁶ See Ober's "The Debate Over Civic Education in Classical Athens" (2001).

⁷ Ober (1989: 315-316)

⁸ Munn (2000: 77-82). See also Plato's *Protagoras* 316c-326c for the types of knowledge that the Sophists supposedly taught, and Guthrie (1969: 27-34) on the evolution of the meaning of the term σοφιστής from the sixth to the fourth century.

sophists. For example, Plato's *Apology* explicitly counters Aristophanes' infamous depiction of Socrates as he is portrayed in the *Clouds*, which was produced in 423 BCE, at least three decades before Plato's dialogue.⁹

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Aristophanes concentrated on the generation of sons who came of age in the 420s. The instability of *paideia*, coupled with the backdrop of the Peloponnesian War, seems to create a setting for the exploration of the conflicts between young men and their more conservative fathers. If not an historical reality, anecdotally this phenomenon of generational incompatibility or conflict was perceived as early as the fifth century. A few decades later, the first Socratic authors focused on the unruliness of this generation of young Athenians. In Xenophon's *Symposium*, the reader encounters a number of examples of these strained father/son relationships; Callias' father appears to have failed to raise an upstanding son, Nicias also arguably faltered with Niceratus, as did Lycon with Autolycus.

Among elites, conversations about education must also take into account the practice of pederasty, which becomes an important topic in Xenophon's *Symposium*, in addition to that of Plato. Sexual intercourse or intimate relationships between an *epebe* (the *eromenos*) and an older male citizen (the *erastes*) were thought to be a means through which the young man might learn about how to lead a virtuous life. Ideally, the *erastes* would be a model of good behavior for the impressionable *eromenos*. At the same time, these relationships were potentially difficult to navigate, as Kenneth J. Dover described in his famous comprehensive study of homoeroticism in Classical Greece.¹⁰ Pederastic practice was accompanied by anxiety about the desires of the passive *eromenos* and his transition into an active adult male citizen.¹¹ Michel Foucault points

⁹ For more on this depiction of Socrates in the *Clouds*, see Konstan (2011).

¹⁰ Dover (1978).

¹¹ See Dover (1978) and Skinner (2005: 114-124).

out the essential problem for democratic citizens: these relationships needed to be formulated in such a way that the *eromenos* never seemed to be the more interested party in the relationship.¹²

After all, if a young man was on the threshold of citizenship, then he would soon need to become an active, inviolable citizen who had control over his desires.

A pederastic relationship is the *raison d'être* for the celebration in Xenophon's *Symposium*. Callias is an older aristocrat who is pursuing Autolycus, his younger beloved. The sympotic setting provides a context where homosocial activity ostensibly performs a pedagogical function.¹³ Lycon evidently allows his son to join the gathering because it will allow Autolycus to learn about how to behave in distinguished company. The relationship between Callias and Autolycus has not yet been physically consummated, even though Callias might prove to be a favorable role model for Autolycus. In addition to addressing the aristocratic practice of pederasty, the uniquely elite concerns about the nature of *arête* and *techne*, and how to learn them, become the focus of the conversation at Callias' home, which is discussed at length below.¹⁴

The first statement of Xenophon's *Symposium* declares that the serious deeds of *kaloikagathoi* are notable—but their playful deeds are also worth recalling (literally those deeds done ἐν ταῖς παιδιαῖς).¹⁵ Despite this assertion, the atmosphere in the text is at times remarkably tense, given that the group of *kaloikagathoi* is inimical and because the conversation turns to the

¹² Foucault (1985: 221-225).

¹³ Griffith (2001: 40).

¹⁴ Munn (2000: 50-56) discusses the aristocratic pursuit of *arête* and its competitive use in motivating elite displays in battle and public service. Hall (2003: 26) describes how elites in the sixth century across great distances shared values including *arête* in their effort to distinguish themselves as *kaloi*. Lyric poetry of this period reflects this aristocratic self-styling, for example, see Xenophanes' Frag. 1.19-20: ἀνδρῶν δ' αἰνεῖν τοῦτον ὃς ἐσθλὰ πῶν ἀναφαίνη/ ὡς οἱ μνημοσύνη, καὶ τόνος ἀμφ' ἀρετῆς (Praise the man who when he has taken drink brings noble deeds to light./ As memory and a striving for virtue bring to him) from the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus 11.462f, translated by Leshner (1992: 10-15). See also the sympotic poems of Theognis of Megara; for more on Theognis, see Nagy and Figueira (1985); Morris (1996: 40) addresses the construction of Theognis as a complex poetic persona.

¹⁵ Johnstone (1994) focuses on aristocratic leisure activities in Xenophon's *Cynegeticus* and *Oeconomicus*, and how leisure made arduous work possible while insuring the superior status of the elite class.

contentious issues of civic participation and responsible procreation. The group of *kaloikagathoi* initially includes Callias and Autolycus. Autolycus, having just won a victory in the Pankration, is joined by his father and Niceratus. They pass Socrates, who is accompanied by a group that includes Critoboulus, Hermogenes, Antisthenes and Charmides. Callias wishes to reveal to the group of philosophers the many wise things he learned from the Sophists whom he has been paying for instruction. He says that philosophers—rather than generals, cavalry commanders or politicians—will best adorn his home (1:4). When Socrates yields to the wealthy host, his party and Callias' group combine, creating an unlikely assemblage of symposiasts.

Xenophon repeatedly highlights the contrast between serious and playful activities and individuals over the course of the night's conversation. Callias immediately tells Socrates that he would like to demonstrate that he has learned serious things, and that he is in fact worthy of seriousness (1:6). While musicians and dancers may lend an air of playfulness to the gathering, Xenophon's cast of characters is made up of enemies; for example, Lycon was one of Socrates' accusers and Charmides was one of the Thirty Tyrants. While Callias' father Hipponicus was a successful statesman, Callias was accused of being a bad son to him.¹⁶ Also, according to comic characterizations of him, Callias became a man known specifically for his sexual promiscuity.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the group continues to Callias' home in the Piraeus, the port of Athens. The port city symbolized the imperial ambitions of Athens, given that its development by Themistocles ushered in a new era of Athenian naval power.¹⁸ The Piraeus is an appropriate

¹⁶ Strauss points to the speeches of Andocides, where Callias is said to have transgressed the most basic laws of kinship by mistreating his own son and bringing shame to his father (1993: 197).

¹⁷ Gilhuly (2009: 124-125).

¹⁸ While a great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the setting of Plato's *Republic* in the Piraeus, the site has not been adequately explained as a feature of Xenophon's dialogue. Garland (1987: 14-22) also notes that the association of the Piraeus with democracy derives from the *demos'* dependence on rowers as a result of massive naval expansion and the development of the Piraeus in the 470s BCE. In Pericles' Funeral Oration the statesman describes the diversity of imports in Athens: "the greatness of our city brings it about that all the good things from

location for a symposiastic revelry since the port most likely had the best available wines, Eastern luxuries and scores of prostitutes. It was also the site where the plague reportedly began and where the Thirty were defeated, at which point the Spartans razed the city.¹⁹ Combined, these historical factors create a fitting backdrop for erotic activity and the discussion of *eros* among politicians and philosophers.

The symposium was a space in which to eat, drink and enjoy entertaining diversions, but it was also a space for political ties to be forged or maintained. The pursuit of *eros* in Athens related not only to the fulfillment of bodily desires, but also to desires related to political ambitions.²⁰ Sexual relationships were delineated between an active versus a passive party; the ideal citizen was always active and never penetrated, but the subject of his own agency. Only certain types of sexual practices were appropriate for the adult male citizen, which means that sex acts had political meaning beyond the private sphere.²¹ Additionally, while erotic passion manifested as sexual desire for another person, its implications extended to political pursuits. Civic ambition or the desire to serve the *polis* were conceived of as being driven by *eros*. In the Funeral Oration of Pericles, citizens are characterized as *erastes* of the *polis*, and erotic language is employed to describe the state's imperial ambitions.²² The civic dimensions of *eros* also related to the pursuit of success in the political arena, which drove men like Callias to hire sophistic teachers, who in turn might help individual citizens procure the love of the *demos*. It is

all over the world flow in to us, so that to us it seems just as natural to enjoy foreign goods as our own local products." (*Thuc.* 2.38, trans. R. Warner)

¹⁹ In 431 Pericles ordered the citizens from the Athenian countryside to move to the Piraeus, leading to overcrowding and probably intensifying the effects of the plague; from Thucydides: "A number of people also took up their quarters in the towers along the walls and, in fact, wherever they could find space to live in. For when they all came into the city together there was not enough room for them, though later they shared out sections of the Long Walls and most of Piraeus and settled there." (*Thuc.* 2.17) Garland (1987: 32-37) describes the successful resistance to the Thirty and oligarchic rule led by Thrasyboulus in 403 from the Piraeus.

²⁰ For more on desire in Classical Athens, see Davidson (1998).

²¹ Wohl (2002: 1-2).

²² See Wohl's "Pericles' Lovers" (2002: 30-72).

of course Alcibiades who most famously courts the affections of the people, though Aristophanes reminds us that the *demos* both loves and hates its beloved, both condemns him to exile and wants him back; this elicitation for reciprocated *eros* in a sympotic setting will be the focus of my next chapter.²³ More generally, the symposium was a space where a father might introduce his son to his political allies; if the son engaged in a pederastic relationship then he could gain the *erastes* as an ally in the future. Thus, the symposium represents a setting where both political intrigue and sexual satisfaction partake in the vocabulary of *eros*.

