

Πολιτικός Έρωτας: Alcibiades' Love in Thucydides and Plato

By Nicholas J. Olin

Advisor: Radcliffe G. Edmonds III

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I. Introduction:

Throughout Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, erotic language is spoken by the war-time leaders Pericles, in his famous Funeral Oration, and Alcibiades, in his speeches to the Athenians and the Spartans. This language is also present in Thucydides' discussion of the myth of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Thucydides' usage of ἔρωξ is anomalous for the very reason that the *History* – a self-styled κτήμα τε ἐς αἰεὶ, a possession unto eternity – is decidedly un-erotic (1.22.3; Wohl 2002, 30). Thucydides, criticizing the romantic stories found in Herodotus, qualifies his investigations thus: ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν ἴσως τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες αὐτῶν ἀτερπέστερον φανεῖται, “in a hearing equally their lack of fabulousness will appear unpleasing” (1.22.4). This history then is not an account meant to please, but one meant to instruct “those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the understanding of the future” (1.22.4).

Few characters are more conspicuous with respect to Thucydides' didactic aims than Alcibiades himself. This general, playboy, politician, and multiple Olympic victor plays an ever-shifting role in the War, casting a long shadow on some of its most dramatic developments, including the Battle of Mantinea, the mutilation of the Herms, the Sicilian Expedition, and the international political machinations between Athens, Sparta, and the Persian Empire. Throughout his account, Thucydides contrasts Alcibiades' leadership with that of Pericles, and in doing so presents him as an object lesson in how a democratic city's leadership can falter and bring about great ruin. This comparison partakes of erotic terms, concepts, and cultural ideals endemic to fifth century Athenian political life, which are thus integral to Thucydides' broader analysis.

Thucydides is first and foremost an Athenian writing the history of his city's downfall. His understanding of this process is thus rooted in Athens' unique political culture, ideals of

citizenship, and norms of behavior. That being said, Thucydides shows time and again that Alcibiades has a tendency to cross the boundaries that a true citizen should not cross. One of these boundaries is erotic in nature, and falls along the carefully delineated lines that form the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship. This relationship, between an older citizen male (the lover) and a male youth (the beloved), was a crucial component of the socialization of young men into political life. Anyone who transgressed his role as a youthful beloved or an elder lover would be breaking a gendered political taboo that maintained social cohesion among the citizen body. These norms dictated a youth's role as beloved ἐρώμενος and an adult's role as loving ἐραστής, and are represented as foundations of Pericles' wartime leadership. In employing erotic language then, Thucydides offers readers a view of Alcibiades' corrupt erotic relationship with the δῆμος as the root cause of Athens' precipitous decline from Pericles' own erotic leadership of the city, carefully structured as it was along the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος divide. A close reading of Alcibiades' speech to the Spartans after going into exile will provide evidence for Alcibiades' transgression of his role as ἐραστής. A look at his speech to his fellow Athenians in support of the Sicilian Expedition will provide evidence for his transgression of his role as ἐρώμενος. A reading of his appearances in several of Plato's dialogues, in particular his speech to the company assembled in Agathon's house in Plato's *Symposium*, will provide additional insight into the manifold ways Alcibiades broke, bent, and displaced Athenian gender norms, the ways in which he was both a bad ἐραστής and a bad ἐρώμενος.

Plato's evaluation of Alcibiades' turbulent relationship with Socrates in this dialogue provides a useful lens with which to examine Thucydides' views on the demagogue's career and the ways in which he was responsible for Athens' decline. A fundamental sexual ambiguity exists in his relationship with the philosopher. This ambiguity precludes the simple assignment

of the roles of lover or beloved to either Socrates or Alcibiades. The political and ethical implications for the πόλις at the level of norms and at the level of history are staggering: we find a similar kind of ambiguity between Alcibiades and the δῆμος in Athens. This correspondence leads us to question whether we cannot judge Plato and Thucydides on an equal footing as political commentators who perceived an erotic dimension to the politics of the late fifth century, one that animated its most dramatic episodes and propelled its most important players to their ruin. Alcibiades' ambiguous erotic relationship with the δῆμος ultimately displaced the ideal relationship between the citizen-ἐραστής and the πόλις as set forth in the Funeral Oration, a relationship which Thucydides credits with Athens' success under Pericles. As a youth, Alcibiades is a loving ἐρώμενος – so much so that he tries to seduce the older Socrates – and as an adult, he is the beloved ἐραστής of his city, to the point that he is recalled from treasonous exile and reinstated as a general in Athens. As Plutarch tells us, citing Aristophanes' *Frogs*, the people “long for him, they hate him, they cannot do without him” (Plutarch *Alc.* 16). Their love for him and his love for them, by stretching and finally breaking the Periclean Ideal, brought about Athens' disastrous fall (Wohl 2002, 32).

II. The Erotic Context:

To better understand Thucydides' presentation of Alcibiades' ἔρωσ, it is necessary to provide a much broader cultural and political context for his work, one that will sufficiently detail the erotics of democratic politics in Athens during its golden age. Underlying all relations within and among the Athenian citizenry was the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship. Modern authors, such as Michel Foucault, David Halperin, and Kenneth J. Dover have illuminated this sexual dimension in several seminal works on sexuality in Ancient Greece. They largely focus on the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship. In *The Use of Pleasure*, the second volume of *The*

History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault writes that “the notion of homosexuality is plainly inadequate as a means of referring to an experience, forms of valuation, and a system of categorization so different from ours” (Foucault 1985, 187). For the Greeks, Foucault argues, any “anxiety” surrounding “[t]he use of pleasures in the relationship with boys” was not so much a matter of a “dual, ambivalent, and ‘bisexual’ structure of desire,” but a matter of the extent to which one had control over his desires (Foucault 1985, 187-189).¹ Self-control is the operative virtue here, and its opposite, an inability to control one’s passions, the corresponding vice. This results from a fundamentally different understanding of the self: while “the preference for boys or girls was easily recognized as a character trait,” it was not seen as an immutable part of a person’s nature, but as “two ways of enjoying one’s pleasure, one of which was more suited to certain individuals or certain periods of existence” (Foucault 1985, 190).² For ancient Athenians, “the same desire attached to anything that was desirable – boy or girl – subject to the condition that the appetite was nobler that inclined toward what was more beautiful and more honorable” (Foucault 1985, 192). This aesthetics of desire ultimately prized beauty and deference in the ἐρώμενος and virtue and self-control in the ἐραστής.

Halperin, in his *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* presses this analysis further, suggesting that homosexuality, even the notion of sexuality itself, “is a modern invention” (Halperin 1990, 24).³ This follows from his understanding that “gender roles,” and not sex, were

¹ Foucault adds that “[t]o have loose morals was to be incapable of resisting either women or boys, without it being any more serious than that” (Foucault 1985, 187).

² Indeed, “the pleasures did not reveal an alien nature in the person who experienced them; but their use demanded a special stylistics,” hence the outgrowth of a large ethical and normative discourse praising and condemning certain actions by the ἐραστής and the ἐρώμενος that either suited or overstepped their appropriate role in the relationship (Foucault 1985, 192).

³ This “sexuality... is a specifically sexual dimension to the human personality, a characterological seat within the individual of sexual acts, desires, and pleasures – a determinate source from which all sexual expression proceeds” (Halperin 1990, 24). Indeed, as “a constitutive principle of the self,” sexuality did not exist for the ancient Greeks (Halperin 1990, 24).

the primary means of classifying “ancient sexual typologies” (Halperin 1990, 25).⁴ An older male could love youths and/or women, and would be understood by his peers merely as a lover: the active (penetrative) participant in courtship, the resultant relationship, and the sexual acts that may or may not have constituted that relationship. Assuming the passive (penetrated) role in this process and in sexual relations was diametrically opposed to his gender role as a citizen-male. By the same token, a youth or a woman could not abide by Athenian gender norms if he or she was to pursue an active, penetrative role. Sex was thus “a deeply polarizing experience” that separated the lover and the beloved “into distinct and radically opposed categories” (Halperin 1990, 30). The social dimension of this opposition was “hierarchical”: women and youths were always in a subordinate position to the citizen-male, forever his “social inferior[s]” (Halperin 1990, 30).⁵ Sexual relations therefore constituted implicitly political actions carried out by a citizen upon a non-citizen (Halperin 1990, 31-32). The reversal of these roles by either the ἐραστής or the ἐρώμενος was thus a form of taboo that had the potential to set the entire political structure on its head.⁶

Dover, in his revolutionary *Greek Homosexuality* identifies a competitive element in the ἐραστής’ courtship of the ἐρώμενος: “the very frequent use of words for pursuit, flight and capture sustain the notion that the eromenos is the quarry or victim of the erastes” (Dover 1989, 87). As with other forms of hunting, the courtship of the youth was intimately bound up with

⁴ He argues that these “typologies generally derived their criteria for categorizing people not from sex but from gender: they tended to construe sexual desire as normative or deviant according to whether it impelled social actors to conform to or to violate their conventionally defined gender roles” (Halperin 1990, 25).

⁵ “[T]he insertive partner is construed as a sexual agent... whereas the receptive partner is construed as a sexual patient, whose submission to phallic penetration expresses sexual ‘passivity’” (Halperin 1990, 30).

