

EROTES

by Lucian of Samosata

English rendition by Andrew Calimach

Preface

The origins of male love are lost in the mists of prehistory. In fact, they go back to the dawn of man, if observations of animals in the wild are any guide. Though same-sex sexual activity is widespread throughout the animal kingdom, it is predominantly a characteristic of higher species: the more evolved the animal, the more frequent its occurrence.¹ We have no way of knowing what animals think of this topic. Humans, however, are possessed of speech, so that wherever a history of male love has survived, so have records of the conversations inspired by it. These debates have been going on, in various forms, for over two thousand years, so they are unlikely to be concluded any time soon. We might, however, steal a page from the arguments of our forefathers, and inject a little humor and poetry into our modern day disputes. Perhaps then the chase for some absolute truth will not be so all-consuming.

This dialogue was written in Greek in the early years of our era by Lucian of Samosata (a town on the Euphrates, present-day Samsat, in modern Turkey).² It reveals to our twenty-first-century eyes idealism and prejudice; humor and misogyny; a sense of play, sometimes fair and sometimes not; and a seriousness leavened by lightness of heart. Before us are arrayed the trappings of philosophical inquiry, along with specious arguments delivered with great vehemence. We would be justified to conclude that many things have not changed in the past two thousand years, while we smile, or frown, at how much has indeed changed.

¹ See Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999)

²The authorship is contested by many modern scholars, thus the work is generally cited under the name of pseudo-Lucian of Samosata.

One thing that has not changed is the confusion often present in discussions of what is now dubbed “homosexuality,” which purports to conflate attraction with specific acts. Charicles, the fictional character in this dialogue who presents the argument against lying with males, argues against one thing and one thing only—anal sex with another male.³ His opponent, Callicratidas, defends the construction of male love prevalent among educated Athenians (as well as Spartans, Thebans, and Cretans) of his time. This was a chaste pederasty that consisted of the attraction, love, and mentorship between a grown man and an adolescent boy, but explicitly rejected acts of penetration in the relations between lover and beloved. This is not to say that somehow this “pure” or “noble” pederasty was in any way not sexual, or frigid. We can be certain that it was fully sexual in that the lovers surely enjoyed the peak of pleasure. Their lovemaking, however, consisted of acts that were seen as not debasing to either partner.

Thus the two opponents in this debate talk past each other, neither acknowledging the veracity of his opponent’s arguments. Callicratidas makes no answer to Charicles’ accusations, characteristic of his time and historically accurate, that many men do indeed abuse, dishonor, and harm their boy beloveds by penetrating them, in flagrant contravention of mainstream Greek morals. Perhaps that is because of his own complicity in such behavior, hinted at by the nature of his interest in the statue of Aphrodite. Charicles has nothing to say about an affectionate and constructive chaste pederasty that does not imply the degradation of both lover and beloved by acts of *hubris*, which in this context was not used in its modern sense of “arrogance” but as a technical term for acts of sexual penetration, regardless of whether they were forced or voluntary.⁴ Could

³ In contrast to this stance, Charicles asserts anal sex with a woman is a tolerable option: “the road is open to a double enjoyment,” suggesting that his objection to anal sex is not based primarily on aesthetic or medical considerations, but rather gravitates around issues of loss of dignity and masculinity. There is a subtle irony in his statement as well, since if the text is read closely it appears to be an attack on buggery carried out by two closeted buggers. One simply prefers boys while the other uses women, but each makes efforts to outdo the other in his condemnation of buggery, implied or explicit.

⁴ For more detailed analyses of the opprobrium attached to anal sex, particularly in the context of pederastic relationships, see Harvey Yunis’ commentary in *Phaedrus*, pp 152, 161. 2011, Cambridge U. In support of this view. Yunis cites David Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society*, Cambridge, 1991, and *Law*,

that be because of his fixation on women and inability, or refusal, to react erotically and sentimentally to the beauty of a youth, as did the great majority of the men of his time?

The significance of the dialogue is best expressed in the words of the great classicist and male love pioneer, John Addington Symonds: “More than any other composition of the rhetorical age of Greek literature, it sums up the teaching of the doctors and the predilections of the vulgar in one treatise. Like many of Lucian’s compositions it has what may be termed a retrospective and resumptive value. That is to say, it represents less the actual feeling of the author and his age than the result of his reading and reflection brought into harmony with his experience”.⁵

Violence, and Community in Classical Athens, 1995; Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 7.1148b30; Demosthenes 22.58; Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 1.185; Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.1.30;

See also David Cohen, *Consent and Sexual Relations in Classical Athens*, in Angeliki E. Laiou, ed. (1993) *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, p. 13 and Thornton, Bruce S. (1997). *Eros: The Myth of Ancient Greek Sexuality*. Westview Press. pp. 256–258, 264.