In sum, Xenophon's text depicts a sympotic gathering that concerns *eros*, but is comprised of political enemies, and is located in a city where erotic pleasures can be sated but where political intrigue historically led to carnage. The reader must question why Xenophon insists that the deeds of the *kaloikagathoi* here assembled are playful, when they are so clearly serious—perhaps they are even matters of life and death. It appears as though Xenophon considers the topic of *eros*—or rather, correct erotic practice—to be of the upmost importance to the Athenian *polis*, particularly at a time when the democracy seemed to be thriving and when perhaps the men in the *andron*, the *kaloikagathoi*, could have changed the fate of the Athenian state, if only they had heeded Socrates' advice about education.²⁴

²³ When Dionysos goes down to the underworld in the *Frogs*, he tells Euripides and Aeschylus: "I came down here to get a poet. Why? To help/ our city survive, so it can stage my choruses," (Arist. *Frogs* 577, trans. Arrowsmith). He says, "Alcibiades is a baby who's giving/ our state delivery-pains," and proposes the question, "what shall we do with him?" (577). Dionysos says that the state, "longs for him, it hates him, and it wants him back," (577). Euripides responds by claiming, "I hate the citizen who, by nature well endowed,/ is slow to help his city, swift to do her harm./ to himself useful, useless to the community," an answer that Dionysos calls "clever" (577). Aeschylus' counters stating, "We should not rear a lion's club within the state./ [Lions are lords. We should not have them here at all.]/ But if we rear one, we must do as it desires," which Dionysos describes as a "clear" response (578).

²⁴ Halperin makes a similar argument about the narrative structure and the significance of the dramatic date while discussing Plato's *Symposium*: "Plato's choice of historical setting and his spacing of the various conversations at temporal removes from one another create a retrospective irony: by granting the reader more knowledge about what life has in store for the interlocutors than any one of them possesses at any given moment, Plato imparts to their words a significance of which they themselves are unaware.... Their lives and loves can now be measured against their words and convictions, which lie under the posthumous judgment of history and fate." (1992: 100)

As the symposium begins, the group is silent, not engaging in discussion (1:11). In this suspended atmosphere, the guests are captivated by Autolycus, whose regal beauty is coupled with acceptable modesty. Autolycus appears to be an ideal *eromenos*, with good looks, outstanding athletic ability, and an aristocratic pedigree. Athletic competition distinguished ambitious Athenians in a community where all male citizens were entitled to an equal voice in the democratic assembly. Nevertheless, aristocrats like Callias or Autolycus naturally had more resources than the rest of the *demos* to maintain their primacy when participating in public or private competitions. Victors in the athletic arena such as Autolycus might garner at least as much esteem in private sympotic settings when friends and political allies celebrated their achievements as in the city in front of the public.²⁵

Yet this static environment of aristocratic esteem for Autolycus, exhibited when all of the symposiasts silently stare at him, does not dominate Xenophon's dialogue. The participants' gaze on the *epebe* is broken with the interruption of Philippus, the jester. This disruption breaks the spell upon the dinner guests, who then begin to partake in the games and entertainment. Robin Osborne maintains that games and competitions at symposia served to help participants project idealized identities. Hosts might strive to provide entertainment that was provocative but not offensive, while guests could attempt to rise to these challenges and demonstrate their own wit and wisdom.²⁶ The ability to navigate the challenges of decorum at the symposium might be understood as an essential part of the education of a young man before his indoctrination into his father's political circle.

Education and the topic of the ability to teach virtue become an early focal point of the night's discussion in the *Symposium*. After the initial performances of flute girl and the harpist

²⁵ Munn (2000: 51).

²⁶ Osborne (2007: 50). For more on the competitive composition of poetry in the priamel form, see Burnett (1983).

boy, Callias recommends that his guests enjoy some perfumes. Socrates objects to this suggestion; he states that perfumes are not suitable for adult men, who instead should smell like the olive oil applied at the gymnasium or like noble deeds (2:4). In order to illustrate his point, Socrates quotes a passage attributed to the Archaic poet Theognis, which says that good deeds can only be taught by good men.²⁷ This passage strikes Lycon, who praises the wisdom of Socrates to his son (2:5). The philosopher in turn remarks that just as Autolycus consulted with his father about who best to learn athletics from, the young man should also consult Lycon about the teacher most qualified to teach him about virtue. At this point, an unnamed interlocutor counters Socrates, asking where Autolycus will find such a teacher of virtue. Another guest remarks that virtue cannot be taught, while still another unnamed symposiast claims that it must be learned more than anything else. Socrates responds that the group should abandon the topic of the teaching of virtue, but the questions raised by the group in this exchange continue to be of paramount importance throughout the night.

The discussion of whether virtue can be taught is related to the question of whether a son can be virtuous if his father is not. Although Socrates suggests that the symposiasts cease this discussion about virtue and education, he immediately raises the very same subject. The catalyst for Socrates' commentary is not a young man on the precipice of citizenship; instead of Autolycus, it is the dancing girl who compels Socrates' further exploration of the topic of virtue. The girl performs a routine where she masterfully dances while maneuvering a dozen hoops in the air (2:8). Socrates says that this performance demonstrates that "the feminine nature is not at all inferior to the man's, but it lacks judgment and strength" (2:9). Further, Socrates says that any

²⁷ This line is taken from Fragment 35: 'Ἐσθλῶν μὲν γὰρ ἀπ' ἐσθλὰ διδάξεαι.

man is capable of teaching a wife whatever he wishes her to know.²⁸ The girl performs a tumbling routine with knives, which prompts Socrates to remark that her feat proves that courage is teachable *even* to a woman. Although courage has been taught to the dancing girl, her teacher is the Syracusan man, who is ridiculed throughout the text as somewhat inept. Thus, both Lycon and the Syracusan appear to be incapable of teaching a skill to their charges; however, Autolycus seems virtuous despite his father's lack of virtue, just as the dancing girl is courageous even though the Syracusan is not.

The topic of the arrangement of education by Athenian fathers for their sons is further examined by a number of prominent sons who are attending the symposium. The guests all take turns asserting which τέχνη they would be most proud of because it makes others better (3:3). Their responses to this question not only create the circular structure of the conversation, but they also demonstrate the tensions in the relationships between fathers and sons. Niceratus is the first to answer; he is the son of Nicias, the Athenian statesman and general. Niceratus states that he is most proud of his ability to recite Homer, and much like Callias, he has been taught this skill by a sophist. Socrates reminds him that it is not so much recitation that is a notable skill, because even unintelligent beings can memorize Homer; rather, what is admirable is the art of interpreting the meanings in the poem. Presumably, it was Niceratus' father who arranged for his son's study of epic poetry. The role of the Athenian father was as advisor and authoritarian. Reputation was an incentive for illustrious fathers to obtain the best possible resources for their sons. According to Barry Strauss, the elite had the ability to hire nurses, attendants, teachers and specialized instructors for their sons.²⁹

²⁸ See Murnaghan (1988) for an exploration about teaching by a husband to his wife with regard to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*.

²⁹ Strauss (1993: 84-85).

Niceratus suggests that his friends are able to learn from him, claiming, “whoever... wishes to become an expert household manager, public speaker, or general, or to become like Achilles, Ajax, Nestor, or Odysseus, let him pay court to me,” adding, “for I understand all these things” (4:6). Thus, it is not his father, the general who was responsible for the eponymous Peace of Nicias in the same year during which the dialogue is set, who taught Niceratus about how to be a general; Niceratus learned generalship from Homeric verses, specifically those explained by his well-paid teachers Stesimbrotus and Anaximander (3:6). Of course, Nicias’ own military career ended in disaster after his tremendous losses in the Sicilian Expedition, which led to his execution following the Athenian defeat in the Second Battle of Syracuse.³⁰ Once again, Xenophon makes his reader cringe at the incongruity between the literary symposiast’s arrogant claim to knowledge and his decidedly unfavorable historical outcome—Niceratus himself was killed by the Thirty.

While Niceratus comments that he is most proud of his ability to recite Homer, Critoboulus claims that he can make men better with his beauty (3:7). Critoboulus imagines that anyone who sees him must feel the same way that he feels about Cleinias, his attractive young peer. Critoboulus never fully explains how his beauty benefits his friends; instead, his entire speech describes his emotional state as a result of his desire for Cleinias. He claims that his passion causes him sleepless nights (4:12), that his love makes him like a slave (4:14), and that his beloved’s image is burned into his mind so much so that he could sculpt it if he were an artist (4:21). These conditions surely might describe any comedic unrequited lover in comedy, but they

³⁰ Thucydides describes circumstances of his capture and execution: “So [the Corinthians] persuaded their allies to agree and put him to death. For these reasons or reasons very like them he was killed, a man who, of all the Hellenes in my time, least deserved to come to so miserable an end, since the whole of his life had been devoted to the study of the practice of virtue.”

closely echo details from the speech made by Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium*.³¹ This may not be entirely coincidental, given that Cleinias is Alcibiades' brother.³²

Socrates reveals that he had actually been involved in the education of Critoboulus, after the young man's father hired him. When his father perceived that Critoboulus was passionately inflamed with desire at the sight of Cleinias, he entrusted his son to Socrates. Although Socrates claims that Critoboulus is clearly still under the spell of Cleinias, he notes that the young man is proof that "it is necessary for one who will be capable of moderation to abstain from the kisses of those in their bloom" (4:26). Critoboulus would have been just one of many young Athenian men who looked to Socrates for an education. Most famously, historically and as represented in Plato's *Symposium*, it seems that Socrates failed to lead Alcibiades down the path of philosophy—and towards any kind of moderate behavior, whether in politics, drinking or erotic activity. Later in the dialogue Socrates reveals that the homoerotic relationship between Critoboulus and Cleinias (who have in fact shared a kiss) must be refigured in order to fit into the paradigm of proper male citizenship that he suggests. Once again, homoerotic relationships are problematic, and described in terms of slavery and tyranny. This vocabulary closely echoes the speech made by Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium*, where the politician and student of philosophy claims that he is a slave as a result of his unreciprocated desire for Socrates.³³

The beauty contest between Socrates and his pupil Critoboulus presents an incursion of the public into the private space of Callias' *oikos*. Socrates makes a case as to why he is beautiful, using forensic terminology and philosophical elenchus to cross-examine Critoboulus

³¹ Alcibiades uses the imagery of statuary to describe Socrates, whom he calls a Silenus who can be opened up to reveal truths (Plato, *Symp.* 221d-222a).