⁶ Foucault gives proper definitions of these roles: the ἐραστής “was in a position of initiative – he was the suitor – and this gave him rights and obligations,” among which were “to show his ardor, and to restrain it; he had gifts to make, services to render; he had functions to exercise with regard to the *eromenos*; and all this entitled him to expect a just reward” (Foucault 1985, 196). The ἐρώμενος on the other hand was “the one who was loved and courted,” and “had to be careful not to yield too easily” (Foucault 1985, 196).

classical Greek notions of shame (for the defeated) and glory (for the victors).⁷ This was also reinforced by young men's parents: while an Athenian citizen would try to limit potential lovers' access to his daughters and his younger sons, he would simultaneously approve of his older son courting the daughters and the younger sons of his peers (Dover 1989, 88-89).⁸ This same sense of honor and prestige might also motivate a father to allow a lover to court his young son or daughter if he "belongs to a powerful and influential family or is in truth an excellent model for the boy to imitate" (Dover 1989, 89). Only worthy lovers would be granted access to boys and girls; for everyone to have access would have been shameful.

As far as boys are concerned, this courtship overlaps with the time-honored institution of the παιδεία, or child-rearing, in which an older citizen, a πολίτης, would educate and socialize a youth into public life and the prerogatives of citizenship. The mutually reinforcing erotic, ethical, and political components of this relationship cannot be emphasized enough. Thus one finds Pausanias, one of the several encomiasts of Ἔρωος in Plato's *Symposium*, giving an orthodox depiction of the classical παιδεία in that dialogue:

there is one – and only one – further reason for willingly subjecting oneself to another which is equally above reproach: that is subjection for the sake of virtue. If someone decides to put himself at another's disposal because he thinks that this will make him better in wisdom or in any other part of virtue, we approve of his voluntary subjection: we consider it neither shameful nor servile. (Plato *Symp.* 184c3-8).

The courtship and education of youths by older men ultimately preserved Athenian political culture by producing new citizens. What competition we see on the part of citizens (for the best beloveds) and on the part of youths (for the best ἐρασταί) can ultimately be extrapolated to the

⁷ "If the quarry is human and the object copulation, the difficulty of the chase enhances the value of the object, and eventual capture, after fierce competition with rival hunters, is incalculably reassuring to the hunter himself" (Dover 1989, 88).

⁸ "Social competition is among the factors affecting what we say to our children; there can be no winners without losers or losers without winners, and it matters to us very much that we should be the winners and others the losers" (Dover 1989, 88).

level of classical Athenian political discourse and the erotic relationship between δῆμος and δημαγωγός, which we will soon account for.

Picking up on the work of Foucault, Halperin, and Dover, Victoria Wohl and Susan Sara Monoson have written extensively on the erotic dimensions of this discourse. They take as their starting point the speeches of and representations of leading Athenians of the period to construct (and in some instances reconstruct) how ἔρως motivated and conditioned the λόγοι and ἔργα of these key historical figures. Wohl's *Love Among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens* seeks to uncover the Athenian erotic *imaginary*, the cultural or “psychic scaffolding of Athens’s manifest political structure, holding aloft its political ideals and holding together its political relations” (Wohl 2002, ix). In doing so, Wohl argues that the ἐραστικός-ἐρώμενος relationship underpins the entirety of Athens’ democratic ideology (Wohl 2002, 1-29). Indeed, she writes “[i]t was through a passionate attachment to certain ideals that the citizen was forged: the Athenian citizen-subject is coterminous with his political eros” (Wohl 2002, 2). Monoson’s *Plato’s Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Philosophy*, which “read[s] Plato in the context of contemporaneous understandings of democratic political ideals and practices...[s]ituating [the philosopher]...in the context of the Athenian civic self-image,” argues that he was not the “virulent antidemocrat” he has been made out to be (Monoson 2000, 3-4). “We need,” she writes, “to be alert to the way Plato mobilizes the language, imagery, and principles that the Athenians themselves used to fashion their orthodox civic self-understanding” (Monoson 2000, 4). She ultimately suggests that in some ways, “Plato’s dialogues...depict the practice of philosophy as indebted to Athenian democratic culture” (Monoson 2000, 4). In doing so, she deems it necessary to account for the erotic component of Pericles’ Funeral Oration.

III. The Ideal Citizen-Lover:

The Oration, as one of the most profound moments of the *History*, can provide a useful example of the kind of erotic language Thucydides employs, as well as a point of departure for examining Thucydides' understanding of the place of ἔρωϝ in Athenian democratic politics. The climax of Pericles' speech occurs with the famous exhortation:

τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς χρῆ ἀσφαλεστέραν μὲν εὐχεσθαι, ἀτολμοτέραν δὲ μηδὲν ἀξιοῦν τὴν ἐς τοὺς πολεμίους διάνοιαν ἔχειν, σκοποῦντας μὴ λόγῳ μόνῳ τὴν ὠφελίαν, ἣν ἂν τις πρὸς οὐδὲν χειρὸν αὐτοὺς ὑμᾶς εἰδότας μηκύνει, λέγων ὅσα ἐν τῷ τοὺς πολεμίους ἀμύνεσθαι ἀγαθὰ ἔνεστιν, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τὴν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ' ἡμέραν ἔργῳ θεωμένους καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς (2.43.1).

for those remaining it is necessary on the one hand to pray for a more safe situation, and on the other to deem it unworthy to have a cowardly attitude toward our enemies, not looking towards aid alone in word, which anyone knowing no less than you can stretch out, speaking of how many good things come from warding off enemies, but rather gazing upon the power of the city every day in deed and becoming her lovers (2.43.1).

In essence, Pericles implores his countrymen not to consider the practical benefits of war, but how war and daring action might benefit the city. By their deeds, the city might show itself to be excellent in fighting off its enemies. He adds that they should look upon the city in much the same way they behold a beautiful athlete who displays excellence in action. One must note the word Thucydides' uses, ἐραστὰς, the masculine accusative plural of ἐραστής, the very same kind of lover examined in such great detail by Foucault, Halperin, and Dover, a lover who embodied everything that being a free-born Athenian male entailed.

But what of the πόλις as an ἐρώμενη, a passive beloved? Monoson takes up this point in her discussion of "citizenship as reciprocity between lover and beloved" in the Oration (Monoson 2000, 74). She interprets "[t]he ideal image of the relation between erastes and eromenos...as an elaborate 'gift exchange' that creates a defined set of mutual obligations and that, from an aesthetic point of view (always significant to the Athenians), increases the order

and beauty present in the lives of the participants” (Monoson 2000, 80). Thus we find Pausanias’ appeal to ἔρωσ “for the sake of virtue” (Plato, *Symp.* 184c4-5). This “activity was circumscribed by complicated conventions designed to enable the junior, pursued male to evade the social stigma attached to being cast in a submissive, losing sex role as well to enable the adult suitor to evade the suggestion of treating a fellow citizen as a servant” (Monoson 2000, 69). Thus, in referring to the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship, Monoson suggests, Pericles can safely “avoid suggesting that the city plays [a shameful] role” (Monoson 2000, 75). The relationship, while one of “obvious asymmetry,” was embedded within “formalities [that] enabled the participants to establish a relation of mutuality and reciprocity...between unequals” (Monoson 2000, 76-78). In the same way that an ἐραστής might love an ἐρώμενος with the concomitant goal of making him better (a vital component of the παιδεία discussed above), the citizen should love his city and desire to make it better. A crucial distinction is made between the good lover, who acts according to this Ideal, and the bad lover, who seeks to harm his beloved out of selfish and base motives. Monson goes to some lengths to show that the modern fear of the city overwhelming the freedom of its citizens is not operative here (Monoson 2000, 82-83). “Rather, Pericles’ metaphor is animated chiefly by a worry that the city might be cast in a subordinate, subservient position in relation to citizens. It harbors a worry that citizens (erastai) might act shamefully and abuse the polis (eromenos) in an effort to service their own desires” (Monoson 2000, 83). This distinction between the good and the bad lover of the city is the crux of the implicit comparison Thucydides draws between Pericles’ civic ἔρωσ and the corrupt ἔρωσ of Alcibiades.

The historian depicts a specific break between the marbled heights of civic life in Periclean Athens and all that came afterward. He writes how Pericles “told...[the Athenians] to wait quietly,” to fight a war of attrition against the Peloponnesians, “and [by] doing this,

promised them a favorable result” (2.65.7). But, Thucydides adds, “[w]hat they did was the very contrary, allowing private ambitions and private interests, in matters apparently quite foreign to the war, to lead them into projects unjust both to themselves and to their allies – projects whose success would only conduce to the honor and advantage of private persons, and whose failure entailed certain disaster on the country in the war” (2.65.7). There is special blame reserved for those citizens with “private ambitions and private interests” who led the πόλις and the δῆμος in a degenerate way as bad ἐρασταί (2.65.7). “The causes of this are not far to seek,” Thucydides adds (2.65.8). “Pericles indeed, by his rank, ability, and known integrity, was enabled to exercise an independent control over the multitude – in short, to lead them instead of being led by them” (2.65.8). Thucydides concludes that “what was nominally a democracy was becoming in his [Pericles’] hands government by the first citizen” (2.65.9). Pericles is depicted as a stern guardian of his fellow citizens, who through eloquence and a spotless record of public service could sway them from their passionate excesses, for “he could afford to anger them by contradiction” and “was never compelled to flatter them” (2.65.8-9). In this way he performs as the model ἐραστής, a mature adult who provides benevolent but stern guidance for his young, sometimes unruly beloved.⁹ But, Thucydides suggests, “[w]ith his successors it was different. More on a level with one another, and each grasping at supremacy, they ended by committing even the conduct of state affairs to the whims of the multitude” (2.65.10). This was a change in leadership for the worse. The dynamic between δῆμος and δημαγωγός had irrevocably shifted and was perverted to the core. Those leaders who rose to power in Pericles’ wake behaved like

⁹ We find Pericles and his fellow citizens enacting these corresponding roles in the aftermath of the plague and the second invasion of Attica by the Spartans in 430 BCE. He publicly rebukes the anger and frustration they bear toward him, saying “I am the same man and do not alter, it is you who change, since in fact you took my advice while unhurt, and waited for misfortune to repent of it; and the apparent error of my policy lies in the infirmity of your resolution, since the suffering that it entails is being felt by everyone among you, while its advantage is still remote and obscure to all, and a great and sudden reverse having befallen you, your mind is too much depressed to persevere in your resolves” (2.61.2).

bad lovers, harming their beloved δῆμος and πόλις to suit their own pernicious ends. In doing so, they deviated from the erotic Ideal that had sustained Athens' greatness under Pericles.