⁵ John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics: Studies in Sexual Inversion*, p.78

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Lycinus: Since daybreak, friend Theomnestus, you have been filling my ears with love's games. I was fed up with serious affairs and thirsted for some diversion, such as your words' enchanting stream. The human spirit has need of respite—it craves a touch of relaxation, a taste of pleasure. All morning long your vivid and delightful stories made me feel like Aristides the Milesian, that writer of steamy tales. I swear upon those loves of yours, to which you have presented such a broad target, I'm truly sorry you've made an end of them! I beg you, in the name of Aphrodite herself should you think I am joking, recount another adventure with boys or with girls; come, search your memory! Besides, today is the festival of Hercules—we need a sacrifice. I'm sure you know how wild this god is about Love; your tales will please him more than victims.

Theomnestus: You'd sooner count the waves upon the sea, or the rushing snowflakes, Lycinus, than all my loves. I think they've emptied their quiver into me, so were they to chase after another, their unarmed hand would draw only laughter. Ever since boyhood gave way to youth I gave them leave to feast upon me. Loves followed hard and fast upon each other: before one ended another began. Like veritable Lernean⁶ heads they were, more numerous still than those of the Hydra, and defying the flaming torch of Iolaus—as if fire could ever put out fire. No doubt there is some lodestone in my eyes that tirelessly attracts all who are beautiful. I have even asked myself, more than once, whether such abundance of favors was not some curse of Aphrodite. And yet I'm no child of Helios,⁷ nor some

⁶ The heads of the Hydra, denizen of the Lernean marsh; when one was cut, two more sprang from the stump.

⁷ Helios, who saw all from his chariot in the sky, spied Aphrodite in Ares' arms. He wasted no time in telling her husband, Hephaestus, the god of blacksmiths. He fashioned an unbreakable net, trapped the entwined lovers in the act, and displayed them to the other gods. Aphrodite never forgave Helios, and paid back his treachery by persecuting his mortal daughters.

insolent Lemnian,⁸ nor that boor Hippolytus.⁹

Lycinus: Spare me your hypocrisy, Theomnestus! What?! Would you blame Fortune for a life awash in pretty women and boys in the flower of their youth? Perhaps we should offer sacrifices of atonement to cure you of such a dread disease. All kidding aside, consider yourself fortunate the gods did not fate you to the grimy toil of the farmer, the peregrinations of the merchant, or the perils of army life. Your only preoccupation in the world is to stroll through wrestling schools redolent of massage oil, to primp the folds of your purple robe, or treat yourself to yet another fancy hairdo. Besides, these torments of love you gripe about only heap delight upon delight, and desire's bite is sweet. When you tempt, you joy in hope. When you win, you joy in pleasure: present and future hold only delectation for you. Just now, as you were drawing up the tally of your loves with a precision worthy of Hesiod, your eyes melted, your voice flowed more sweetly than the voices of Lycambes' daughters,¹⁰ and your whole demeanor shouted out you were in love with love, as well as with its memory. Come, if you've left out any part of your journey with Aphrodite, repair the fault right away: Hercules will have his victim whole.

Theomnestus: This god, Lycinus, is an eater of oxen. What's more, he likes his victims steaming. If we are to honor him with stories, mine have dragged on long enough and grown stale. Your turn, please. Let your own Muse cast off her usual gravity and spend the day delighting together with the god! I see you do not favor one love over the other, so be an impartial judge please: Tell me who is better—the lover of boys, or the one who delights in women? I, who am smitten by both, lean neither this way nor

⁸ The women of Lemnos had no respect for Aphrodite. As punishment, the goddess cursed them with a stench so foul it drove their men away.

⁹ Hippolytus, the son of Theseus, hated women, and so remained chaste. Aphrodite took mortal offense, and caused his stepmother to fall in love with him. He rejected her too, and she, afraid he might reveal her advances, denounced him to her husband for assault. Theseus believed her, and had his father, Poseidon, kill Hippolytus.

¹⁰ The three daughters of Lycambes were publicly (and falsely) accused, by a spurned suitor, of "being easy" and luring men with their wiles, upon which they hung themselves for shame.

that, but keep in balance the two arms of the scale. You, who remain untouched by either, give me your impartial opinion. Be frank, dear friend. Say which side you are on, now that I have revealed my loves to you.

Lycinus: Do you imagine this, Theomnestus, to be some kind of game? This is a matter requiring serious study. I have myself recently given it thought, and well do I know its complications, having been present at a heated debate between two friends whose words still ring in my ears. Their arguments reflected their passions, as well as the opposition of their views—which was absolute. They did not enjoy this happy mean for which I congratulate you, and which lets you collect double pay, since you, sleepless herder, “first guard the cattle, and then the sheep.”¹¹ The first of these gentlemen found his delight in boys, and compared feminine Aphrodite to the pit of doom;¹² The second, untainted by male love, was crazy about women. They asked me to referee their contest of words, and I can’t express how much I enjoyed it. Their arguments are engraved in my memory as if they had just uttered them. I will try to recall them faithfully, to give you some small proof of my good will.

Theomnestus: Allow me to shift my seat the better to see you, “waiting for Achilles to make an end of his song,”¹³ and you, please give voice to the melodious glory of this debate on love.