³² Strauss (1993: 88).

³³ Alcibiades says that he is forced to act like a runaway slave to avoid Socrates (216b) and that there was never any slave under his master's power than he was under Socrates' (219e).

(5:1-8). The competition recalls not only a court of law but also the *euandria*, a beauty contest in the Panathenaic games.³⁴ Meanwhile, the Syracusan, angry that the men are ignoring his performers, asks Socrates if he is the man who is called the “Thinker” and who measures flea feet (6:6-8). These are clearly references to the caricature of Socrates, as head of the Thinkery and as a natural philosopher, in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. Though performed in 423 BCE, this depiction of Socrates in the *Clouds* clearly ingrained itself into the collective Athenian consciousness, as both Plato and Xenophon repeatedly address it. Thus, in these tense exchanges, the lexical vocabulary of legal practice, civic competition, and popular comedy all mark incursions of civic practice into the private space of the sympotic setting. There is a connection between Socrates as public figure, who is subject to having the *demos* judge his skills, and how that relates to his role in as a teacher of young Athenians.

In Xenophon’s text, the speech of Socrates presents an argument about how to lead a productive life through a new understanding of homosocial relationships. Socrates’ speech elucidates the intersection between correct erotic practice and the education of young Athenian men. Before Socrates elaborates, Antisthenes takes on the Alcibiadean role as spurned lover and student, lamenting the lack of return for his affections from Socrates and making violent threats to the philosopher (8:4-6). Socrates elicits love from his followers, but by the end of his speech it appears as though he seeks to convert that love into a productive desire to serve the community through public service. Socrates praises Callias for his love of Autolycus, stating: “that you, Callias, love Autolycus the whole city knows, as do, I think, many foreigners” (8:7). He continues by commending Callias for loving an individual who is not soft or effeminate, but strong, courageous and moderate (8:8). Here, Socratic *eros* is two-fold: there is both a Heavenly

³⁴ Crowther (1985: 288).

Eros and a Vulgar Eros, a claim that recalls Pausanias' *encomium* in Plato's *Symposium*.³⁵ This distinction is bound up in the mythology surrounding the two distinct origins of Aphrodite: the chaste Heavenly Eros rises from the ocean after Ouranos ejaculates, while the lowly Vulgar Eros originates from the union between Zeus and Dione.³⁶ The Heavenly Eros, heir to a legacy of asexual procreation and conception without feminine intervention or participation, is associated with homosexuality; correspondingly, Vulgar Eros is associated with heterosexual intercourse.³⁷

Within this binary, those inveigled by Vulgar Eros are subject to love for the body, while those affected by Heavenly Eros cultivate a love of the soul, of friendship, and of noble deeds. It follows that a young man may still pursue relationships with an older man in order to facilitate his education; however, the terms of this discussion revolve around the cultivation of the soul: if the *eromenos*' soul approaches greater prudence, then it becomes worthier of love as a consequence of its being guided by an older mentor. However, the formulation of this type of relationship may be problematic insofar as it is potentially not procreative and because the relationship between the *erastes* and the *eromenos* should not be consummated physically (8:14). Yet, Socrates implies that the beloved does have agency; a young man can return love if he forms an attachment to something beyond simply the body of the other man (8:19). Nevertheless, the *eromenos* in this reconfiguration will never be sexually gratified (8:21).

Socrates' ultimate conclusion is that the asexual relationship between the *eromenos* and the *erastes* instead should be directed towards the *polis* through civic participation. The elite pederastic relationship aims towards procreation through the medium of civic good, as the

³⁵ See Plato's *Symposium*, 180c-185c for the speech of Pausanias.

³⁶ Skinner (2005: 117).

³⁷ Ever since Foucault's *La Volenté de Savoir*, many scholars have adopted a constructionist approach to the understanding of Greek sexuality. The social construct of sexuality implies that distinctions were made between active and passive acts and individuals rather than "homosexual" and "heterosexual", which are terms that developed in the last two or three centuries. For a more recent discussion, see Parker (1997).

distinctions between private and public space and education become less clear. According to Mark Griffith, in the Archaic period, there was a constant tension between public and private models of civic education. He claims that, “On the one hand, a continuing need was felt among the elite to define, maintain, and justify the distinction of particular individuals, families, and groups, while on the other, the pressure for civic solidarity, and a sense of shared social responsibilities, was promoted at all levels.”³⁸ Yet, the private education of *kaloikagathoi* might come to be suspicious in the fifth century, if aristocrats were perceived of as conspiring against the government or simply as relying upon ancient familial networks to garner political support.³⁹ Further, these networks might congregate, for example, at symposia. These class tensions may have contributed to the impetus that Xenophon had in choosing a symposium as the backdrop against which Socrates made such a civic-minded proposal.

Returning to the text, after Socrates’ speech, Callias is impressed enough to ask a favor of the philosopher. Referencing Socrates’ earlier assertion that his greatest skill was being a procurer, Callias says, “Surely, then, Socrates, you’ll act as a pimp for me in regard to the city so that I may tend to its affairs and always be pleasing to it?” (9:42). Xenophon makes it clear that this request is made while Callias watches Autolycus, who in turn watches Callias. Despite his alleged intention to partake in some sort of civic practice, Callias’ gaze seems to indicate that he is playing the part of the lustful *erastes*, even as the boy’s father looks on. Curiously, Autolycus and Lycon get up and go outside for a walk, thus missing the final performance, although Lycon’s concluding remark is that Socrates is a noble and good man (9:1).

The final performance merges political symbolism with emotion in a highly dramatic spectacle. This concluding scene depicts a final performance by the dancing girl and boy. The

³⁸ Griffith (2001: 26).

³⁹ Griffith (2001: 57).

Syracusan announces that the symposiasts will see a performance of Ariadne and Dionysus (9:2). Ariadne is dressed like a bride and excitedly watches as Dionysus enters to a Bacchic rhythm. Then, Dionysus sits on her lap and kisses her, which elicits applause from the audience. At this point, “when the onlookers saw that Dionysus really was noble and that Ariadne was in her bloom, and that the two were not playing at kissing one another but were genuinely kissing with their mouths, all were carried away” (9:5). The actors whisper oaths to one another, as they finally appeared to have the opportunity to do what they had long been desiring to do. The audience is overwhelmed and deeply moved by the performance; finally, the unmarried members of the audience swear that they will get wives and those with wives leave immediately to go home to them (9:7).

Ultimately, it is not the homosexual *eros*, with its associations to the aristocratic practice of pederasty, which is venerated at the end of Xenophon’s *Symposium*. Instead, it is a heterosexual love, as displayed to the audience by the actors playing Dionysus and Ariadne. Internally, there is momentum in the narrative structure; the climax is not solely the speech of Socrates, but his mediation on civic participation in tandem with the consummation scene. The dialogue culminates at the point when the dramatic scene within the “social performance” ceases to be “performative,” because the emotional young couple is *really* kissing one another.⁴⁰ Yet, it is intriguing that Autolycus, whose education seems to be at stake throughout the dialogue, misses out on this obviously significant performance.

⁴⁰ Dietler (2010: 71) describes how dramatic expressions in rituals can instruct their audiences when emotional experiences become heightened for viewers: “The emotional power of rituals also stems from certain theatrical media and sensory mechanisms commonly employed (in various combinations) in performance that tend to frame ritual as symbolically pregnant action marked off from other kinds of daily practice, thus focusing people’s attention and rendering them receptive to episodes of heightened emotional experience. These devices include such things as music, dancing, rhythmic verse, role acting, evocative staging and costumes, and intoxication. Dramaturgical techniques such as the creation of images through contrast and the dialectical resolution of contradictions merge emotional catharsis with important pedagogical functions.”

This structure seems to share similarities with the narrative in Plato's *Symposium*. Socrates' speech in Plato's dialogue seems to keep the audience enthralled, and each earlier speech contributes to it; yet, as I argue in the next chapter, the speech of Alcibiades is necessary to flush something out—in this case, that disembodied Socratic erotic pursuit leaves something to be desired, namely, that the unique desire for an individual contributes an important kind of understanding to the experience of love. In Xenophon's *Symposium*, the speech of Socrates at first appears as though it is the climax of the dialogue, because it so obviously stands out as the most complex and carefully considered proposition. However, his speech must be understood in terms of what follows; Socrates' advice about civic participation by elite men is best understood when considered in the context of a performance that then confirms heterosexuality as procreative and absolutely necessary for the future health and vitality of the *demos*, and the depiction of Socrates as a supporter of that vision.

In her discussion of the role of dancing in philosophical education, Victoria Wohl explains the importance of *mousike* in Plato's *Laws*; she claims that dancing and performance are not inherently harmful, and rather, they are a useful feature in *paideia*:

In that form, [*mousike*] becomes a vital tool of education. Education is here conceived conservatively as a project of social reproduction: the point is to make the young like the old, to make them share the same pleasures and displeasures (659d1-e1). This educational mimesis is produced through performative mimesis. It is not enough, then, for a performance to be pleasurable (ἡδύ); it must also be ὀρθόν and ἀληθές, accurate and true (667e10-68b7). A good performance is the good imitation of the action and characters of good men; the best performance is not that which give the most pleasure, but 'that which resembles the imitation of the good' (ἐκείνην τὴν ἔχουσαν τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῷ τοῦ καλοῦ μιμήματι, 668b1-2).⁴¹

Education becomes mimetic in the sympotic setting, where father teaches son embodied customs and rituals of consumption. Here, Autolycus is essentially mute until he states that he is proud of

⁴¹ Wohl (2004: 340).

his father. Strauss claims that this is the case because Autolycus is a *meirakion*, and therefore unable to participate fully in the sympotic conversation.⁴² His presence is also a performance as he acts out the complicated role of *eromenos* in a pederastic relationship; he must somehow appear disinterested in Callias, especially under his father's watchful gaze. Simultaneously, he must become a subject able to increase his own moral capacity, as the flourishing of *arête* is the justification for pederasty to begin with.