IV. The Beloved Ἔραστής:

The perversion of the relationship between the δῆμος and its δημαγωγοί manifests most clearly in Alcibiades' speech to the Spartans after he first goes into exile. In this speech, he presents himself as a lover of his city despite conspiring with its enemies against it. Plutarch's anecdotal account of Alcibiades' first exile provides further evidence for the perverted love the man felt for his city and for the δῆμος. These episodes support the notion of Alcibiades' deviance from Pericles' mature love for Athens, from his injunction to his fellow citizens to be model ἐρασταί of the city. They point to a love that crosses the boundaries defining the citizen-ἐραστής and a love not for the πόλις (the proper object of desire within the Ideal) but for the Athenian δῆμος (an improper object of a citizen's desire). Alcibiades' variant behavior during his time in Sparta shows the extent of his erotic παρανομία, or transgression of his city's laws, norms, and customs, a concept that appears in Thucydides (6.28.2) and is discussed at length by Wohl (Wohl 2002, 129). Plutarch tells us of his adoption of Spartan customs upon fleeing to Athens' enemy, that

[i]t was not so much that he could pass with ease from one type of behavior to another, nor that his own character was transformed in every case; but when he saw that by following his own inclinations he would give offence to his associates, he promptly assumed whatever manner or exterior was appropriate to the situation. (Plutarch *Alc.* 23).

Alcibiades was able to slip into any role that might serve his own interests. In doing so, he came to epitomize the bad ἐραστής who would go to any lengths to secure his beloved. Plutarch says as much: "he sent word to the Spartans asking for asylum and promising that he would render them services greater than all the harm he had done them when he was their enemy" (Plutarch *Alc.* 23). Thus began his seduction of Sparta, a process that culminated in his affair with King

Agis' wife, Timaea. Plutarch writes that she went so far as to name their love-child after Alcibiades in private, "so completely was she carried away by her passion for him" (Plutarch *Alc.* 23). Alcibiades is purported to have quipped "that he had not done this as a mere insult, nor simply to gratify his appetite, but to ensure that his descendants would one day rule over the Spartans" (Plutarch *Alc.* 23). Such a shocking revelation would not be out of character for an individual long habituated to committing outrages in the service of truly great ambition.

Alcibiades not only "seduced" Agis' wife, but won the affections of the entire Spartan populace: "[a]t Sparta his public reputation already stood high, but he now earned just as much admiration for his private conduct, and by adopting Spartan customs in his everyday life he captivated the people and brought them under his spell" (Plutarch *Alc.* 23). Plutarch likens him to a "chameleon" (Plutarch *Alc.* 23). "Even the chameleon cannot take on the colour of white, but Alcibiades was able to associate with good and bad alike, and never found a characteristic which he could not imitate or practice" (Plutarch *Alc.* 23). His stay at Sparta, his behavior toward Agis, and his exemplary service in their military in Ionia ultimately grated on the "most powerful and ambitious of the Spartans [who] were by now both jealous and tired of him" (Plutarch *Alc.* 24). They "had influence enough to prevail on the magistrates at home to send out orders to Ionia for Alcibiades to be put to death" (Plutarch *Alc.* 24). The parallels with his experience at Athens not long before are instructive: there is an erotic pattern to Alcibiades' public career, one that sees his power and influence spread until it threatens enough of his elite competitors that they compel his exile. His grasping for power involves first the courting of the δῆμος as if it were his ἐρώμενος by consistently bending to its will and arousing its desire in turn. In doing so, he forces his rivals to court the people in the same way or risk losing political influence. But Alcibiades' and his competitors' behavior was ultimately self-interested. It was this kind of behavior that

Pericles sought to avoid in his own command of Athens and attempted to prevent his fellow citizens from following.

Alcibiades' deviant behavior centers on his relationship with the Athenian δῆμος, or δᾶμος while he is in Sparta. Thucydides depicts him explaining his situation to the Spartans after his first exile from Athens:

τό τε φιλόπολι οὐκ ἐν ᾧ ἀδικοῦμαι ἔχω, ἀλλ' ἐν ᾧ ἀσφαλῶς ἐπολιτεύθην. οὐδ' ἐπὶ πατρίδα οὔσαν ἔτι ἠγοῦμαι νῦν ἰέναι, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον τὴν οὐκ οὔσαν ἀνακτᾶσθαι. καὶ φιλόπολις οὗτος ὀρθῶς, οὐχ ὅς ἂν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀδίκως ἀπολέσας μὴ ἐπίη, ἀλλ' ὅς ἂν ἐκ παντὸς τρόπου διὰ τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν πειραθῆ αὐτὴν ἀναλαβεῖν. (6.92.4).

love of country is what I do not feel when I am wronged, but what I felt when secure in my rights as a citizen. Indeed I do not consider that I am now attacking a country that is still mine; I am rather trying to recover one that is mine no longer; and the true lover of his country is not he who consents to lose it unjustly rather than attack it, but he who longs for it so much that he will go to all lengths to recover it. (6.92.4).

How can an exile “long for” his former city without at the same time having a “love of country” (6.92.4)? This apparent contradiction might make sense in light of Socrates' point in the *Symposium* that “a man or anyone else who has a desire [necessarily] desires... what he does not have, ... for such are the objects of desire and love” (Plato *Symp.* 200e3-6). The operative distinction here is between φιλόπολις, a “love for or dearness toward one's city” and the verb ἐπιθυμεῖν, the infinitive form of the verb meaning “to set one's heart on something, to desire or yearn for that thing” (6.92.4). Dover argues that the φιλόπολις must apply to citizenship and not to the “conditions in which I [Alcibiades] am wronged” (Dover 1989, 93). According to this line of reasoning, Alcibiades understands his city to be something more than the malicious ballots cast by his rivals, something he himself must have known from his experience in the Assembly and as a general. But the distinction between dearness or fondness and desire cannot be overlooked. One might feel φιλία toward what one possesses, like one's parents or friends, but one cannot feel ἐπιθυμία, let alone ἔρωσ, toward the very same kind of thing (that one owns).

The principle articulated by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium* is clearly at work here between Alcibiades and the δῆμος.

David Gribble focuses on Alcibiades "love of country" in his *Alcibiades and Athens: A Study in Literary Presentation* (6.92.4). Alcibiades' "action in exile may have been dictated by his desire to return to Athens, but he is not deterred by the necessity of doing great harm to the city in order to achieve his end: this underlines the problem of a concept of τὸ φιλόπολι ('patriotism') which is fundamentally *self-centered*" (Gribble 1999, 208-9). More to the point, "Alcibiades has an inadequate conception of the city as a place to which he owes his loyalty regardless of how he himself may be treated (6.91.4); he views the city and the civic sphere primarily as an arena for the pursuit of his personal goals" (Gribble 1999, 209). Gribble does not take his analysis in an erotic direction, preferring throughout his book to problematize Alcibiades' life and career on the basis of the classical relationship between the individual and the πόλις. But the erotic resonance of Alcibiades' words and deeds is never so faint that it cannot be heard or observed. Alcibiades is precisely a bad kind of ἐραστής for the very fact that he is a "kolax, or flatterer," a stereotypical characteristic of the bad ἐραστής (Gribble 1999, 210). In keeping with two other stereotypical traits of the bad lover, Alcibiades is jealous and violent as well. Such lovers will ultimately stoop to what Plato describes in the *Phaedrus* as "commend[ing] whatever you say and do, even when it is less than the best, partly because they fear incurring your animosity and partly because their judgment is impaired by their desire" (Plato *Phaedrus* 233a6-b2). We might recall how Pericles "could afford to anger...[the people] by contradiction" and "was never compelled to flatter them" (2.65.8-9). In this way, he embodied the ideal ἐραστής, an unyielding guardian of the πόλις and the people that he exhorted his countrymen to become. We must note how he avoided giving in to their whims.

Alcibiades' willingness to "go to all lengths to recover" his beloved is striking in comparison (6.92.4). We have Pausanias giving a tongue-in-cheek description of his city's laws: "our custom is to praise lovers for totally extraordinary acts – so extraordinary, in fact, that if they performed them for any other purpose whatever, they would reap the most profound contempt" (Plato *Symp.* 182e1-183a2). He gives various examples of behavior the Athenians would have found shameful, including "kneel[ing] in public view and begg[ing] in the most humiliating way" (Plato *Symp.* 183a6-7). One behavior he does not include is hurting the beloved. We find this behavior in the speech of Lysias, recited by Phaedrus in Plato's eponymous dialogue. In this speech, the speaker provides several reasons why a young boy should take a non-lover as his erotic guardian. We find in it a depiction of the kind of stereotypically bad lover Pericles implored his countrymen to avoid becoming toward the city. The speaker includes the jealousy that a bad lover will inevitably feel, and his consequent desire to limit his beloved's access to other role models.¹⁰ In sum, lovers "are on their guard against anyone who has acquired any other advantages" beyond their own (Plato *Phaedrus* 232d1-2). This results in the beloved being bereft of "friends" and beneficial mentors (Plato *Phaedrus* 232d3). The bad lover will also seek to diminish his beloved's capabilities. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates imitates Lysias, saying that "a lover will not tolerate a darling who is superior or equal to himself, but always makes him inferior and deficient by comparison" (Plato *Phaedrus* 238e5-239a2). He concludes his speech with the quip "[a]s wolves cherish lambs, so lovers befriend boys" (Plato *Phaedrus* 241c9-d1).