Lycinus: Intending to head for Italy, I had a speedy vessel readied, the kind of bireme used principally by the Liburnians of the Ionian Gulf. After having paid my respects to the gods of the fatherland and supplicated Zeus the Protector to look with favor upon this lengthy expedition, I had the mules saddled and set out for the shore. I said my goodbyes to the men who had accompanied me; they were gentlemen of wit and erudition who, after having sought my company, wished to convey their sadness at my leaving. Upon boarding the vessel I took my seat at the stern beside the helmsman. The oarsmen had already rowed us offshore when the wind picked up. Soon the mast was stepped, the yard was run up and we made sail. The canvas

¹¹ Ironic allusion to a passage in the *Odyssey* (X.85).

¹² Barbathon in the original: a deep precipice, particularly the one near Athens, into which criminals were cast.

¹³ Another ironic allusion, this time to the *Iliad* (IX.191).

filled, and we shot like an arrow over the foaming waves, noisily rent asunder by our plunging bow.

But the details of our voyage, whether serious or amusing, are beside the point. After having followed the Cilician coast and having reached the Gulf of Pamphylia we passed, not without some difficulty, the Swallow Islands, those glad boundaries of ancient Greece. We then visited the main towns of Lycia, where we feasted more on their history than on their monuments since they have retained none of their former splendor. Finally, upon reaching Rhodes, the City of the Sun God, we decided to take a short break from our ceaseless journeying.

The ship was hauled out and the oarsmen pitched their tents nearby. As for me, having taken lodgings across from Bacchus' temple, I headed for it at my leisure, abandoning myself to a thousand impressions, delighting in them with boundless pleasure. By its beauty, the City of the Sun God is indeed worthy of the name. Along the way I made the rounds of the portico of the temple of Bacchus, admiring the paintings that retrace the heroic fables and are as enjoyable as they are instructive. At any rate, two or three guides had already taken charge of me and, in exchange for a couple of obols, explained that which I had not understood, or only suspected.

After having my fill of this spectacle I was getting ready to return to my lodgings when I had the most delightful surprise that a trip abroad can offer: that of meeting old friends, ones who are not unknown to you since you have often encountered them at my house. One was Charicles of Corinth, a young man whose good looks are matched by his cultivated elegance, since he always wants to stand out to please the ladies. With him was Callicratidas the Athenian, a man of the simplest appearance as behoves one of our principal orators and lawyers. This latter beside is devoted to physical exercise, not so much for the love of the gym as for the love of the boys, a passion which totally transports him—he detests the fair sex to the point where he often curses Prometheus. As soon as they saw me, the two ran up to me overjoyed; after the customary embraces each clasped me by the hand and insisted that I accept his hospitality. Seeing that their friendly rivalry was growing heated, I said, “Today, Callicratidas and

Charicles, I will resolve your dispute by inviting you to my place. The following days, for I expect to stay here three or four, I will take turns being the guest of each of you, and we will draw lots to determine who will be first.”

And so it was decided. That day they were my guests. The next day I was hosted by Callicratidas, and the following by Charicles. During the festivities, I discerned in the arrangements of each household the proof of their tastes. The Athenian was attended only by handsome boys. All his servants were beardless, and remained at his side only upon that condition. As soon as the least down shaded their cheeks they were sent to work his lands in Attica. Charicles, in comparison, was surrounded by a veritable ensemble of female dancers and musicians, and his house was filled with women as if at the Thesmophoria.¹⁴ You could not have found a single representative of the other sex, save perhaps a little child or some old cook who, due to his age, could not inspire any jealousy. There you had, as I have said, clear indications of their respective inclinations. Often brief skirmishes broke out between them on this topic, but the issue was never settled. That is how things stood when the time came for me to resume my voyage. But this time I was no longer departing alone: my two friends had decided to accompany me, desiring to visit Italy as well.

We could not pass up the chance to stop in Cnidus, where there is so much to be seen, notably the temple of Aphrodite which encloses the statue by Praxiteles, so greatly admired for its beauty. We made a gentle landfall amid a splendid calm, as if the goddess herself had propelled our vessel. After disembarking, and while lodgings were being readied, I took the two experts on love by the arm and we went round Cnidus, delighting in the erotic terra cottas, worthy of a town dedicated to Aphrodite. After having seen the portico of Sostratus¹⁵ and a couple of other landmarks, we directed our steps towards the temple of the goddess, Charicles and I with the

¹⁴ A festival in honor of Demeter, attended only by women.