In Socrates' new paradigm, the homosocial order between philosopher, student and city is recalibrated in such a way that the philosopher and student are both active pursuers of civic good. The philosopher acts as procurer and guide to the student, who in turn procreates in the medium of civic good. Once again, as in Plato's *Symposium*, the problem of passivity of Athenian *eromenoi* becomes a central theme; Socrates must make erotic pursuits active, and both the *eromenos* and *erastes* must be indomitable. The *polis* gains subjectivity in this new Socratic scheme, as it acts as beloved of elite displays of civic participation, by appropriating elite cultural institutions such as symposia and pederasty. This new elite practice is part of an asexual scheme where heterosexuality, displayed during the performance of Dionysus and Ariadne, is glorified as a means of procreation that ultimately is not threatening to the stability of the *polis*. Unlike in Plato's *Symposium*, where the pursuit of *eros* necessitates physical promiscuity, the *erastes* in Xenophon's text are only sexually gratified with their wives in their private *oikos*; though Callias and Autolycus exchange passionate glances, their affections are circumscribed by a new custom and model for elite male erotic behavior.

As I argued in the previous chapter when discussing Aristophanes' *Wasps*, tensions between fathers and sons during the early years of the Peloponnesian War resulted from the

⁴² Strauss (1993: 75).

inability of fathers to educate their unwieldy sons, which is clearly an issue in Xenophon's *Symposium* as well. As Barry Strauss notes, the fathers who were the most successful statesmen in the decade of the 420s seem to have failed in their duties to adequately prepare their sons.⁴³ Of course, the greatest letdown as a father figure may have been found in Athens' most prominent statesman, Pericles; both Pericles' own son and his ward proved to be exceptional disappointments.⁴⁴ Yet according to Thucydides, Alcibiades seemed to have understood the importance of the role of the elite in the civic sphere. In response to Nicias' charges against him during the debate about the Sicilian Expedition, Alcibiades justifies his entries to the Olympic games and his sponsorship of theatrical choruses:

It is customary for such things to bring honor, and the fact that they are done at all must also give an impression of power. Again, though it is quite natural for my fellow citizens to envy me for the magnificence with which I have done things in Athens, such as providing choruses and so on, yet to the outside world this also is evidence of our strength. Indeed, this is a very useful kind of folly, when a man spends his own money not only to benefit himself but his city as well. And it is perfectly fair for a man who has a high opinion of himself not to be put on a level with everyone else; certainly when one is badly off one does not find people coming to shore in one's misfortunes. (Thuc. 6.16 trans. R. Warner)

According to this politician and student of Socrates, competition among elites was absolutely justifiable and in no way ostentatious when it was directed towards benefiting the public. Despite Xenophon's best apology on behalf of Socrates, the group portrayed in his *Symposium* and their associates were not *erastai* of correct democratic practice—as many of them historically joined oligarchic factions. Somewhere along the way, the desires of these *kaloikagathoi* became perverse, as they failed to live up to the legacy of their fathers. In the next chapter, I will continue to explore the sympotic setting and its role as a backdrop for a discussion about *eros*

⁴³ Strauss (1993: 141-148).

⁴⁴ For more on the *erastes* in Periclean Athens, particularly as figured during his Funeral Oration, see Wohl (2002: 30-62).

and education. The *Symposium* of Plato, like that of Xenophon, offers an apology of sorts for Socrates; however, while the civic presence never seems to leave Xenophon's text, Plato's *Symposium* only brings the public gaze to the private sphere in the final moments of his dialogue.

IV. Discordant *Eros* and the *Symposium* of Plato

In Plato's *Symposium*, the discussion during the sympotic gathering generally seems loftier than the one depicted in Xenophon's text. Plato's dialogue was probably written a few years before that of Xenophon, though the dramatic date is about five years later.¹ The participants in the Platonic text each take turns giving an *encomium* to *Eros*, in long and clearly articulated speeches. The group of symposiasts initially seems amicable, although Aristophanes is in attendance, and Plato calls attention to the comic poet's defamatory depiction of Socrates in the *Clouds*. Again, the theme of the tension between *euphrosyne* and the common quest for pleasure on the one hand, and competition and the pursuit of individual passions on the other hand, is persistent as the symposiasts do their best to navigate this tense environment.

The conversation focuses on the transference of knowledge, where shared sympotic experience is the backdrop against which wisdom is gained.² Plato depicts the symposium as a space where the various perspectives of the participants articulate diverse ideological, political, and textual tensions.³ Yet the dialogue terminates when the drinking group exits the *andron* and relocates beyond the space of controlled discourse. Thus, there is the possibility that any resolutions reached during the sympotic conversation correspondingly dissolve once the group disbands. This phenomenon of persistent quasi-resolutions reflects broader tensions in the Athenian *polis*.⁴ While the symposium is an appropriate setting for *posing* the loftiest claims

¹ See Dover (1965) for a discussion of the complications surrounding the dating of the text.

² Schmitt-Pantel (1992: 70): "Le repas est aussi une pièce importante de la *paideia*, ce mécanisme de transmission des valeurs civiques, par sa pratique qui est à l'image de la cité et par les discours à fonction exemplaire, pour les adultes comme pour les jeunes, qui y sont tenus."

³ Although the number of participants—and thus the number of perspectives represented—at a fifth century Greek symposium was relatively restricted; see Bergquist (1990: 46-55) for a discussion of the limitations that the size of a *kline* within an *andron* imposed on the size of the sympotic group.

⁴ Murray (1990: 149-161) discusses the complicated relationship between the democratic *polis* and the symposium.

about philosophical or ideological truths, it ultimately remains for the reader to interpret these claims.

At the sympotic gathering, Plato articulates many different theories of erotic pursuit. But philosophical truths are only revealed to the student of philosophy who actively pursues the course articulated by Diotima.⁵ By the end of the *Symposium*, even Socrates—arguably the embodiment of philosophical pursuit itself—must labor through the rigors required for the life of philosophy.⁶ In his speech, Socrates reveals that Diotima described the Form of the Beautiful to him; however, once he was initiated into the Mysteries of *Eros*, the philosopher did not go forth and lead a static life of solitary contemplation.⁷ The pursuit of knowledge, even when one comes closer to understanding the nature of the world, requires action. Likewise, the reader of a sympotic text does not immediately access straightforward or definitive resolutions. The sympotic dialogue grants that the opinions of its literary participants, who both competitively try to surpass one another and yet amiably share in the pleasures of wine and entertainment, will be internalized by the reader of the dialogue.⁸ The reader who attempts to follow Diotima's course must then embody those beliefs (*physically*—as this philosophical process begins in the locus of one lover's body and then many lovers' bodies) before he may make a contribution to the

⁵ It is arguably in his *Symposium* that Plato most succinctly describes his Theory of the Forms and the experience of an individual reaching recognition of a true form (211b-212a).

⁶ As the last man standing, Socrates gets up from the couch and goes about his normal routine, spending the next day as he would any other and presumably going around the city and asking people questions. I have relied upon Robin Waterfield's translation of Plato's *Symposium* (1994).

⁷ Although Socrates' status as initiand is up for debate, as Diotima tells him: ““Now it's not impossible, Socrates, that you too could be initiated into the ways of love I've spoken of so far. But I don't know whether you're ready for the final grade of Watcher, which is where even the mysteries I've spoken of lead if you go about them properly.”” (209e-210a)

⁸ Burnett (1983: 10) describes how Archaic poets drafted songs as “a recognised form of rivalry” in the competitive atmosphere of the symposium, where “wisdom—popular or esoteric, practical or speculative—was what the singer tried to impose.”

conversation; the process of learning as articulated by Socrates, and how that may be understood even further, is the focus of my discussion in what follows.⁹

Critics of Plato's *Symposium* often assume that the author makes definitive claims about the philosophical life and "correct" erotic pursuit. However, no individual speaker's *encomium*—nor any combination of the speakers' *encomia* in their entirety—actually endorses a "truth" that we might hold to be one of Plato's beliefs. David Halperin compellingly reframes this argument by stating that, "the way to devise a new unified or synthetic reading of the *Symposium*... is not to attempt to reconcile its various internal contradictions but rather to transcend them by moving to a higher level of interpretation—to what might be called either a meta-philosophical or metadramatic level of interpretation."¹⁰ Halperin emphasizes a textual strategy that stresses eroticism in the text's narrative structure in relation to the desirous reader who longs to understand the "continual cycles of comprehension and incomprehension, constantly shifting proportions of blindness and insight" in the dialogue.¹¹ I propose a textual strategy that relies not on a fetishization of dialogue as an erotic practice, but one that instead attempts to reach a metadramatic understanding of the text within its highly stylized and constructed sympotic setting.¹² Plato draws attention to the literary symposium as markedly constructed and stylized by employing a number of strategies, including the use of elements of over-determination, a sense

⁹ Blondell (2002: 74) notes that, "the more abstract Sokrates becomes in his thinking, the more Plato seems to need to show this thinking as grounded in embodiment."

¹⁰ Halperin (1992: 119).

¹¹ Halperin (1992: 120).