In much the same way, Alcibiades has loved Athens and its citizens. But by this point he has gone beyond even that stereotypical modality. Upon his willingness to betray his

¹⁰ "Many things upset them [lovers], and they think that everything that happens is done to injure them. That is why they prevent those they love from associating with others, for they fear those with property, lest they surpass them in wealth, and those who are educated, lest they be superior in intellect" (Plato *Phaedrus* 232c3-d1).

countrymen, he becomes the worst kind of lover, seeking his own benefit first and foremost; his beloved's benefit, which he claims to accrue alongside his own in his speech to the Athenians in support of the Sicilian Expedition, has by now been discarded entirely. Going even further, his love is now channeled into hurting his beloved πόλις and δῆμος for his own benefit. This self-interested love is the ultimate degeneration on the part of the lover: a good lover will seek to benefit his beloved; a moderately bad lover will be jealous, will limit his beloved's access to other potential lovers, and will use flattery; a bad lover will go so far as to reduce his beloved's capabilities until he cannot function without him and is fully subservient to his will and desires.¹¹ The bad lover may even have recourse to violence. Pericles embodied the good lover, Alcibiades and his rivals embodied moderately bad lovers up until his exile at their hands, and Alcibiades embodied the bad lover once in exile. Alcibiades' actions as a bad lover represent a total abandonment of the Periclean Ideal.

V. Plato on Alcibiades' erotic ambiguity:

The testimony of Plato's *Symposium*, *Gorgias*, and *Alcibiades I* is highly relevant here, if only for providing us with portraits of Alcibiades as an ἐραστής and an ἐρώμενος, earlier in his career and later, not long before the fateful Sicilian Expedition. At a deeper level, Plato is very much concerned with the issues raised by the meteoric rise and fall of the young statesman-general. These issues figure most prominently in Plato's portrayal of Alcibiades' and Socrates' relationship. He depicts this relationship as an alternative to Thucydides' depiction of Alcibiades' erotically ambiguous relationship with the δῆμος, an alternative that would have prevented his downfall and that of the city. Gribble writes that Socrates' and Alcibiades' "confrontation ... was used to illustrate the direct political relevance of Socratic ethical analysis,

¹¹ "He will...contrive other ways to keep him ignorant in every regard and dependent on his lover for everything, so that the beloved will be most pleasant for his lover, but most damaging to himself" (Plato *Phaedrus* 239b7-9).

and the consequences of the failure to pursue philosophy” (Gribble 1999, 216). In a way, Plato and Thucydides are writing with the same didactic goal: instilling a proper understanding of virtue and political life in their respective audiences. The dynamic between Socrates and Alcibiades toward the end of Plato’s *Symposium* is all the more interesting, for at times it is unclear who is the ἐραστής and who the ἐρώμενος. Given the deep political resonance of this ambiguity, one finds a mystery here that needs unraveling. To find out what is going on here, we must look at Alcibiades’ and Socrates’ interactions for the behaviors characteristic of bad lovers. We must also look for ways in which Alcibiades acts as a bad ἐρώμενος.

Their first encounter at the party is illustrative. Alcibiades is astonished to see the philosopher, so much so that “he leaped up and cried” out upon seeing him (Plato *Symp.* 213b9-10). He berates him for “always do[ing] this to me – all of a sudden you’ll turn up out of nowhere where I least expect you!” (Plato *Symp.* 213c2-3). It is as if Socrates is ever-present in Alcibiades’ social sphere. The philosopher’s response indicates as much, as well as the violent nature of Alcibiades’ love: pleading with Agathon for protection, Socrates relates how he “can’t so much as look at an attractive man but he [Alcibiades] flies into a fit of jealous rage. He yells; he threatens; he can hardly keep from slapping me around” (Plato *Symp.* 213c8-d6). He tells the assembled company that “[t]he fierceness of his passion terrifies me!” (Plato *Symp.* 213d8-9). Here we have Alcibiades portrayed as a violent, abusive lover, the very kind of (bad) lover he became toward the δῆμος. Other parallels are present: Alcibiades’ need to be the most beloved of all those present (more of which will be said later), as well as his desire to keep other potential suitors away from Socrates (who presents himself as an ἐρώμενος). These three parallels evoke the bad lover we saw in the *Phaedrus*. Alcibiades jealously tries to keep Agathon away from

Socrates (and Socrates away from Agathon) in much the same way that he tries to outdo his rivals in courting the δῆμος: through violence.

This violence also figures strongly in his portrayal of his relationship with Socrates. Alcibiades first decides “to use an image” of a statue of Silenus or “an image” of the satyr Marsyas to depict Socrates (Plato *Symp.* 215a6, 215b1-6). Socrates words, like Silenus’ or Marsyas’ supernatural flute-playing, have an ultimately maddening effect upon their hearers. “Whether they are played by the greatest flautist or the meanest flute-girl, his melodies have in themselves the power to possess and so reveal those people who are ready for the god and his mysteries” (Plato *Symp.* 215c4-7). Alcibiades reflects on the “extraordinary effect his words have always had on me”: “my heart starts leaping in my chest, the tears come streaming down my face, even the frenzied Corybantes seem sane compared to me” (Plato *Symp.* 215d6, 215e3-5). He draws a contrast with Pericles’ words and those of the philosopher: Pericles’ “never upset me so deeply that my very own soul started protesting that my life – *my* life! – was no better than the most miserable slave’s” (Plato *Symp.* 215e6-9). Indeed, Socrates “makes it seem that my life isn’t worth living” and “makes me admit that my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I most neglect: my personal shortcomings, which cry out for the closest attention” (Plato *Symp.* 216a1, 216a4-7). His next point is key: “I know perfectly well that I can’t prove he’s wrong when he tells me what I should do,” but ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἀπέλω, ἡττημένω τῆς τιμῆς τῆς ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν, “whenever I depart from him, I am forced to give in to the honor of the many” (Plato *Symp.* 216b4-7). Alcibiades is here torn between the philosopher’s love for him and the love that the δῆμος bears for him. We find here, as throughout his speech, that he is also an ἐρώμενος. Unfortunately for them all, the δῆμος proved to win his soul as his lover and his beloved.

We find corresponding testimony in Plato's *Gorgias*. Socrates tells Callicles: "each of the two of us is a lover of two objects, I of Alcibiades, Clinias' son, and of philosophy, and you of the *demos* [people] of Athens, and the Demos who's the son of Pylilampes" (Plato *Gorgias* 481d3-6). He then compares his relationship and Callicles': "You keep shifting back and forth. If you say anything in the Assembly and the Athenian *demos* denies it, you shift your ground and say what it wants to hear. Other things like this happen to you when you're with that good-looking young man, the son of Pylilampes" (Plato *Gorgias* 481e1-4). In contrast, Socrates only has Alcibiades to contend with: "what he says differs from one time to the next, but what philosophy says always stays the same" (Plato *Gorgias* 482a7-8). Socrates shows Callicles that he is a bad kind of lover who goes against his own nature in submitting to his beloveds' every wish. But he might as well be talking to Alcibiades throughout his political career. Between his appearance in the *Symposium* and his appearance in this dialogue, Alcibiades is a fawning, outrageous, and passive ἐραστής at the same time as he is a fickle, demanding, and aggressive ἐρώμενος.¹² His violence against Socrates is indeed a miniature version of his violence against the δῆμος. Both result from the fundamental ambiguity that characterizes Alcibiades' ἔρωσ, an ambiguity with ultimately tyrannical potential.

Plato provides an instructive back-story in his *Alcibiades I*. In this dialogue, he depicts Socrates persuading Alcibiades to live the life of reason through arguments most appealing to the youth's desire for power and influence. Socrates begins by making the case "that nobody is capable of providing you with the influence you crave, neither your guardian [Pericles] nor your relatives, nor anybody else except me" (Plato *Alc. I*. 105e3-5). In order to have proper influence in the city, Socrates proves, a man must necessarily cultivate knowledge of himself, as well as

¹² We must remember the self-control and meek obedience required of an ἐρώμενος if we are to understand the extent to which he transgressed his role as a beloved.

his own self-control and virtue. If he fails to do these things, he will end up confusing his soul and what belongs to his soul (his body), the belongings of his belongings (money), the belongings of others, and ultimately the belongings of the city (τὰ πολιτικά) (Plato *Alc. I.* 130e-134a). The tyrannical impulse results directly from this confusion. Alcibiades has it, and Socrates is terrified at the possibility of this impulse overpowering the youth and in turn the city.

It is telling that the philosopher fears the δῆμος most, in much the same way that a good lover will fear a bad lover's negative influence on his ἐρώμενος (Plato *Alc. I.* 132a). He tells Alcibiades that "that is my greatest fear, that a love of the common people might corrupt you, for many Athenian gentlemen have suffered that fate already. 'The people of great-hearted Erechtheus' might look attractive on the outside, but you need to scrutinize them in their nakedness, so take the precaution I urge" and follow philosophy (Plato *Alc. I.* 132a3-7). At first Alcibiades wants to enter the assembly and provide counsel for his countrymen, to gain power over them and by extension the whole of Greece and the known world. He also desires their admiration, and defiantly attempts to rely on his own beauty (Plato *Alc. I.* 104a5-6). Indeed Socrates says, "you want your reputation and your influence to saturate all mankind" (Plato *Alc. I.* 105c3-4).