¹⁵ Sostratus of Cnidus (born 3rd c. BCE), was a Greek architect and engineer. He designed the lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the Seven Wonders of the World (ca. 280 BCE), on the island of Pharos off Alexandria, Egypt (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sostratus>).

greatest anticipation, but Callicratidas not without some reservations, as if this visit were an homage to a woman. He would have, I believe, willingly traded the Aphrodite of Cnidus for the Eros of Thespieae.¹⁶

As soon as we reached the confines of the temple we felt as if caressed by the very breath of the goddess. The floor of the courtyard had not been condemned to sterility by a stone pavement, but on the contrary, it burst with fertility, as behooves Aphrodite: fruit trees with verdant foliage rose to prodigious heights, their limbs weaving a lofty vault. The myrtle, beloved by the goddess, reached up its berry-laden branches no less than the other trees which so gracefully stretched out. They never know wilted foliage, their boughs always being thick with leaves. To tell the truth, you could notice among them some non-bearing trees, but those have beauty as their fruit. Such were the cypress and the planes which towered to the heavens, as well as the tree of Daphnis, who once fled Aphrodite but now has come here to seek refuge. Ivies entwined themselves lovingly around each of these trees. Heavy clusters of grapes hung from the gnarled vines: indeed, Aphrodite is only more attractive when united with Bacchus; their pleasures are sweeter for being mixed together. Apart, they have less spice. Under the welcome shade of the boughs, comfortable beds await the celebrants—actually the better people of the town only rarely frequent these green halls, but the common crowds jostle there on festive days to yield publicly to the joys of love.

When we had exhausted the charms of these places we pressed on into the temple itself. The goddess stands in the center, her statue sculpted from Parian marble. Her lips are slightly parted by a lofty smile. Nothing hides her beauty, which is entirely exposed, other than a furtive hand veiling her modesty. The art of the sculptor has succeeded so well that it seems the marble has shed its hardness in order to mold the grace of her limbs. Charicles, dazed by this spectacle, impulsively burst out, “Lucky Mars, to be chained to such a goddess!” He rushed forward as he spoke, lips pursed, neck stretched to give her a kiss. Callicratidas watched the display in silence. The temple has a second entrance for those who wish to

¹⁶ An ironical contrast, since both statues were among the most famous created by Praxiteles.

contemplate the goddess from behind, for none of her parts should escape admiration. It is easy in that fashion to gaze upon her hind beauty.

Wanting to see the goddess entire we approached this gate. Upon being let in by the woman who kept the keys, we were overwhelmed by the abundant beauty. As soon as the Athenian, who had so far been indifferent, glimpsed this side of the goddess, which reminded him of boys, he exclaimed with even greater enthusiasm than that of Charicles, “By Hercules, what a harmonious back. What rounded thighs, begging to be caressed with both hands! How well the lines of her cheeks flow, neither too slender, showing the bones, nor so voluminous as to sag! How inexpressible the tenderness of that smile pressed into her dimpled loins! How precise that line running from thigh, to leg, to foot! Now I can understand why Zeus’ nectar tastes so sweet when Ganymede pours it. As for me, never would I receive it from the hand of Hebe.” While Callicratidas was declaiming this speech with much élan, Charicles remained fixed in place, the tenderness of his gaze betraying his emotions.

Filled with admiration, we noticed behind one of the thighs a stain like that on a robe, which only accentuated the whiteness of the marble. It seemed to be a flaw in the stone. This kind of defect is not uncommon, and fate thus tends to thwart that which otherwise would attain perfection. Supposing this dark stain to be natural, my admiration for Praxiteles only increased, for having so skillfully hidden it where it would least be noticed. But the groundskeeper, who had stayed by our side, recounted an extraordinary and barely believable tale on this subject. “A young man from a distinguished family,” said she, “but whose act has made the name unspeakable, would often come to the temple, where an evil spirit had made him fall in love with the goddess. As he spent his whole day there, it was first believed to be due to a faith bordering on adoration. In fact, he was up long before dawn and only returned home after sunset, having spent all his time seated before the goddess, his eyes constantly fixed upon her. You could hear him murmuring sweet nothings to her.

“When he wanted to quench his passion somewhat, he would make an invocation, cast upon the table four small dice of Libyan gazelle bone, and

entrust his fate to chance. If the throw was lucky, especially if it was the one called 'of Aphrodite,' when none of the dice shows the same number, he would prostrate himself, certain his desire would soon be fulfilled. But the opposite was more common, and when the dice were unfavorable he cursed all of Cnidus and, as if his misfortune were incurable, was overwhelmed by sadness. The next moment he would gather up the dice and try his fortune again. His passion only grew more intense, and on every wall and tree he carved the name of Aphrodite the Beautiful. Praxiteles he worshiped as equal to Zeus. Any beautiful or valuable thing he found in his house he offered to the goddess; finally, the violence of his desires made him lose his reason, his audacity serving for pimp. One evening at sunset he slid unseen behind the temple door and hid in the darkest corner, holding his breath. The keepers closed the gate as usual, and this new Anchises¹⁷ found himself alone inside. Who would dare recount the sort of deeds he consummated that wicked night? In short, at daybreak this sign of his amorous embraces was discovered, a sign which ever since has marked the goddess as a reminder of her suffering. As for the young man, they say he threw himself upon the rocks or into the sea. In any case he disappeared forever.”