¹² Halperin's "Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity" (1992: 93-129) raises a number of compelling suggestions about how to understand the complex narrative structure of the dialogue; however, I contend that his desire to reach a metadramatic interpretation of the dialogue relies on a fetishization of philosophical dialogue. This desire is apparent in statements such as: "Good narratives and cunning texts are like beautiful bodies, according to Plato: they excite desire and provide certain kinds of temporary, local gratification, without however yielding up the secret of their fascination. Rather, they renew desire even as they gratify it because the quality in them that awakens desire in the first place tends to recede as one approaches it, transcending as it does the particulars that instantiate it." Halperin (1992: 123).

of instability of dramatic events, and the use of deliberate textual inconsistencies, which overall create a tension between truth and unreal.

So how might an understanding of the elements of the sympotic setting help to create an integrated reading of Plato's *Symposium*? To begin, Plato utilizes the dramatic technique of over-determination; in the early scene of the dialogue when the symposiasts are determining the guidelines for their symposium, one by one all of the conditions of the party that are collectively agreed upon are actually either fulfilled or overturned by the arrival of Alcibiades. At first, Agathon suggests to the group that they "make Dionysus our arbiter" (175e); this declaration prefigures the arrival of Alcibiades, with his chaplet of ivy and violets and ribbons (212e), because he ultimately crowns Agathon and Socrates (213b-e). Curiously, Aristodemus is the only symposiast who is named but who does not make a speech; yet, this is another void that Alcibiades fills, which somehow seems appropriate because he too is a devout follower of Socrates and an uninvited guest. Everything that is laid out by the symposiasts in the beginning of the night that is not fulfilled by Alcibiades' arrival is instead overturned by his interruption. For example, the order of the speeches changes, as do the symposiasts' positions on the couches when Alcibiades sits down in between Socrates and Agathon. Also, the decision not to make the party a drunken one is subverted when Alcibiades shows up drunk and the other symposiasts lose their preference for moderation and begin to drink more wine. Finally, the decision that all of the symposiasts will make *encomia* to *Eros* is negated because Alcibiades decides instead that he will contribute a speech about Socrates.

Other characteristics of Plato's symposium are the instability of dramatic events and the phenomenon of textual inconsistencies within the narrative. Many narrative details position the reader in a grey area between realism (where the reader has the sense that he has access to an

historical event) and aestheticism (where the text seems to point to itself as a purely literary construction), which creates an instability that permeates the entire dialogue.¹³ Firstly, this tension surrounds the basic detail of the dramatic date, both in terms of when Apollodorus and the Companion initially are speaking to one another, and when Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades were at a party where they gave speeches about *Eros* (172b). It is unclear when Apollodorus is speaking to the unnamed Companion—or, when the *actual* dialogue takes place. In addition, Apollodorus reports that Glaucon bizarrely mistakes when the symposium at Agathon’s house took place by a number of years (172a-173b). At the same time, the conversation nestled within the primary conversation (that is, the dinner party at Agathon’s house) explicitly is reported as occurring after Agathon’s first victory, “on the day after he and the cast had performed the victory rites,” which distinguished the dramatic date in 416 BCE (173e).¹⁴

This tension between “real” and “constructed” is also apparent regarding the personage of Diotima. She is “real” in that Socrates describes her as an historical individual with whom he conversed as a young man: she “came from Mantinea,” she “was an expert in love,” and she “delayed the onset of the [plague] for ten years” (201d). Yet Plato draws attention to the figure of the priestess as a construction by employing Aristophanes to make an objection to her speech

¹³ Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan *Plato’s Dialectic at Play* (2004) attempts to answer the question of how to reconcile Plato’s views in his *Symposium* (with its many “nonphilosophical” narrative details) with those in the *Republic*.

¹⁴ Nussbaum (1986: 167-171) proposes an interesting solution to the ambiguity of the dramatic date: “Suppose it is 404, shortly before the assassination [of Alcibiades], at the height of this frenzy over Alcibiades.... Now suppose that a rumor circulates, to the effect that there has been a party, attended by Socrates and Alcibiades, where speeches were made about love. A political man (ignorant of the cultural facts that date this story) would immediately wonder whether the spurned leader had finally agreed to return to Athens, drawn, perhaps, by his famous love for Socrates.... We have, it appears, a conversation set very shortly before the murder of Alcibiades, between a neutral or sympathetic person and one who may be linked with his murderers.” Nussbaum provocatively suggests that the other date of 416 BCE is meant to recall the alleged mutilation of the Hermes by Alcibiades.

(212c).¹⁵ Aristophanes' interruption implies that Socrates was not merely reporting a conversation that he engaged in with an historical figure; rather, it indicates that Socrates is making a speech that refutes preceding *encomia* from the very same night, meaning that the character of Diotima is a rhetorical device.

Another feature in the text that curiously oscillates between what seems “real” and what is obviously a construction is the element of space within the dialogue. Before Phaedrus' speech, spatial context is the subject of many remarks. The reader moves with Aristodemus in this elaborate narrative: on the road where he first meets Socrates, past Agathon's neighbors' homes, to the front door of Agathon's home, into his dining room, and finally onto one of the couches (174a-174e).¹⁶ Repeatedly, attention is drawn to the arrangement of those couches, particularly when Socrates complains that his position will require him to give the final *encomium* (178e). After Socrates' speech, the reader is once again alerted to the existence of the party within the material world, where particular awareness is paid to architectural layout. At this point, the narrative specifically locates the movements of Alcibiades in and around Agathon's *oikos*; Alcibiades shouts up from the courtyard, stands in the doorway of the *andron* and sits down on one couch—only to get up again before finally settling down (212d-213e).

In contrast, during the first six speeches, the spatial context of the symposium recedes amid the philosophical exchange. As the subject matter ascends from the mundane (beginning with Phaedrus' description of a pederastic *eros*) to the abstract (culminating in Socrates'

¹⁵ Specifically, Aristophanes' objection (which we never hear, because Alcibiades interrupts) appears to reference when Socrates says: “‘Now,’ she continued, ‘what of the idea one hears that people in love are looking for their other halves? What I’m suggesting, by contrast, my friend, is that love isn’t a search for a half or even a whole unless the half or the whole happens to be good.’” (205d)

¹⁶ Another interesting detail about the spatial context is provided by Eryximachus, who suggests that the flute-girl be sent out of the room and allowed to play for the women in their own quarters (176e), creating the tantalizing notion that there is potentially much more going on in Agathon's home than we have the privilege to witness. For a discussion of the significance of the exit of the flute-player, see Gilhuly (2009: 62-67).

discussion of the deeply intense experience of seeing the Form of the Beautiful) the discussion follows a trajectory that is reminiscent of Diotima's proposed *scala amoris*.¹⁷ Sense perception climaxes in pure philosophical dialectic. Somewhere along the way, the reader forgets that the dialogue is set in Agathon's dining room—let alone that the primary narrative occurs as a report that takes place on the road to Phalerum (172a). Of course, within the dramatic setting Plato characteristically calls attention to the retreat of the material world with another interruption by Aristophanes—this time with his hiccups and the subsequent disruption of the proposed order of speakers based on the configuration of the couches.¹⁸

Whereas the symposia depicted in the texts of Aristophanes and Xenophon create tension because of the conflicts between symposiasts or the contentious topics that come under discussion, Plato uses literary elements to construct a sense of unease in the dialogue. All of the elaborate textual strategies described above (the over-determination of events or their overturning; the use of both ambiguous and historical dates; the historical and literary qualities of Diotima; and the spatial context, which moves from the material world to a higher metaphysical space, and back again) create a tension within the narrative from start to finish. Plato provides concrete textual and narrative details, only to alert the reader to the transience of those details. He seems to indicate that all truths are fleeting, not only those that are apparently mundane but also those that are philosophical and of great importance. For readers, the setting is fragile and

¹⁷ Phaedrus' suggestion of a community of lovers and boyfriends (179a) strikes the reader as absurd, and his statement that the god Eros has no parents (178b) provides a point of disagreement for Diotima.

¹⁸ Emlyn-Jones (2004: 394-395) proposes that the interruption somehow belittles comedy, personified by Aristophanes, to the advantage of tragedy, personified by Agathon. See below for a discussion of the dialogue as "fight" over the legacy of tragedy as claimant over wisdom. Nussbaum (1986: 174) would likely take issue with Emlyn-Jones' claim; she finds Aristophanes' speech to make a substantial (though incomplete) contribution to the discourse with its proposal of *eros* directed to a unique individual, stating: "...Aristophanes' myth vividly dramatizes the sheer contingency of love, and our vulnerability to contingency through love. The very need that gives rise to erotic pursuit is an unnatural, contingent lack—at least it is seen as such from the point of view of the ambitions of human reason."

changeable; and when we are at long last lifted by Socrates and close to knowing the truth, we are immediately hurled back down to earth by an outsider banging on the door. Moreover, philosophical truth is also transient for the individual who pursues Diotima's doctrine because it turns out to be intangible to everyone except for Socrates; however, to understand the instability of truth in Plato's *Symposium*, the speeches made by Socrates and Alcibiades must be examined in closer detail, as they both make claims about the true nature of *eros*.

As Socrates begins speaking about the mysterious woman who taught him what he knows about *eros*, this character seems like a curious addition to a conversation among male peers. Although Socrates goes to great lengths to provide historical details about Diotima, she is clearly a didactic tool—a mouthpiece for the philosopher. By making Diotima a woman, Plato frees Socrates' speech from the complications of male pederastic *eros*, as it creates a reciprocal rather than a hierarchical paradigm between men in their pursuit of beauty.¹⁹ David Halperin explains Diotima's role as a marker of the feminine, noting that, "Plato's model of successful erotic desire effectively incorporates, and allocates to men, the positive dimension of each of [the] two Greek stereotypes of women, producing a new and distinctive paradigm that combines erotic responsiveness with (pro)creative aspiration."²⁰ Although a valuable insight, this suggestion implies that Diotima's speech is a mouthpiece for *Plato's* theory about *eros*; Halperin fails to differentiate between the theory described by Socrates and any beliefs that we might attribute to Plato.