The erotics of this series of exchanges are palpable, not only between Socrates and Alcibiades, but between Alcibiades and The People. In Socrates' (the good lover's) eyes, they (as bad lovers) have a basically corrupting influence over rising stars like Alcibiades, because they have the arrogance and ignorance to think they know what they do not. Their second mistake, which derives from this ignorance, is to act on and teach what they do not know. The politicians are especially guilty of acting and teaching based upon their own ignorance, but the

consequences of their actions are all the greater because of the power they wield over other men.¹³

The philosopher notes how Pericles might be one of those “few exceptions” to the rule (Plato *Alc. I.* 118c2). But Socrates (and by extension Plato) does not think that Pericles is a suitable guardian for Alcibiades. Pericles was not able to impart his knowledge of politics to his children, let alone Alcibiades’ brother, and therefore cannot really be an “expert” at politics (*Alc. I.* 118d-e). Only he, Socrates, is a suitable guardian, along with “God” or the *daimon* (*Alc. I.* 124c4-8). In hindsight though, not even Socrates could turn Alcibiades from a life of profligacy and excess. This apparent contradiction with the history of the period can best be explained with reference to the *Symposium* and the kind of erotic madness Alcibiades shows in that dialogue.

We noted Alcibiades’ astonishing desire for Socrates to take advantage of him as exemplary of the behavior of the bad ἐρώμενος: “all I had to do was to let him have his way with me, and he would teach me everything he knew” (Plato *Symp.* 217a5-7). But to no avail. It soon became apparent to Alcibiades that far from being pursued in this relationship, he was taking on the role of the hunter: “I refused to retreat from a battle I myself had begun, and I needed to know just where matters stood. So what I did was to invite him to dinner, as if I were his lover and he my young prey!” (Plato *Symp.* 217c7-10). Analyzing this episode, Gribble notes how “[t]he debased erotic deal Alcibiades offers Socrates involving his own body links the Alcibiades

¹³ We can compare Plato’s criticism of the δῆμος and the politicians to Thucydides’ arguments surrounding the Tyrannicide digression: “the Athenians are no more accurate than the rest of the world in their accounts of their own tyrants and of the facts of their own history” (6.54.1). The same could be said with regard to their cultivation of virtue in the young, something Socrates is keen on achieving himself if need be. While I do not have space enough here to pursue this line of reasoning, I would like to draw a parallel between the implicit epistemological critique present in both of these portrayals of the δῆμος. In the same way that the Athenians are unable to account for their own history, they cannot adequately (rationally) account for their political life. The two are intimately related: a rational account of their political life ultimately rests upon an accurate understanding and a rational account of their political history. Without understanding their political life, Plato would have us believe, they are unable to properly instruct their youth on how to behave virtuously in the political arena. Though they do so from different starting points and with different goals in mind, Thucydides and Plato provide overlapping critiques of the Athenians’ ability to sustain a virtuous citizenry.

episode to Socrates' vision of philosophical *eros*, which Alcibiades has missed by arriving late to the symposium, just as he has 'missed' it as a youth" (Gribble 1999, 243). In doing so, he "fails to grasp precisely the point that knowledge cannot simply be learned or passed from one to another" (Gribble 1999, 243). This interpretation ultimately transcends "the city's allegation that Socrates was capable of corrupting Alcibiades," as well as "the protreptic dialogue's [*Alcibiades I's*] implication that he was capable of turning him in a straightforward way to virtue" (Gribble 1999, 243). Due to his need for admiration and esteem, as well as the "power of existing society," Alcibiades' turn toward virtue was impossible (Gribble 1999, 243). Both, as we have seen, were conceived of erotically and in erotic terms as a consequence of Athens' erotic political culture and the strictures of the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship.

Martha Nussbaum, in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, accounts for Alcibiades' seeming inability to follow Socrates. She makes the striking claim that in the *Symposium* Alcibiades "cannot describe...[his] passion or its object in general terms, because his experience of love has happened to him this way only once, in connection with an individual [Socrates] who is seen by him to be like nobody else in the world...[His] entire speech is an attempt to communicate that uniqueness" (Nussbaum 2001, 187). This description or λόγος stands not as a reasoned account in the Socratic vein, but as a series of images and anecdotes displaying the finitude and beauty of a sensual world and an enigmatic philosopher disturbingly aloof from that world. In the same way, Alcibiades loves his city and desires its love, but he does not conceive of it as a general phenomenon consisting of laws, institutions, and politicians. He views it as a place, a culture, a historical moment unlike any other throughout time. Consequently, he loves the δῆμος (as opposed to the abstract πόλις), a

group of living, breathing men – and not just any men, but citizen-lovers of the πόλις in their own right.

But the δῆμος itself is not the proper object of desire within the Periclean Ideal. Neither is Alcibiades, insofar as he performs his role as an ἐρώμενος aggressively. Alcibiades is both a bad lover *and* a bad beloved. His overall ambivalence toward Athens' form of government is key here: Plutarch judges “that Alcibiades cared no more for an oligarchy than for a democracy, but was ready to follow any course of action to get himself recalled from exile” (Plutarch *Alc.* 25). Thus, we find him first distorting and then wholly displacing the Periclean Ideal to achieve his ends. His actions, we must remember, are all contingent upon his love for the δῆμος and his desire for its love in return. Plato recognized that these maddening desires stand opposed to the philosophical way of life and the rational pursuit of virtue. This understanding is the reason for the stark contrast between Socrates' and Alcibiades' competing views of ἔρωσ and between their methods of presentation.

Gribble comments at length on this latter aspect of their speeches. We have already noted the lengths to which Alcibiades went to shape public opinion about himself as an object of desire, an ἐρώμενος in his own right. It should not be surprising if we find the same thing occurring here. Gribble suggests that “[h]is supposedly self-revealing speech is also a carefully planned self-presentation, through which he emerges as ambitious, beautiful, and successful, but at the same time possessed of sensitive intellectual qualities which make him susceptible to the force of philosophy” (Gribble 1999, 248). Drawing a parallel with Thucydides' “aim...to recreate the charm with which this self-presentation is achieved,” Gribble suggests that “[c]haracterization emerges *through* the self-presentation” (Gribble 1999, 249). Indeed, Alcibiades is consistently defined (and self-defined) on his own terms, all for the admiration and

love of others. In presenting a story of his own love and the way his beloved loves him in return, he is presenting himself in all his beauty, glory, and rhetorical ability for the other symposiasts to desire.

VI. The Loving Ἐρώμενος:

If one is to give a full account of how Alcibiades transgressed his role as an Ἐρώμενος, it makes sense to start with the account of his youth provided by Plutarch. Alcibiades was first of all beautiful. Plutarch writes that “we need say no more than that [his beauty]...flowered at each season of his growth in turn, and lent him an extraordinary grace and charm, alike as a boy, a youth, and a man” (Plutarch *Alc.* 1). Furthermore, “[h]e was a man of many strong passions, but none of them was stronger than the desire to challenge others and gain the upper hand over his rivals” (Plutarch *Alc.* 2). The anecdote Plutarch provides about Alcibiades biting a wrestling opponent in order to avoid losing a match is instructive here: “[t]he other let go his hold and cried out, ‘Alcibiades, you bite like a woman!’ ‘No, like a lion,’ was his reply” (Plutarch *Alc.* 2). Alcibiades counters the charge of effeminacy by claiming openly the nature of a powerful – and hungry – symbol of regal greatness.

The symbolism of this anecdote is mirrored in a passage of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, lines 1431-2, quoted by Plutarch later in his biography: “Better not bring up a lion inside your city, / But if you must, then humour all his moods” (Plutarch *Alc.* 16). In his depiction of Alcibiades as a lion cub, Aristophanes (and by extension Plutarch) draws a connection to Aeschylus’ metaphorical description of Helen in his *Agamemnon*. In that play Aeschylus has the chorus lament “a lion cub,” which was raised in captivity and “played with children / and delighted the old” (Aeschylus *Ag.*, 718, 721-22). This “they pampered...like a newborn child” (Aeschylus *Ag.*, 724).

But it grew with time, and the lion
in the blood strain came out; it paid
grace to those who had fostered it
in blood and death for the sheep flocks,
a grim feast forbidden. (Aeschylus *Ag.*, 727-731).

Between these texts we have two figures, linked by the lion metaphor, who caused untold damage and loss of life on account of their beauty and the intense desire they aroused in others. But beyond these shared traits, Alcibiades possessed an inner drive for power and victory, as well as a flare for the dramatic and the outrageous. He is said to have cut the tail off of his “exceptionally large and handsome dog” to give the Athenians something to say about him and to “stop them saying anything worse about [him]” (Plutarch *Alc.* 9). He was also capricious. Plutarch says that his “character was to reveal many changes and inconsistencies, as one might expect in a career such as his, which was spent in the midst of great enterprises and shifts of fortune” (Plutarch *Alc.* 2).

His effeminacy was another crucial component of his allure for others. Wohl interprets the wrestling episode thus: “is he a girl or a lion?” (Wohl 2002, 134). She notes Plutarch’s comparison of Alcibiades with Helen, “not for his effeminate beauty and desirability but for his changeable nature” (Wohl 2002, 134-5). Indeed, like Helen, “Alcibiades can make himself a reflection of every man’s desire” (Wohl 2002, 135). Thus we find his ability to “assimilate and adapt himself to the pursuits and the manner of living of others and submit himself to more startling transformations than a chameleon” (Plutarch *Alc.* 23). It was this “special gift which surpassed all the rest and served to attach men to him” (Plutarch *Alc.* 23). In the classical imagination, his effeminacy thus runs deeper. Wohl notes how “[l]ike a woman, Alcibiades hides his true nature behind a seductive but false exterior” (Wohl 2002, 135).