Before the attendant could make an end to her story Charicles exclaimed, “So! Even made of stone, a woman wants loving. How then if such a beauty came to life? Would not a night with her be worth Zeus’ very scepter?” Callicratidas replied, smiling, “We don’t know yet, Charicles, whether many more such stories lie in store for us once we reach Thespieae.” “What do you mean?” asked Charicles. Callicratidas answered, not without reason, as I see it. “It is claimed,” said he, “that this young lover had a whole night to satisfy his passions at his leisure. Yet he dealt with the statue as with a boy, thus proving he was not seeking the woman in front.” When other comments along these lines had brought tempers to a boil, I said to them, after calming them down, “O, very dear friends, if you are going to argue, do it properly, according to the blessed rules of contest. Cease this disorderly and fruitless spat. Let each of you defend his cause in proper

¹⁷ A Trojan hero and Aphrodite’s mortal lover, Anchise had a son by the goddess, Aeneas, and thus was the Romans’ forefather.

fashion. It is not yet time to board. Let us put this moment to good use in the service of enjoyment, exploring these serious matters in a way that combines pleasure and profit. Let us leave this temple, since people are starting to crowd in for their devotions, and let us repair to the garden, there to listen and talk to our hearts' content. But remember, he who is bested today is never again to reopen this discussion."

It seems I had not spoken in vain, for both agreed. We left, myself thrilled to have naught to do but listen, they deeply absorbed in thought, as if upon this debate hung in balance the vanguard of the procession at Plataea.¹⁸ When we arrived in a suitably shady nook, offering shelter from the heat of the day, I said to them, "Here is a splendid spot. The songs of the cicadas overhead will be our accompaniment." I sat down between the two antagonists like a true judge, the weight of the Athenian Tribunal heavy on his brow. I had them draw lots to choose the first speaker. Charicles won, and I bade him begin his speech at once.

Charicles passed his hand over his brow and, after a moment of silence, began thus: "I call upon you, my Lady Aphrodite, uphold my plea for this your cause! Every task, regardless how small, attains perfection if you but grant it the least measure of your mercy; but matters of love have special need of you, for you are, after all, their natural mother. Come as a woman to defend women, and grant that men remain men as they were born to be. At the very start of this debate I call as witness of the truth of my words the primordial Mother, original source of all creation, the sacred nature of the universe, she who united the elements of the world—earth, air, fire and water—and through their mingling wrought all living creatures.

"She knew we were a meld of perishable stuffs granted an all too short existence, and wrought that the death of one would be the birth of another so that procreation would keep mortality in check, one life sending forth another in infinite succession. Because a thing cannot be born of a single source, to each species she granted the two genders: to the male she gave

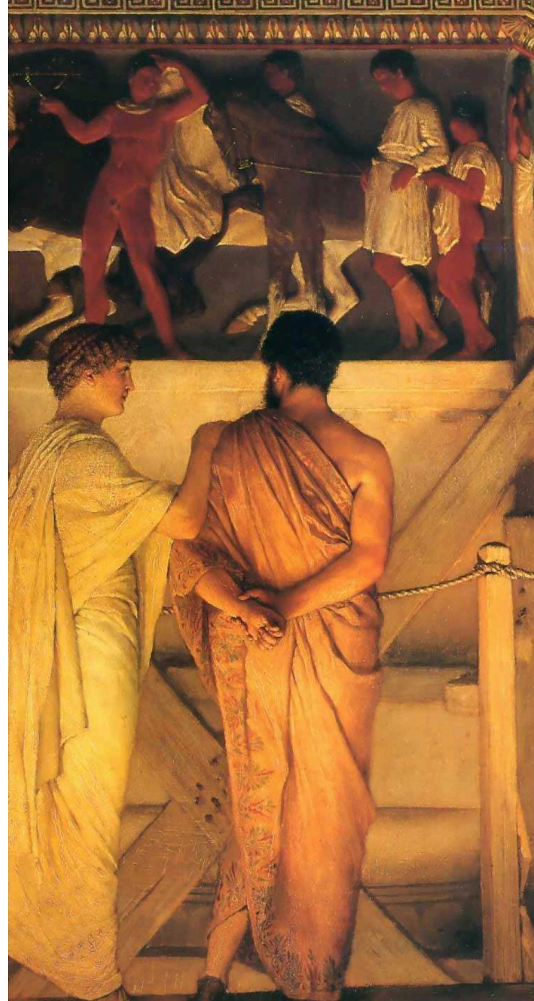
¹⁸ A yearly procession celebrating the victory of the Greeks over the Persians in 479. It was held for six hundred years without interruption, except for the years 427-386 when Plataea lay destroyed by other Greeks. (Plutarch, *Lives*; "Aristides" 21.3-5)

the seed principle, and she molded the female into a vessel for that seed. She draws them together by means of desire and unites one to the other in accordance with the healthy requirement of need so that, each remaining within its natural bounds, the woman will not pretend improbably to have become a man, nor will the man wax indecently effeminate. Thus it is that the unions of men with women have perpetuated to this day the human race through an undying chain of inheritance, instead of some man claiming the glory of being uniquely the product of another man. Quite the contrary, all honor two names as equally respectable, for all have a mother and at the same time a father.