Nevertheless, Diotima does employ the language of pregnancy and procreation, which has important implications for her theory about beauty. Diotima claims that the purpose of *eros* is "physical and mental procreation in an attractive medium," (206b) and that its aim is "the

¹⁹ Halperin (1990: 257-308) and Gilhuly (2009: 58-97).

²⁰ Halperin (1990: 265).

permanent possession of goodness for oneself,” and because man desires immortality, *eros* must also aim for immortality (207a). Diotima tells Socrates that while those who are physically pregnant have children, “those who are *mentally* pregnant... they’re filled with the offspring you might expect a mind to bear and produce,” and their offspring is virtue and wisdom (209a). Diotima proposes a path for a young man, who is guided by an older male and instructed about how, “to love just one person’s body and to give birth in that medium to beautiful reasoning” (210b). From this point, the young man learns to love all bodies, before he realizes that physical beauty is “ridiculous and petty,” and so he learns to love mental beauty in others. Then, he will come to love the beauty in people’s activities, then the beauty in their ideas, until after much work, the young man “faces instead the vast sea of beauty, and in gazing upon it his boundless love of knowledge becomes the medium in which he gives birth to plenty of beautiful, expansive reasoning and thinking, until he gains enough energy and bulk there to catch sight of a unique kind of knowledge whose natural object is the kind of beauty I will now describe” (210d). The lover will see how beautiful men, beautiful activities, and beautiful ideas all partake in this constant and eternal Form of beauty. Diotima’s final description of the individual confronting the Beautiful is arguably the most startling excerpt from the dialogue; in commanding rhetoric she states:

‘What else could make life worth living, my dear Socrates,’ the woman from Mantinea said, ‘than seeing true beauty? If you ever do catch sight of it, gold and clothing and good-looking boys and youths will pale into insignificance beside it. At the moment, however, you get so excited by seeing an attractive boy that you want to keep him in your sight and by your side for ever, and you’d be ready—you’re far from being the only one, of course—to go without food and drink, if that were possible, and to try to survive only on the sight and presence of your beloved. How do you think someone would react, then, to the sight of beauty itself, in its perfect, immaculate purity—not beauty tainted by human flesh and coloring and all that mortal rubbish, but absolute beauty, divine and constant? Do you think someone with his gaze fixed there has a miserable life? Is that what you think about someone who uses the appropriate faculty to see beauty and enjoy its

presence? I mean, don't you appreciate that there's no other medium in which someone who uses the appropriate faculty to see beauty can give birth to true goodness instead of phantom goodness, because it is truth rather than illusion whose company he is in? And don't you realize that the gods smile on a person who bears and nurtures true goodness and that, to the extent that any human being does, it is he who has the potential for immortality?' (211c-212a).

Thus, for Diotima's students, the process of erotic pursuit from the love of one person to the study of the Form of the Beautiful is not linear. Most likely, those who continue on this path will regress or get stuck in one point in their ascent; for the devoted student, the process of attaining knowledge is ongoing—and yet constantly in flux. Diotima admits that, “no one's mental characteristics, traits, beliefs, delights, troubles, or fears ever remain the same: they come and go... our knowledge comes and goes as well: we gain some pieces of information and lose others. The implication of this is not just that we don't remain the same for ever as far as our knowledge is concerned either, but that exactly the same things happens to every single item of information” (207e-208a). Likewise, just as even most basic factual information within the text seems to vanish, the end of Diotima's ladder appears beyond almost anyone's grasp, given how difficult it is to attain knowledge—let alone to keep it. And in addition, the philosophical “truth” described by Diotima must be contextualized within a world that is not static, sterile or immune from the complications of, for example, emotional entanglements. At the point of the dialogue where the language is most obscure—and arguably the most philosophical—Diotima propounds a philosophical doctrine that encourages and even relies upon bodily pursuit in its early stages—the point at which most students get stuck or distracted. This appears to be an unsettling contradiction, although not if one grants that the sympotic setting is the venue best suited to exploring this and other tensions.

At the symposium, the potential for chaos or the devolution of discourse looms (even in terms of *physical* violence, as there is always the potential for a *komos* once the sympotic group

disbands), but on this night the course of the dialogue is most dramatically disturbed by the addition of one final speaker.²¹ When Alcibiades arrives, drunk and supported on the arm of a flute girl, he signals the material incursion on the philosophical world. It is at this arrival that the results of Socrates' philosophical pursuit are most dramatically felt: Alcibiades promises that he will tell the truth, as long as Socrates will let him.²² It is a truth about how the student of philosophy can fail in his pursuit of the Beautiful. The reader will judge not only the merits of Alcibiades' arguments, but also the actions of the literary personage against the context of the historical life of the man portrayed (214e).²³ One after the other, Plato provides two vastly different philosophies of erotic pursuit: the seemingly inaccessible Socratic path and Alcibiades' tragic example of passionate love for another individual wherein possession of that beloved is the end—not the ultimate realization of some obscured Form.

Essentially, Alcibiades' tale describes how he came to be what he thought was the boyfriend of Socrates, and how the philosopher rebuffed him. Alcibiades, having been “struck and bitten by philosophy” would follow Socrates around, and at this point Alcibiades planned to

²¹ Upon the entry of Alcibiades, Socrates' speech moves from describing a philosophical conversation with an otherworldly or abstract priestess, to the language of mock-violence about his boyfriend: “Ever since the start of our affair, I've never been able to look at or talk to anyone attractive without him getting so jealous and resentful that he goes crazy and calls me names and comes close to beating me up... if he starts to get violent, please protect me from him, because he gets insanely attached to his lovers, and it terrifies me.” (213c-d).

²² Nussbaum (1986: 184-185) eloquently describes the arrival of Alcibiades as such: “The faculties that see and hear and respond to Alcibiades will be the feelings and sense-perceptions of the body, both vulnerable and inconstant. From the rarified contemplative world of the self-sufficient philosopher we are suddenly, with an abrupt jolt, returned to the world we inhabit and invited to see this vision, too, as a dawning and revelation, We are then moved to wonder whether there is a kind of understanding that is itself vulnerable and addressed to vulnerable objects—and, if there is, whether the ascent comprehends it, transcends it, or simply passes it by.”

²³ Thucydides of course provides the most reliable account for historical information concerning Alcibiades in Books V and VI of his *Peloponnesian War*. Additionally, although Plutarch must be approached with scholarly vigilance, the details that he provides about Alcibiades are too tantalizing to ignore: “Nevertheless, it was actually by pandering to his ambitious longing for recognition that his corrupters set him prematurely on the road of high endeavour; they convinced him that as soon as he took up politics, he would not merely eclipse all the other military commanders and popular leaders, but would gain more power and prestige among the Greeks than even Pericles enjoyed. Just as iron, then, is softened in the fire, but is hardened again by cold and reconstitutes its own compact nature, so time and again Socrates took him back in a state of complete promiscuity and presumptuousness, and by force of argument would pull him together and teach him humility and restraint, by showing him how great his flaws were and how far he was from virtue.” (Plut. *Life of Alcibiades* 6, trans. R. Waterfield).

consummate their relationship by keeping Socrates at his home late one night (218a). But Socrates was not interested in a physical relationship, and according to Alcibiades, Socrates accused him of trying to make a “bronze for gold trade” (218e). Alcibiades thinks that he can trade his beauty for Socrates’ truths, but the philosopher mocks him, saying that he actually has nothing to offer the young politician. This Platonic Socrates, unlike that of Aristophanes in the *Clouds*, is not a sophist who will sell his knowledge for the highest price. Of course, Alcibiades’ trade was bound to fail, as foreshadowed in the beginning of the night’s discussion, when Socrates tells Agathon that wisdom cannot be transferred by matter—truth cannot flow from one person to another through physical contact (175d-e).

Alcibiades does not believe that Socrates really does not know anything; the politician still sees the philosopher as inaccessible when he is giving his speech before the symposiasts:

This point is, you see, that I forgot to mention at the beginning that his conversations too are just like those Sileni you can open up. The first time a person lets himself listen to one of Socrates’ arguments, it sounds really ridiculous. Trivial-sounding words and phrases form his arguments’ outer coating, the brutal Satyr’s skin. He talks of pack-asses, metal-workers, shoe-makers, tanners; he seems to go on and on using the same arguments to make the same points, with the result that ignoramuses and fools are bound to find his arguments ridiculous. But if you could see them opened up, if you can get through to what’s under the surface, what you’ll find inside is that his arguments are the only ones in world which make sense. And that’s not all: under the surface, his arguments abound with divinity and effigies of goodness. They turn out to be extremely far-reaching, or rather they cover absolutely everything which needs to be taken into consideration on the path to true goodness. (221d-222a)

In light of this interpretation by the student of Socrates, one is left wondering: did Alcibiades ever have a chance at accessing Socrates’ truths? In their relationship, Alcibiades is the pursuer, acting like the *erastes*, rather than as the pursued, or the young *eromenos*.²⁴ Thus, the typical pederastic relationship undergoes an inversion. Victoria Wohl explains that this perverse desire

²⁴ For more on the *erastes-eromenos* relationship in Classical Greece, see Dover (1978).

of Alcibiades, who always wishes to remain an *eromenos*, should be understood as a conflict between what is *nomos* and *paranomos* within the context of fifth-century Athens; she reads the doctrine of Diotima as harmful to Alcibiades, who is deeply vulnerable to the lure of philosophy.²⁵ Surely, if Alcibiades' love for Socrates is placed on the ladder of Diotima, it cannot be very high up; Alcibiades is stuck at the point where he loves and sees the beauty in only one individual.²⁶ He would like for that desire to be reciprocated, but of course Socrates is unable to do so, as he has ascended to a higher point in the pursuit of beauty and knowledge.