Not surprisingly, in a political culture so erotically charged, “[i]t was not long before Alcibides was surrounded and pursued by many admirers of high rank. Most of them were plainly captivated by the brilliance of his youthful beauty and courted him on this account” (Plutarch *Alc.* 4). Though he scorned many of these lovers in favor of Socrates, who “alone...he feared and respected,” “there were times when he would surrender himself to his flatterers, who promised him all kinds of pleasures” (Plutarch *Alc.* 6). Plutarch tells us that “Alcibiades was carefree and easily led into pleasure; that lawless self-indulgence in his daily life, which Thucydides mentions, gives reason to suspect this” (Plutarch *Alc.* 6). Indeed, “the weakness which his tempters played upon most of all was his love of distinction and his desire for fame, and in this way they pressed him into embarking on ambitious projects before he was ready for them” (Plutarch *Alc.* 6). These notably bad ἐρασταί even “assured him that once he entered public life, he would not merely eclipse the other generals and politicians, but even surpass the power and prestige which Pericles had enjoyed in the eyes of the Greeks” (Plutarch *Alc.* 6).

In many instances then, Alcibiades expresses a desire to be seen and *wanted* by others, as well as a desire to outdo his competitors. In this regard, he embodied what for the Greeks was the perversion of “[a]n overeager eromenos,” which “might evoke the figure of the boy-whore” (Wohl 2002, 131). Foucault tells us as much: the ἐρώμενος “had to be careful not to yield too easily; he also had to keep from accepting too many tokens of love, and from granting his favors heedlessly and out of self-interest, without testing the worth of his partner” (Foucault 1985, 196). Alcibiades’ revelation to the guests at Agathon’s in the *Symposium* that he actively sought Socrates’ penetration out of self-interest must have been astonishing. His anticipation of their reaction would explain Alcibiades’ disclaimer, before relating the story of how *he* tried to seduce

the older Socrates, that the company would “forgive both what I did then and what I say now” (Plato *Symp.* 218b5-6).

His justification is also suspect: Alcibiades cites “the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy” as a cause of this unacceptable conduct (Plato *Symp.* 218b3-4). Monoson considers “[i]conographic evidence” from the period, in which “[t]he boy is shown as yielding only in gratitude for clearly defined benefits received, not out of sexual appetite or his own erotic madness” (Monoson 2000, 78). Madness would not have been an adequate excuse for his attempt to seduce Socrates. We thus find that self-control on the part of the beloved was “necessary to evade the potentially problematic implications of sexual activity between these two parties” (the adult lover and young beloved) (Monoson 2000, 78). Alcibiades, in trying to elicit Socrates’ penetration, crosses a boundary that a citizen-to-be, an ἐρώμενος, should not cross. He is far too aggressive in the pursuit of pleasure and far too eager to please others for the sake of what they could give him, whether wisdom or political influence (Wohl 2002, 131). He ultimately distorts the ideal image of self-controlled lover and beloved by exceeding his role as ἐρώμενος.

This tendency appears in public as well. While at times Alcibiades is subject to the whims, schemes, and diversions of his suitors and the broader Athenian citizenry, at others he appears to have full mastery over his lovers –and the larger δῆμος –as an ἐρώμενος. Wohl notes how “Alcibiades’s sex appeal carries with it political authority...always imagined in sexual terms: his power makes him desirable and to desire him is to desire to be ruled by him. It is as Eros that he wields his political thunder” (Wohl 2002, 130). The episode involving a hidden quail shows just how much the δῆμος was enthralled with the youth. When he “offered a contribution himself” to a “public conscription,...[t]he crowd clapped their hands and cheered with delight” (Plutarch *Alc.* 10). The noise scared “a quail which he happened to be carrying under his cloak”

that then took off (Plutarch *Alc.* 10). The assembled citizens were amazed and “shouted all the louder and many of them jumped up to help chase the bird” (Plutarch *Alc.* 10). One can only imagine all of them vying for his affection to the point of submitting *themselves* to his needs and whims. Their self-submission is crucial. A lover was not supposed to submit in any way to his beloved. On the contrary, he was supposed to guide his beloved in the latter’s best interests and to not give in to his shifting moods. Here the δῆμος acts like the bad ἐραστής described above, and Alcibiades acts like the fickle, demanding ἐρώμενος we found in Plato’s *Gorgias*.

A turn to Thucydides’ portrayal of Alcibiades’ speech to the Athenians in support of the Sicilian Expedition will be useful to see how the historian judges this aspect of his corrupt relationship. Two points of resonance occur with other speeches in the text: one with Pericles’ Oration, and another with the speech of the Athenian envoys at Sparta before the war. These three speeches ultimately rest on Athenians’ sense of national character. They differ with respect to their consequences for the πόλις, the proper ἐρώμενη for the model Periclean citizen-ἐραστής, and the δῆμος, the improper object of desire for debased ἐρασταί like Alcibiades and his rivals.

Thucydides comments that Alcibiades “wished to thwart Nicias both as his political opponent,” and that he was “exceedingly ambitious of a command by which he hoped to reduce Sicily and Carthage, and personally to gain in wealth and reputation by means of his successes” (6.15.2). Likely Plutarch’s source for the above character sketch, Thucydides indicates the great extent to which personal considerations weighed on Alcibiades’ support for this fateful public decision. Alcibiades also sought to surpass Nicias in the love which Sparta bore them: “[i]t caused Alcibiades great annoyance that Nicias was as much admired by the enemies of Athens as he was by his own fellow citizens” (Plutarch *Alc.* 13). Alcibiades here desires and vies to be as beloved by the Spartan δῆμος as by the Athenian δῆμος. This same desire led to his concocting a

series of alliances with disaffected Peloponnesian cities like Mantinea and organizing a rebellion against Spartan hegemony in the region that would ultimately end at the Battle of Mantinea in 418 BCE (Plutarch *Alc.* 14-15).

Alcibiades' private lifestyle is explicitly implicated in Athens' fall. Indeed "the position he held among the citizens led him to indulge his tastes beyond what his real means would bear, both in keeping horses and in the rest of his expenditure; and this later on had not a little to do with the ruin of the Athenian state" (6.15.3).¹⁴ Once again, the very fear that animated Pericles' Ideal, the fear that an individual would seek to subordinate the good of the city to his own ends – even going so far as to harm the city to advance these ends – finds expression in Alcibiades' actions and contributes to his exile in 415 BCE. Thucydides concludes that "although in his public life his conduct of the war was as good as could be desired, in his private life his habits gave offense to everyone, and caused them to commit affairs to other hands, and thus before long to ruin the city" (6.15.4). Thucydides admits Alcibiades' extraordinary capabilities, while at the same time passing judgment on the man's personal conduct. He does so as a consequence of the public import of the man's private actions, motivated as they were by a desire to present a distinct image to his contemporaries. The episode in which he cut his dog's tail off shows how much he sought to shape public opinion about himself (Plutarch *Alc.* 9).

We have as further evidence Thucydides' rendering of Alcibiades' words in defense of his own extravagant conduct: "any splendor that I may have exhibited at home in providing choruses or otherwise, is naturally envied by my fellow citizens, but in the eyes of foreigners has an air of strength" (6.16.3). "And this is no useless folly," he continues, "when a man at his own private cost benefits not himself only, but his city: nor is it unfair that he who prides himself on

¹⁴ Wohl sees a tyrannical element in his private life: "[h]is extravagance, effeminacy, sexual voracity, and foreign affiliations all chime with the Athenian imagination of the tyrant: self-indulgent and sybaritic, emptying state coffers to pay for his pleasures, making the polis an instrument of his own insatiable enjoyment" (Wohl 2002, 137).

his position should refuse to be upon an equality with the rest” (6.16.3-4). Plutarch provides a confirmation of this bold claim: “[h]is success at Olympia was made all the more brilliant by the way in which the various cities vied with each other to do him honour” (Plutarch *Alc.* 12). Thucydides has Alcibiades placing the interests of the πόλις in a subordinate and derivative position relative to his own interests. In doing so, Alcibiades distorts the kind of relationship advocated by Pericles. By contrast, in the Funeral Oration, “interactions befitting free citizens and a free city are those of mutual exchange, understood on the pattern of benefaction and gratitude, which tie in with the compulsion of honor, not power” (Monoson 2000, 83). In this scheme, “benefaction and gratitude is properly a relation between every individual and the whole polis, not between a wealthy individual and poorer individuals,” as was the case of Alcibiades and the δῆμος (Monoson 2000, 83-84).

Reciprocity is understood to occur between the citizen and the πόλις, not a citizen and the δῆμος. In acting virtuously and potentially contributing their lives, citizens “actively” sustain and better the πόλις, in much the same way one might look after and benefit one’s ἐρώμενος (Monoson 2000, 83). Within the norms of the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship, this conduct by the lover is perfectly legitimate. In the same way that ἐρασταί come to love beautiful ἐρώμενοι, “[c]itizens [should] become lovers of a specific object, the city of Athens, after having perceived that it possesses an exceptionally alluring quality, power...referring chiefly to Athens’ possession of empire,” as well as “the greatness of the democratic patterns of life that define Athens” (Monoson 2000, 73). Alcibiades seeks personal gain and in doing so, displaces this reciprocal relation between citizen and πόλις, taking on the role that the city should rightly play: that of the ἐρώμενος of the citizenry. Alcibiades arouses the submissive desire of the δῆμος in addition to violently, jealously loving the δῆμος. He crowds out any remaining tie between the

citizenry and their Idealized city, much to their detriment and to the detriment of Athens' institutions and political culture. In Thucydides' eyes, Alcibiades debases both himself and the δῆμος by becoming its beloved in place of the idealized πόλις.