“In the beginning, when men were imbued with sentiments worthy of heroes, they honored that virtue which makes us akin to the gods: they obeyed the laws fixed by nature and, conjoined with a woman of fitting age, they became fathers of virtuous children. But little by little the race fell from those heights into the abyss of lust, seeking pleasure along new and errant paths. Finally, lechery, overstepping all bounds, transgressed the very laws of nature. Moreover, how could that man who first eyed his peer as though a woman not have resorted to tyrannical violence or deceit? Two beings of one sex met in one bed; when they looked at one another they blushed neither at what they did to each other, nor at what each suffered to be done to him. Sowing their seed (as the saying goes) upon barren rocks, they traded a slight delight for a great disgrace.

“Arrogance and tyranny have gone so far as to mutilate nature with a sacrilegious steel, discovering, by ripping from males their very manhood, a way to prolong their use. However, in order to remain alike to young boys, these unfortunates no longer are men. They are nothing but ambiguous enigmas of dual gender, having lost the one into which they were born, yet not having attained the one they aspired to. The flower of childhood, having thus lingered a while into their youth, wilts into a premature old age. But we still consider boys those become old, for they know not real maturity. Thus vile lust, mistress of all evils, contriving ever more shameful pleasures and stooping eagerly to any baseness, has slid all the way to the vice that cannot decently be mentioned.

“If all obeyed the laws given us by Providence, relations with women would satisfy us and the world would be washed clean of all crime. Animals can not corrupt anything through depravity, so the law of nature remains unpolluted. Male lions do not get excited over other male lions, and when in rut, Aphrodite awakens their desires for females. The bull, master of his herd, mounts the cows; the ram fills all the sheep with his male seed. What else? The boars, do they not cover the sows in their sty? The wolves, do they not mingle with she-wolves? To sum it up, neither the birds who ride the winds, nor the fishes fated to their wet element, nor the animals on land seek dealings with other males: for them the decrees of Providence remain inviolate. But you, men of overrated wisdom, you truly debased beasts, what novel raving drives you to rise up against the laws and commit a double crime? What blind insensibility blankets your souls, to doubly stray from the good road, fleeing what you should chase and chasing what you should flee? If everyone did as you do there would be no one left!



*Socrates and Alcibiades*¹⁹

¹⁹ Detail from Phidias and the Parthenon marbles by Alma Tadema (1836-1912). Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Alcibiades_and_friend_-_detail_from_Phidias_and_the_Parthenon_marbles_by_Alma_Tadema.jpg

Though Lawrence Alma-Tadema was a painter famous for his love of women, he painted this work with a strong and positive homoerotic aspect in 1868. Not only is the male couple, Socrates with his beloved Alcibiades, foregrounded while other equally famous man/woman couples are placed in the middle ground and the background, but the painter proceeds to comment on the essence of the pederastic relationship, as he would have us see it. The boy is in love with the man and excited to be in his presence, while the man exhibits restraint (the Greek *sophrosyne*, “moderation”), symbolized by the clasped hands and clenched fist of Socrates.

The painting was done at a time when the English culture of Greek love, centered at the great public schools like Eton and Harrow, and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, was close to its peak. William Johnson (later Cory, likely an allusion to Corydon, Virgil’s bucolic *erastes*) was still teaching at Eton, together with his former student and fellow in arms, Oscar Browning. Both were fated to be dismissed for what can only be described as chaste pederasty, Johnson in ’72 and Browning three years later. Walter Pater and Benjamin Jowett were at Oxford, where John Addington Symonds had only a few years previously engaged in the pursuit of pretty choirboys, together with at least one student under his

“Socrates’ disciples wield truly impressive arguments with which they deceive young boys not yet in full possession of their reason, but anyone favored with a grain of sense can hardly be swayed by them. They feign love of the soul and, as if ashamed to love the beauty of the body, style themselves ‘lovers of virtue.’ Many a good laugh I have had over that. How is it, O venerable philosophers, that you dismiss with such disdain those whose age has long since proven their worth and whose gray hairs vouch for their virtue? How come your love, so full of wisdom, lunges hungrily for the young, whose judgment is not yet fully formed and who know not which road to take? Is there some law that condemns lack of beauty as perverse and decrees the beautiful as always good and praiseworthy? Yet, to quote Homer, that great prophet of truth:

One man may fail to impress us with his looks
 But a god can crown his words with beauty, charm,
 And men look on with delight when he speaks out.
 Never faltering, filled with winning self-control,
 He shines forth at assembly grounds and people gaze
 At him like a god when he walks through the streets.²⁰

“And elsewhere he also said, “No sense in your head to match your handsome looks.”²¹ Indeed, prudent Ulysses is favored over beautiful Nireus.