There is another possible way of interpreting Alcibiades' contribution to the discussion, one that does not paint him as a jilted lover and student of philosophy who failed to master or understand Diotima's teachings. In contrast, Alcibiades may instead propose a distinct model of erotic relationships—one that is incompatible with what Socrates offers. When Diotima describes the “vast sea of beauty” she suggests that lovers will only see in their beloved to what extent they partake in this disembodied Form of the Beautiful (210d). Diotima proposes that love objects are somehow uniform; the lover must look for the appearance of uniform beauty after transitioning from loving one person to then finding beauty in many other bodies. This projection not only allows for, but also depends upon, promiscuity—wherein the goal of that promiscuity is to recognize qualitatively homogenous beauty. Martha Nussbaum argues that within this scheme, it follows that the lover's conception of the first unique beloved must necessarily be

²⁵ Wohl (2002: 168-169).

²⁶ Halperin (1990: 269) finds that Diotima's theory abolishes the distinctions between the active and passive partners in relationships. He claims that, “by granting the beloved access to a direct, if reflected, erotic stimulus, and thereby including him in the community of lovers, Plato clears the erotic relation between men and boys from the charge of exploitativeness and allows the beloved to grow philosophically in the contemplation of the Forms.” These erotic relationships that give birth in thought and speech are certainly less troublesome than the pederastic alternatives described by Phaedrus, for example, but it still seems that in practice the “erotic stimulus” is elusive and that relationships turn out to have the pursuers and the pursued.

diminished.²⁷ This disembodied love is in no sense reciprocated or in danger of falling prey to complicated emotional entanglements, because the medium in which this occurs is thought or speech. The object of the lover is immortal, and the motivation is completeness along with an autonomous and controllable love. Nussbaum reads this ascent to the beautiful as physically embodied by Socrates, where “inside the funny, fat, snub-nosed shell, the soul, self-absorbed, pursues its self-sufficient contemplation.”²⁸ In contrast, Alcibiades loves Socrates precisely because of the characteristics that make him unique, rather than because of how he partakes in the Form of the Beautiful. Alcibiades says that what is most astonishing about Socrates is that no other man has ever or will ever be like the philosopher (221c). Thus, Alcibiades’ speech demonstrates his role in understanding the value of learning through experience and emotion. It follows that some activities, like the experience of loving another person, can only be discovered by living them; or to put it differently, certain truths cannot be learned exclusively through Socratic contemplation.²⁹

This reading implies that given that Socrates’ and Alcibiades’ processes and visions are mutually exclusive, Alcibiades potentially offers something more valuable. It becomes essentially a matter of choice for the reader to favor one speech over the other, because this

²⁷ Nussbaum (1986: 197). Nussbaum’s theory is heir to Vlastos’s argument that Plato does not allow for the love of unique individuals; his position is summed up as such: “As a theory of the love of persons, this is its crux: What we are to love is persons in the ‘image’ of the Idea in them. We are to love the persons so far, and only insofar, as they are good and beautiful. Now since all too few human beings are masterworks of excellence, and not even the best of those we have the chance to love are wholly free of streaks of the ugly, the mean, the commonplace, the ridiculous, if our love for them is to be only for their virtue and beauty, the individual, in the uniqueness and integrity of his or her individuality, will never be the object of our love. This seems to me the cardinal flaw in Plato’s theory. It does not provide for love of whole persons, but only for love of that abstract version of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities. This is the reason why personal affection ranks so low in Plato’s *scala amoris*. When loved as congeries of valuable qualities, persons cannot compete with abstractions of universal significance, like schemes of social reform or scientific and philosophical truths, still less with the Idea of Beauty in its sublime transcendence, ‘pure, clear, unmixed, not full of human flesh and color and other mortal nonsense’ (*Smp.* 211E1-3). The high climactic moment of fulfilment—the peak achievement for which all lesser loves are to be ‘used as steps’—is the one farthest removed from affection for concrete human beings.” (1973: 31-32)

²⁸ Nussbaum (1986: 183).

²⁹ Nussbaum (1986: 186).

reading of the *Symposium* does not allow for integration between the philosophy and methodology of Socrates and the experiences that might be learned from Alcibiades' interpretation. There is certainly a tension between the different ways that the two men consider truth; Alcibiades' *eros* is dominating, while Socrates' *eros* is abstract. Alcibiades casts himself as a slave, claiming that Socrates made him realize that his life was slavish (215e), that he is forced to act like a runaway slave to avoid Socrates (216b) and that there was never any slave more under his master's power than he was under Socrates' (219e). It seems that a politician such as Alcibiades can only conceive of relationships in terms of power; Alcibiades is so upset because he cannot overpower the one man he loves. Meanwhile, Socrates can merely speak in abstractions, and the model that he proposes seems to work in practice only for the philosopher himself. Andrea Nightingale tries to salvage Socrates by arguing that he is not necessarily the only person with a claim to wisdom. Instead, the philosopher occupies a third path between ignorance and truth. When speaking to Socrates, according to Nightingale, Diotima "dismantled this binary scheme by introducing Socrates to a *tertium quid*: midway between beauty and ugliness, mortality and immortality, ignorance and knowledge, Eros both loves and lacks wisdom."³⁰ It would follow that Plato does not take Alcibiades' view of Socrates as a wise man who hoards truth for himself.³¹ Perhaps it is not Socrates who offers a middle path, but actually it is Plato who hints to a negotiation between what Socrates describes and how Alcibiades seems to live the philosophical life. What proves to be important is not just accepting Socrates' dogma, but how one practices it. At the beginning of Socrates' speech Diotima says that there is a "middle ground between knowledge and ignorance," which is true belief (202a). By the same

³⁰ Nightingale (1995: 126-7).

³¹ Nightingale is interested in the importance of the *encomia* as a genre and a means of parody appropriated by Plato.

logic, philosophy can perform the same function as a middle ground between the material world and more abstract divine truths.

Above, I proposed that attempting to reconcile inconsistencies within the text is futile; it is not possible because there are too many contradictions, and it is not worthwhile because the objective of the text is not to provide wholesale resolutions to deeply complex ideological questions. The sympotic setting is an appropriate backdrop for the introduction of dialogue as the medium for the discipline of philosophy, which can propose claims about truth, but which necessitates the participation of the reader to judge the values of those claims in a context beyond the space of the text, in the context of a “real” life. Knowledge, then, might most effectively be sought in conviviality.³² This process of embodied learning in particular social contexts is demonstrated by the exchanges between Socrates and Agathon. Before giving his speech, Socrates explains that he once believed exactly what Agathon did, that *Eros* himself was beautiful. But when Socrates met Diotima, he tells the group: “I’d been saying to her, in my own words, almost exactly what Agathon was just saying to me—that Love is an important god and must be accounted attractive. She used the same arguments I used on him to prove that it actually followed from my own ideas that Love *wasn’t* attractive or good” (201e). After Agathon’s speech when Socrates questions the tragedian, Agathon admits that he did not know what he thought he knew; it becomes apparent that Socrates can conveniently begin his speech from that

³² Tecuşan (1990: 238-260) describes the importance of symposia for the dissemination of truth in Plato’s *Laws*, where Plato seems sympathetic to the sympotic gathering, which is a place where men engage in discussion and test their own virtue in the face of temptation. Schmitt-Pantel (1992: 237) takes it a step further by claiming that the symposium was *actually* the place at Plato’s Academy where truths might be taught to young philosophers: “Il tient à la place dévolue à la pratique du *symposion* dans l’œuvre de Platon, sujet immense, on s’en doute, puisque lié à toute la réflexion sur la *paideia* et plus généralement sur la parole. Le *symposion*, comme pratique sociale, est d’abord une réunion entre amis où l’on peut atteindre l’ivresse et les plaisirs des sens. Mais il est aussi et surtout chez Platon, le lieu des discours et en particulier du discours philosophique. Grâce à l’échange de paroles, au dialogue qui s’instaure, le *symposion* remplit une fonction éducative hautement valorisée dans le cercle socratique. On sait qu’à l’Académie Platon avait organisé de grands banquets placés sous la protection de Muses et qu’un dialogue socratique porte le nom de *Symposion*. Aux yeux du philosophe, et selon des modalités complexes qu’il ne m’appartient pas d’étudier ici, le *symposion* est un lieu d’apprentissage de la sagesse.”

very starting point, because he used to believe what Agathon believes at the beginning of the dialogue.³³

The importance of Agathon in the dialogue is highlighted when Socrates appears to be invested in the tragic poet's role in educating the *demos*. At first, Socrates gently mocks Agathon, who does not know the nature of *eros*, by telling him: “[*your wisdom*] is brilliant and has great potential too, as is proved by the fact that, despite your youth, it shone out so powerfully and clearly the day before yesterday, with thirty thousand Greeks to witness it” (175e). After Aristophanes' speech, Socrates begins to question Agathon about the role of the tragic poet in the *polis*. Agathon says that he fears he will not be able to make a good speech in front of the audience of symposiasts. Socrates accuses the tragedian of considering the sympotic audience as intelligent and the general public, which comprised the theatrical audience, as ignorant. Naturally, Socrates continues his questioning, asking Agathon, “are you sure that we here *are* clever? After all, we were also there in the theatre, forming part of the general populace. Anyway, if you *did* ever come across clever people, you'd probably be embarrassed to feel that you might be doing something wrong... But wouldn't you be embarrassed to feel you were doing something wrong in front of the general populace?” (194c). Socrates clearly feels that the poet does not take his role in educating the public very seriously, which foreshadows the final scene in the dialogue when the philosopher argues that knowledge about how to write tragedies must be combined with knowledge about how to write comedies for any author (223d). It seems that Socrates proposes this alternative for the tragedian: if Agathon listens to and chooses to learn from Socrates, he too can pursue philosophy. But Alcibiades bursts in and complicates

³³ Nussbaum (1986: 198) takes a very harsh view of Agathon, stating that: “as Socrates and Alcibiades compete for our souls, we become, like their object Agathon, beings without character, without choice. Agathon could stand their blandishments, because he had no soul to begin with. We did have souls, and we feel they are being turned into statues.”

things for the philosopher, because it seems that the politician also would like to command the attention of the tragedian. At this symposium, what began as a competition about who could make the best speech about *eros*, becomes instead a competition over a tragedian and tragedy's instructional role and its claim to wisdom.