Alcibiades' temptation of the δῆμος has catastrophic consequences. Thucydides notes that the demagogues drew their fellow citizens into "projects whose success would only conduce to the honor and advantage of private persons, and whose failure entailed certain disaster on the country in the war" (2.65.7). This comment brings us to the Sicilian Expedition. Alcibiades motivates his countrymen by appealing to their nature and by their previous conduct: "It is thus that empire has been won...by a constant readiness to support all...that invite assistance; since if all were to keep quiet or to pick and choose whom they ought to assist, we should make but few new conquests, and should imperil those we have already won" (6.18.2). We may compare Plutarch's assessment of the man's impulsiveness and his proclivity to begin "great enterprises" on a personal whim or at the suggestion of his admirers (Plutarch *Alc.* 2). Once again, Alcibiades was capricious. But he was also calculating: he schemes to whip up the people into a frenzy over Sicily and secure their love through subduing the country. He arouses desire at the same time as he plans to fulfill it. Nicias fails to dissuade his countrymen, καὶ ἔρωσ ἐνέπεσε τοῖς πᾶσιν ὁμοίως ἐκπλεῦσαι, "and eros fell upon all equally to sail out" (6.24.3). This use of ἔρωσ is key: Thucydides explicitly names desire as one of the major contributing factors in driving the citizenry to man the expedition. We must note the erotic language in this passage: the historian uses the word πόθος (a longing, desire, or yearning) to describe how "those in the prime of life" felt "for foreign sights and spectacles" (6.24.3). He also writes of the "exceeding desire of the many," τὴν ἄγαν τῶν πλεόνων ἐπιθυμίαν, as a force overwhelming any opposition (6.24.4).

In appealing to their nature, Alcibiades invokes for his fellow countrymen the soaring rhetoric of Pericles' Oration and the sense of identity that that speech instilled in its audience. He also adds a sense of urgency, lacking in the Oration, to live up to who they are and to seize the day: "we cannot fix the exact point at which our empire shall stop; we have reached a position in which we must not be content with retaining what we have but must scheme to extend it for, if we cease to rule others, we shall be in danger of being ruled ourselves" (6.18.3). "Nor can you look at inaction from the same point of view as others," he warns, "unless you are prepared to change your habits and make them resemble theirs" (6.18.3). Alcibiades is here pointing out the danger in the Athenians' becoming what they are not. This warning is ironic coming from one whose political career is founded upon transgressing the very gender roles that comprise Athenian citizenship. A further irony is the way Alcibiades forces his lover the δῆμος to act like him: fickle, ambitious, and motivated by πλεονεξία – in direct contravention of the model ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship. In doing so, he again transgresses his role as an ἐρώμενος.

And yet, there is some precedent for his words. In Alcibiades' speech to the Athenians, there is an implicit allusion to the speech of the Corinthians at Sparta where they compare the Athenian and Spartan national characters. The Corinthian envoys say of the Athenians that "[t]he deficiency created by the miscarriage of an undertaking is soon filled up by fresh hopes; for they alone are enabled to call a thing hoped for a thing got, by the speed with which they act upon their resolutions" (1.70.7). In essence, "they toil on in trouble and danger all the days of their life, with little opportunity for enjoying, being ever engaged in getting" (1.70.8). The Athenian envoys could not agree more, and state that they will not "combat the accusations of the cities" (1.73.1). They brazenly conclude "that it was not a very remarkable action, or contrary to the common practice of mankind, if we did accept an empire that was offered to us, and refused to

give it up under the pressure of three of the strongest motives, fear, honor, and interest” (1.76.2).

The Athenians are here embracing their acquisitive nature and using that nature to justify the hegemony they won in the aftermath of the Persian Wars.¹⁵

Alcibiades only reiterates the main point of the Athenians’ speech to the Corinthians when he calls upon his countrymen to invade Sicily. But he adds a special twist in this appeal their nature. Alcibiades comments on the young and the old: “do not let the passive policy which Nicias advocates, or his setting of the young against the old, turn you from your purpose, but in the good old fashion (τῷ δὲ εἰωθότι κόσμῳ) by which our fathers, old and young together, by their united counsels brought our affairs to their present height, do you endeavor still to advance them; understanding that neither youth nor old age can do anything the one without the other” (6.18.6). The erotic connection between the young and the old in this context would not have been lost on his audience. Nor would the Athenians have failed to remember the Ideal, the model of the older ἐραστής guiding his younger, dynamic, though sometimes unruly ἐρώμενος. In essence, he is accusing Nicias of setting the passions of the youth and the careful restraint of the aged against one another. “In short, my conviction is that a city not inactive by nature could not choose a quicker way to ruin itself than by suddenly adopting such a policy, and that the safest rule of life is to take one’s character and institutions for better and for worse, and to live up to them as closely as one can” (6.18.7). Thus he provides his summary of the main points above: do not abandon your nature, but live up to it. This warning applies as much to the polis’ inherent dynamism as to its erotic politics.

¹⁵ We must note the contrast between the acquisitive nature of the δῆμος invoked here and the restrained nature of the idealized Periclean πόλις. In the wake of the plague and the Spartans’ second invasion of Attica, Thucydides has Pericles remind his fellow citizens that “your country has a right to your services in sustaining the glories of her position” (2.63.1). Nowhere in this speech does he say that they should acquire more. On the contrary, he says that “what you hold is, to speak somewhat plainly, a tyranny; to take it perhaps was wrong, but to let it go is unsafe” (2.63.2). The emphasis is on maintaining what they already have, not on “attempt[ing]...new conquests” (2.65.7).

VII. Thucydides' Critique of the Myth of the Tyrannicides and its reception by the δῆμος:

Alcibiades' appeal to unity between the young and the old has a special resonance with the myth of the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton that must be examined in detail. The series of episodes occurring after Alcibiades' speech in favor of the Sicilian Expedition is broken up by a digression upon this myth about an ἐραστής and an ἐρώμενος who were thought to have ended the rule of the Pisistratid dynasty in Athens. Thucydides comments at some length about the Athenians' mistaken views of the end of the tyranny and the faulty conclusions they drew from the myth in coping with the mutilation of the Herms and the supposed profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, events that brought about Alcibiades' exile. He sees the Athenians' mistaken reception of the myth and their consequent failure to address the mutilation and profanation properly as another manifestation of the bad ἔρως Alcibiades elicited from the δῆμος.

Monoson, in giving an account of the Athenian democratic life, treats the tyrannicide myth at length. She describes the depiction of Harmodius and Aristogeiton in a "group statue [set in the agora]...by Kritios and Nesiotes": "[i]t visually represents the achievement of a sort of solidarity. It engages the viewer in imagining the strength that comes from uniting youthful vigor and boldness with mature, considerate determination" (Monoson 2000, 31). The erotic dimension of this "solidarity" was not lost on the viewers (Monoson 2000, 31). Indeed, Monoson suggests, the image "represented a politicization of their erotic relationship. The liberation depended on the manly virtues that the erotic bond between these men had nurtured" (Monoson 2000, 39). Thus we find Pausanias' reference to the myth in the *Symposium*. Speaking of the prevailing attitudes to pederasty in Persia and Ionia, he says that

[i]t is no good for rulers if the people they rule cherish ambitions for themselves or form strong bonds of friendship with one another. That these are precisely the effects of

philosophy, sport, and especially of Love is a lesson the tyrants of Athens learned directly from their own experience: Didn't their reign come to a dismal end because of the bonds uniting Harmodius and Aristogiton in love and affection? (Plato *Symp.* 182c1-d1).

This passage stands with Pericles' Oration as one of the clearest expressions of Athens' democratic *ἔργον*. An interesting element of the myth is the way in which it "resolved the potential for conflict between a citizens' public and private loyalties" (Monoson 2000, 37). Indeed, "the lovers' loyalty to each other and to the familial interest of the kin of Harmodius were all consistent with the best interest of the city, understood as liberation from the tyrant" (Monoson 2000, 37). The reward for their act of self-sacrifice was the "exceptional personal glory" afforded to them by later generations (Monoson 2000, 40). "Invoking their memory represented the citizen, even in dying, not only as giving but also as receiving something of great value" (Monoson 2000, 40). This principle is, as we have seen, operative in Pericles' Oration. In the popular imagination, the ideal of the tyrannicides overlaps with and reinforces that of the Oration. Alcibiades' audience would have had in mind the image of the tyrannicides and their erotic-democratic glory. The irony is that Athenians' memories of the myth would ultimately bring about his exile. Thucydides criticizes the people's perverted (i.e. irrational or ignorant) reception of the myth on the grounds that it drove Alcibiades from the city and set in motion Athens' failure in Sicily and in the wider war.

Thucydides' critique of the myth and its consequences in the aftermath of the mutilation and profanation raises a very potent issue. Is he here critiquing Athens' democratic *ἔργον* in its entirety, or is he outlining a way in which that *ἔργον* strayed from Pericles' Ideal? I would side with the latter interpretation. The mutilation of the Herms "was thought to be ominous for the expedition, and part of a conspiracy to bring about a revolution and to upset the democracy" (6.27.3). A preliminary investigation into the matter yielded "[i]nformation...given by some

resident aliens and body servants, not about the Hermae but of some previous mutilations of other images perpetrated by young men in a drunken frolic, and of mock celebrations of the Mysteries, alleged to have taken place in private houses” (6.28.1). Alcibiades’ name came up in connection to this profanation, and his enemies acted swiftly (6.28.2). Desiring “the undisturbed leadership of The People,” they “magnified the matter and loudly proclaimed that the affair of the Mysteries and the mutilation of the Hermae were part and parcel of a scheme to overthrow the democracy,” and emphasized Alcibiades’ role in all of it (6.28.2). They used as “proofs...the general and undemocratic license of his life and habits,” his *παρανομία* (6.28.2).