“How is it that your love does not pursue prudence, or justice, or the other virtues which upon occasion crown maturity? Why is the beauty of the young the only thing that inflames your ardent passions? Ought one to have loved Phaidros, betrayer of Lysias, O Plato? Was it right to love the virtues of Alcibiades, who mutilated the statues of the gods and divulged the Eleusinian mysteries between cups of wine? Who would confess to being his lover when he fled Athens to make his stand in Decelea and

tutelage. One wonders to what extent this painting is a salute to that world.

²⁰ Homer, *Odyssey*, VIII.169.

²¹ *Ibid.*, XVII.454.

openly aspired to tyranny? As long as he remained beardless, according to the divine Plato, he was loved by all, but as soon as he became a man and his intellect, previously unripe, reached its full dimension he was hated by all. Why is that? It is because the men who call ‘virtue’ the beauty of the body paste an honorable label on a shameful affection, and are lovers of boys rather than lovers of wisdom.²² But so as not to recall the famous only to besmirch them, I will not speak further of these matters.

“Let us now descend from these lofty considerations to an examination of your own lusts, Callicratidas; I will demonstrate that the use of women is better far than that of boys. For starters, I deem enjoyment to be more satisfying the longer it perdures. Fleeting delight ends, as they say, before it has begun. Authentic pleasure lies in what is enduring. Would that it had pleased the gods for stingy Fate to spin long the thread of our life, granting enjoyment of perpetual health with no foothold for grief. Then we would spend our days in feasts and celebrations. But since some nefarious demon has begrudged us such great boons, the sweetest of real pleasures are those that last. And woman, from maidenhood until her middle years, before the wrinkles of old age have carved her face, is worthy indeed of commerce with men and, even when her beauty is gone,

With wiser tongue
Experience speaks,
Than can the young.²³

“However, one who courts youths of twenty seems to me a seeker of passive pleasures, a votary of an ambivalent Aphrodite. The bodies of those become men are hard, their chins, once soft, have become bristly, and their muscular thighs are soiled by hairs. As for that which is most hidden, I leave that knowledge to you, men of experience. Any woman’s skin, however, shines with grace. Thick tresses crown her head like the purple flower of the hyacinth—some spilling down her back to embellish her

²² A play on philo-neoi (lovers of the young) and philo-sophoi (lovers of wisdom).

²³ Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 529-530.

shoulders, others framing the ears and the temples, curlier than parsley in a field. Her entire body, devoid of the least hair, has, as has been said, more brilliance than amber, or Sidonian glass.

“Why not seek, when it comes to desires, those which are mutual and which alike satisfy the one who gives and the one who receives? We do not like, in truth, to lead solitary lives as do the dumb beasts but rather, united by our mutual feelings, we find our happiness greater and our pains lighter when shared. Hence the invention of the commensal table, brought out as the center of a gathering of friends. If we grant our belly the pleasure it demands we will not, for example, quaff Thasian wine by ourselves, nor gorge ourselves in solitude with fancy viands. Each finds more pleasant that which he shares with another, and likewise we prefer reciprocal enjoyments. One unites with a woman in mutual desire; the two part equally satisfied one with the other after tasting the same delights, unless we are to believe Tiresias who claimed the woman’s pleasure far surpasses that of the man. I therefore consider that men should esteem not the selfish pleasure they manage to seize, but that which they are able to bestow in exchange. Nobody in his right mind would claim that to be the case with boys: the lover gets up and leaves having tasted joys beyond compare, but his victim begins with pains and tears. Even later when, I am told, his suffering grows less acute, you will never be anything but a bother to him because of pleasure he has none. If we can speak more freely, as suits the woodlands of Aphrodite, I will say, Callicratidas, that it is permitted to make use of a woman in the fashion of a boy, the road being open to a double enjoyment, but the male must never lend himself to effeminate gratifications.

“That is why, if a woman can satisfy the lover of boys, let him abstain from the latter. Or else, if males can conjoin with males, then permit women henceforth to love each other as well. Come, men of the new age, you legislators of exotic thrills: having blazed fresh trails for men’s pleasures, grant the same license to women! Let them commingle as do the males: Let a woman, girded with those obscene implements, monstrous toys of sterility, lie with another woman just as a man with another man.