Thus, Plato establishes philosophy (embodied by Socrates), as opposed to political rhetoric (represented by Alcibiades), as the rightful heir to tragedy (naturally, symbolized by Agathon). Plato's figuration of philosophy as the medium through which truth is disseminated, even if that truth is fragile and requires dedication, positions the philosophical dialogue as the highest literary medium. The inherent hierarchy of genre in Classical Athens implies that such a choice had political implications in a culture that valued performance as a means of educating its citizens.³⁴ Yet, if Plato is advocating for philosophy's claim to truth vis-à-vis political rhetoric or tragedy, one might wonder why he would make this statement in what seems to be his least philosophical (or to put it differently, his most literary) dialogue. It seems that there are some features to the sympotic setting that allows Plato to explore this possibility.

The sympotic setting is the place where desire, philosophy and dialogue converge. Unlike most other Platonic dialogues, in the *Symposium* the speakers give relatively uninterrupted speeches. Socrates only interrupts once, when he cross-examines Agathon, and he does not seem to have the last word, as Alcibiades arguably outshines him. During the course of the sympotic conversation, every speech serves to create an energy or momentum that comes progressively closer to truth and progressively higher towards a collective enlightenment. The narrative structure itself seems to mimic Diotima's ladder, where each part, even the seemingly mundane details, are integrated into a truly remarkable whole. The audience judges the speakers against

³⁴ Kurke (2011: 244).

their historical outcomes, and dialogue allows us to imagine how their positions were impacted by their “actual” lives.³⁵ The reader comes to understand a little about the character of each speaker because they all had a chance to speak over the course of the evening.³⁶ One member of the sympotic group might impose truth, but all of the symposiasts must also participate. Like the *pramel* form, which was developed in the sympotic setting, the philosophical discussion relies on the other contributions before it capitulates towards a higher truth. While the trajectory of Diotima’s ladder is vertical, as the student ascends from one step to the next, the sympotic participants engage in a discourse that is in a sense more horizontal, because they each get a turn in the equal plane where they exchange ideas. Indeed, the effort to come to a higher level of understanding, depicted by Socrates’ speech that enlightens the entire group, depends upon the preceding speeches. Although the environment of the symposium is competitive, the principle of competition depends on the assumption that all members of the symposium have equal chance at enlightening the group with their individual speech. The symposium might imagine itself as superior to the *polis*, or exempt from its rules, but there is a sense that its members have equality. Of course, the game is rigged; it is inevitable that Socrates will win by giving the best speech.

Here, Plato’s reader must integrate different opinions in order to approach an understanding of *Eros*. In contrast, in Xenophon’s *Symposium*, the contributions of most of the symposiasts prove to be unrelated to Socrates’ final speech. Instead, the speeches serve to prove the point of Xenophon’s Socrates: a reformation of the homosocial order is necessary because elite customs like pederasty and competitive activities like participation in athletic events can be redirected towards the benefit of the people if they are directed towards the civic good.

Xenophon necessitates that his readers integrate Socrates’ speech with the final performance,

³⁵ See Nussbaum (1986: 127) and Halperin (1992: 100).

³⁶ Except, curiously, Aristodemus, who leaves his own speech out of the narrative.

which complements his reconfiguration of homosocial activity by glorifying heterosexual *eros* as the proper means of procreation for the *demos*. In Plato's dialogue, Socrates' speech is followed by a direct challenge. Alcibiades' incursion presents an opposing opinion about desire and about what it looks like when a student pursues the course prescribed by Diotima. Both of these structures, where the speech of Socrates is either followed by something that enriches it or threatens it, create tension and momentum in the narratives, although the stakes somehow seem higher in Plato's dialogue. The homoerotic order in Xenophon's dialogue is no longer a problem when Socrates proposes that pederastic relationships between elites should be used to promote civic participation. These relationships are not sexually consummated, and instead, young Athenians are instructed to procreate with women. Although the scheme that Socrates proposes in Plato's text seems to provide a solution about how pederastic homosocial relationships can become less problematic, the homoerotic order complicates matters in the dialogue. Alcibiades cannot figure out how to love Socrates in the right way, or according to the path that Diotima describes. Alcibiades' cautionary tale provides a provocative counter to Socrates' argument; it thus functions to encapsulate the importance of the sympotic setting in literature, where authors are able to articulate a multiplicity of opinions.

V. Conclusions

The literary symposium was a useful mode for authors of the fifth and fourth century to articulate a wide range of opinions about tensions that permeated the *polis*. Authors were able to manipulate the imagery of the symposium in order to structure their texts, but that is not to say that the political or cultural meaning of symposia were necessarily stable across texts. Nevertheless, the symposium is a space where values are tested among its participants. Although Oswyn Murray notably suggested that the historical symposium was a space where aristocrats created their own rules in a kind of anti-*polis*, the literary symposium very much engages with the most important conflicts facing the citizens of the Athenian state. The tensions raised in literary symposia correspond to a wide range of issues, including those related to class, politics and education.

By adapting the sympotic sequence to the comic stage, Aristophanes thematized the symposium in order to illustrate the conflict between two generations of Athenians, those who came of age in the 420s and their fathers. Thus, Aristophanes is able to raise issues about how fathers educate their sons, but also whether the customs passed between generations are threatening to the city. Class was a primary concern for Aristophanes, and his sympotic scene in the *Wasps* allows him to explore the ways in which non-elites appropriated the objects associated with the ritual of the symposium. Xenophon is far less concerned with socio-economic class, although this is partly due to the fact that his dialogue would have had a smaller, more elite audience than the comedy of Aristophanes, which was produced for thousands. Xenophon articulates numerous political opinions in his *Symposium*, where the participants explain how they best serve others with their greatest skill. Education of sons is another important

consideration in the text, when it becomes clear that the sons who speak in the dialogue do not seem to understand the importance of civic participation and where a Socratic solution is necessary in order to preserve elite customs. Plato does not focus a great deal on the issue of class; instead, he focuses on education and how students of philosophy can come to learn about love and the philosophical life. Education is facilitated through the experience of reading a dialogue, which Plato establishes as the best means of articulating philosophy. The issues of genre hierarchy appear most important in the Platonic dialogue, where Plato makes a case for philosophy as the heir to tragedy as the best means of educating young Athenians. Yet this claim is made in a space at a symposium, which allows Plato to reconstruct a number of opinions and to encourage the reader to draw his own conclusions by judging these speeches against the historical backdrop of the lives that the symposiasts would go on to lead.

Despite the multiplicity of issues that are raised in the texts that I have focused on, there are certain elements of the symposium that are consistent throughout the three works. Firstly, the idea of the importance of embodied knowledge becomes prominent, where it is clear that some things can only be learned in specific social contexts. The symposium tests its participants in unexpected ways, as they strive to recline correctly on the couch or to tell the wittiest story or to forge the best social connections in this environment. They must project their desired identity in the face of competition with the other symposiasts or by rising to the challenges that their hosts propose. This type of learning about how to behave in a social setting tests their ability to navigate a gathering with highly ordered ritual activity that is coupled with unexpected challenges. For just when a night seems predictable, the last symposiast might change the terms of the discussion.

These literary symposia also share a distinct status of being a liminal space that makes the transgression of boundaries possible. Of course, the consumption of wine may loosen inhibitions and every party is bound to have a Philocleon who has a few too many drinks, but there is also a certain kind of freedom allowed in the sympotic space. Again, conviviality and the shared pursuit of pleasure mark the environment of the symposium. Concurrently, there is a tension between collective desires of the group and individual passions, or between a common principle of equality and a sense of competition. But we have also seen that when the momentum of the discussion leads to Socrates' speech in Plato's *Symposium*, the entire group benefits. Each arguably less fully realized speech is a necessary component to the discussion, before the guests can hear Diotima's beautiful articulation of what it means to see the true, unadulterated Form of the Beautiful. Even in a competitive atmosphere, the symposiasts are all lifted up together towards something magnificent.

At the same time, the threats that Alcibiades makes to Socrates remind the reader that the symposium is also a space where there is potential for danger and violence. Philocleon's *komos* is unquestionably disruptive to the state as he indiscriminately destroys the private property of others. He is unable to talk his way out of the confrontations that result from his rampage, the violence of which recalls the famous historical episode when the Herms were mutilated in 415 BCE, allegedly after a sympotic gathering became violent. This scandal implicated Alcibiades, whose appearance in Plato's dialogue seems to mark out how the pursuit of politics by those who are not properly educated can cause serious injury to the *polis*. The political implications are prevalent in Xenophon's text, as his participants in some cases even contribute to the deaths of one another, either through legal prosecution or as members of violent political factions in the twilight of the fifth century.

The three texts that I have discussed all look to the years between 422 and 416 BCE, a time that seems to have been viewed both retrospectively and by a contemporary author as critical in the history of Athens. The generation of Athenians that was coming of age at this time faced enormous challenges and conflicts, and the symposium proved to be an effective mode with which to articulate those conflicts, while also highlighting the importance of educating young men about how to behave and confront a diverse range of opinions.

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