Though Alcibiades “offered to stand trial before going on the expedition,” his enemies decided to wait until he had left for Sicily to impugn him even more and then to recall him on “some graver charge” (6.29.1-3). Thucydides’ account of his recall is cut short by the aforementioned digression. “The People,” he says “had heard how oppressive the tyranny of Pisistratus and his sons had become before it ended, and further that his tyranny had been put down at last, not by themselves and Harmodius, but by the Spartans, and so were always in fear and took everything seriously” (6.53.3). Wohl makes the interesting suggestion about this particular passage that “[i]n the popular imagination of the tyrannicide, the Athenian demos takes the place of Aristogiton, fighting at Harmodius’s side to end the tyranny” (Wohl 2002, 8). Here, “[a]s a *mesos politēs*, an average Athenian, Aristogiton becomes a figure with whom all Athenians, regardless of status could identify” (Wohl 2002, 8). In a sense, “every Athenian was an Aristogiton” (Wohl 2002, 8). This symbolic equality sits easily beside Pericles’ Ideal, according to which every Athenian has a duty toward benefitting the *πόλις* and can expect rewards in his turn.¹⁶ Athenians’ memories of this episode, in connection with the mutilation of

¹⁶ Relevant here is the point in Pericles’ rebuke of the Athenians, following the plague of 430, where he says “[a] man may be personally ever so well off, and yet if his country be ruined he must be ruined with it; whereas a

the Herms and Alcibiades' supposed involvement in the supposed plot, are all the more powerful.

Aristogeiton is characterized as an “enraged lover, afraid that the powerful Hipparchus might take Harmodius by force” (6.54.3). He “immediately formed a design, such as his condition in life permitted, for overthrowing the tyranny” (6.54.3). On this basis, we find Thucydides equating this bad ἐραστής with the δῆμος. In her essay *Thucydides on Harmodius and Aristogeiton, Tyranny, and History*, Elizabeth A. Meyer suggests as much. Both the δῆμος (after remembering the myth) and Aristogeiton (after Hipparchus' “insult” to Harmodius) act with ὀργή, or rage, specifically “erotic rage” (Meyer 2008, 21, 16). This “is rarely a rational emotion, usually leading to rash, heedless, and excessive action” (Meyer 2008, 16). The δῆμος and Aristogeiton engage in all three kinds of ἔργα. We have clear examples of these ἔργα in the Athenians' “harshness and their suspicions of fellow-citizens...and in their willingness to act violently (and without due consideration),” as well as in Aristogeiton's attempt to bring down the tyranny (Meyer 2008, 20-21). By contrast, “Hipparchus...acted like the model would-be *erastes*: pursuing after a first refusal, and not using tricks or political pressure or violence” (Meyer 2008, 16). An element of “shame” probably colored his “subsequent desire to take some compensating vengeance” by denying Harmodius' sister a place in a Panathenaic procession, a move “well within the world of Greek popular morality” (6.56.1; Meyer 2008, 16). By contrast, Meyer suggests, “the fear and fury of an *erastes* (Aristogeiton) on behalf of his *eromenos* (Harmodius) is not” (Meyer 2008, 16). The “preparation of an invisible insult [by the shunned ἐραστής] was [therefore] a calculated and reasonable option on the part of a very powerful man, since Hipparchus was avoiding the violence Aristogeiton assumed he could have used” (Meyer 2008,

flourishing commonwealth always affords chances of salvation to unfortunate individuals” (2.60.3). Notable too is Alcibiades' inversion of this concept in his speech in support of the Sicilian Expedition (6.16.3).

16). The Athenians are equally mistaken: “[w]ith these events in their minds, and recalling everything they knew by hearsay on the subject, the Athenian people grew uneasy and suspicious of the persons charged in the affair of the Mysteries, and became convinced that all...was part of an oligarchic and monarchical conspiracy” (6.60.1). Meyer calls this connection a “false parallel,” in which the Athenians conflate the profanation’s “immediate object (the goddesses’s Mysteries)” with “the democracy” (Meyer 2008, 21). Here, she contends, “the Athenians...extrapolated, against their better nature as Pericles had described it, from the private to the public” (Meyer 2008, 22). Aristogeiton does the same, bringing a personal conflict, “a love affair,” into the public domain by trying to kill the tyrant Hippias (6.54.1). In sum, we have δῆμος contravening Pericles’ sweeping appraisal of Athenian life: “[t]he freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life” (2.37.2).¹⁷

In the end, the “tyrannicides” go for Hippias’ brother, having “concluded that they had been discovered and were on the point of being arrested” after “seeing one of their accomplices talking familiarly with Hippias, who was easily accessible to everyone” (6.57.2). Not only do they fail to kill the tyrant, but they fail as a consequence of a grave error of judgment. Their motives are ultimately misguided and their execution of the operation mishandled. The Athenians – who go by “hearsay,” their skewed interpretation of the myth, and the urgings of Alcibiades’ rivals – fail in much the same way (6.60.1). Monoson distills it perfectly: “[i]t was on [this] ‘hearsay evidence’ that the Athenians took Hippias’ tyranny to have grown increasingly harsh on its own, that is, absent the murder of Hipparchus” (Monoson 2000, 48).

¹⁷ But we find in the initial accusation leveled at Alcibiades a private appropriation of a public rite. Thucydides notes how the “mock celebration of the Mysteries, [were] alleged to have taken place in private houses” (6.28.1). The implications of this comment complicate Thucydides’ implicit criticism of all the parties involved in the episode. It appears as though Alcibiades’ and the Athenians’ appropriations move in opposite directions, however much Thucydides wishes to ignore the religious impact of Alcibiades’ tyrannical privatization of the public rituals. Ultimately, Pericles’ injunction toward restraint implicit in his description of Athenian life goes both ways. He balances his praise for the liberality of Athens’ government with this statement: “this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless citizens” (2.37.3).

“In getting this wrong,” she concludes, “they failed to acquire the tools necessary to observe that fear and suspicion triggered the cycle of violence” (Monoson 2000, 48). In the end, “the tyranny pressed harder on the Athenians, and Hippias, now grown more fearful, put to death many of the citizens” (6.59.2).¹⁸ Their turn against Alcibiades occurs in much the same way as the tyrannicides’ spur-of-the-moment attempt on Hipparchus. The Athenians mistake “a Spartan army [that] appeared on the Isthmus...[as] a threat to the city brought about by the collusion with the now absent Alcibiades” (Meyer 2008, 20). Again, in their motives and means, they are fundamentally misguided and their actions bring about the very results they wished to avoid in the first place.

We see now the ultimate consequence of the Athenians’ love for Alcibiades and his own desire for that love. “[T]he general and undemocratic license of his life and habits” were exploited by his rivals and used as “proofs” of his guilt in the profanation of the Mysteries and the wider plot (6.28.2). One must recall the line from Aristophanes’ *Frogs*: “They long for him, they hate him, they cannot do without him” (Plutarch *Alc.* 16). The kind of erotic reciprocity with the δῆμος that Alcibiades’ cultivated was itself a marked departure from Pericles’ idealized reciprocity of city and citizen lover. These forms of reciprocity differ with respect to their principal components. On the one hand, we have Alcibiades tempting the δῆμος as an object of desire, an ἐρώμενος, and being courted in return. On the other hand, we have the citizen-lover willing to give his life for a city that can award him glory unto eternity, a city he loves in the same way a model ἐραστής loves a youthful ἐρώμενος and seeks his betterment. Thucydides gives unwavering support for the latter form of the erotic relationship, one grounded in restraint and the desire to better the well-behaved ἐρώμενος. By contrast, Alcibiades’ erotic relationship,

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that just like Hippias, the Athenians “became what they most feared, tyrants themselves...because they came to oppress their own citizens, acting unjustly in order to achieve a measure of relief for themselves” (Meyer 2008, 24).

as Thucydides describes it, catalyzes the political and social upheavals that bring about Athens' downfall, which begins with the Sicilian Expedition.

VIII. Conclusion:

Alcibiades' erotic ambiguity ultimately threatens Socrates' ethical program and the entire basis for Athens' rationally grounded political culture. But in doing so, it only highlights the urgency of sustaining rational inquiry with an eye toward generating a sober, rational political discourse. His marked presence in Athens and among her enemies during the Peloponnesian War exacerbated an already vicious conflict and, more importantly, elicited a corrupt passion in those very citizens who were, by Pericles' astute judgment, to give their lives to their πόλις as a model lover might benefit and cultivate virtue in his beloved. In this way, the Periclean (Thucydidean) and the Socratic (Platonic) ethical programs sought the same goal: the growth of a rational restraint in Athens' citizens that would conduce to sound international and domestic policy, social harmony, and a general love of truth and intellectual inquiry.

Alcibiades' kind of love, by contrast, removes all hope for a rational order founded around the ἐραστής-ἐρώμενος relationship. As a consequence of his consistent transgression of these clearly defined gender roles, he brings about a change in the conduct of his fellow citizens and the δῆμος as a whole. The δῆμος goes from being a restrained lover of an idealized πόλις to being the fawning, raging lover of the capricious Alcibiades. At the same time it becomes this perverted lover's ἐρώμενος, subject to his needs and desires in a subordinate position. As evidenced most clearly by their failure in the Sicilian Expedition, their misguided conduct surrounding the Mutilation of the Herms, and their ultimate defeat in the war against the Spartans, the consequences for the Athenians' foreign and domestic policy were catastrophic.

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