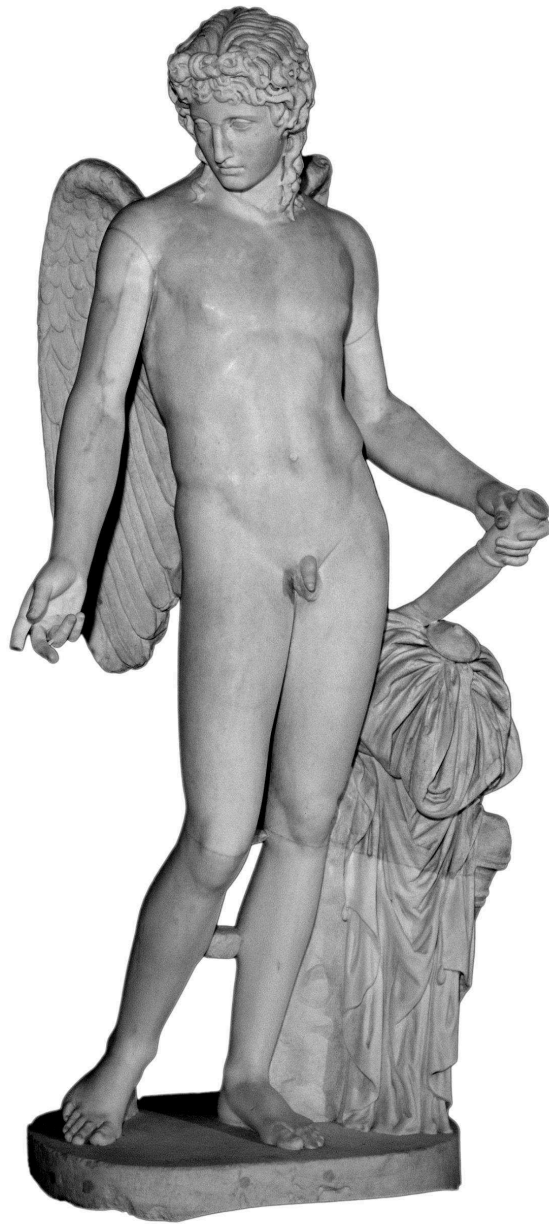
Let those lewd dykes, a word that only rarely reaches my ears for modesty forbids it, triumph freely. Let our schools for girls be nothing but the domain of Philaenis, dishonored by androgynous loves. And yet, would it not be still better to see a woman play the man than to behold a man assume the role of a woman?”

Having uttered these words with fire and conviction, Charicles grew quiet, his gaze still terrible, almost ferocious. He appeared to have pronounced a conjuration to atone for all male loves. As for me, I glanced at the Athenian with a gentle smile and said, “I had thought, Callicratidas, that I would merely be judging some game or lark, but here I find myself, due to Charicles’ vehemence, referee over a more serious cause. He has grown heated beyond measure, as if on the Areopagus pleading for a murderer or a criminal arsonist or, by Zeus, for an affair of poison. It is time now to make recourse to Athena’s help: may the eloquence of Pericles and the tongues of the ten orators marshaled against the Macedonians make your harangue worthy of those declaimed on the Pnyx!” Callicratidas collected his thoughts for a moment or two. Judging by his expression, he too seemed ready for combat. Then he launched into his rebuttal.

“If women took part in government meetings, in the tribunals, and in public affairs you surely would be a general, Charicles, or president, and they would raise bronze statues of you in the public squares. In fact, the wisest among them, were they to speak in favor of their cause, could hardly have outdone you—neither Telesilla, who fought against the Spartiates²⁴ and in whose honor at Argos Mars is deemed one of the gods of women; nor Sappho, that sweet glory of Lesbos; nor Theano, daughter²⁵ of wise Pythagoras. It may even be that Pericles defended Aspasia with less eloquence. But if men are now to speak on behalf of women, then let us men speak on behalf of men. And you, Aphrodite, grant me favor, for we too honor your son, Eros!

²⁴ In Sparta, the elite warrior class.

²⁵ Theano, in fact Pythagoras’ wife, was considered his spiritual daughter, as she was a brilliant follower of his teachings.



*Eros*²⁶

²⁶ This statue of Eros in the “Eros of the Centocelle” style is a graphic example of the complicated role of the god in ancient Greece, a god intimately linked to desire, and through his role in bonding warriors on the battlefield, to death as well. A poem by Praxiteles himself (Anthologia Graeca 16.204) tells us that his famed Eros of Thespieae was a sad Eros. His words, together with Sullan coins struck in Boeotia showing precisely this type of Eros, lead us to believe that this statue is modeled after the lost Praxitelean original. Marble Pompeiian statue, ca. 1st c. BCE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. Source: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c3/Eros_Farnese_MAN_Napoli_6353.jpg>

“I had thought our argument would remain on friendly footing, but since Charicles in his speech started theorizing on behalf of women I will gladly seize the opportunity to tell him this: only male love is the product of both desire and virtue. I would have wished, had it been possible, that we stood beneath that plane tree that once heard the speeches of Socrates—happier that tree than the Academy or the Lycaeum—and under which Phaedrus lounged, as the divine man, best beloved of the Graces, tells us. From its branches, like those of the talking oak of Dodona, we would hear a voice defending the love of boys in memory of young Phaedrus. Alas, that cannot be, ‘for between us lie tenebrous mountain ranges, and seas that surge and thunder.’²⁷

“We have halted here, strangers in a foreign land, and Cnidus is the domain of Charicles. However, I will not succumb to fright. But come thou to my aid, divine spirit, guardian of friendship, revealer of its mysteries, Eros. Not the mischievous urchin limned by the hands of painters, but He who from birth was formed perfect by the primal principle of the seed. You are the one, in fact, who molded the universe, until then shapeless, featureless, and dark. Pulling the world out as if from a grave, you pushed back all-enveloping Chaos and flung him into the deepest abyss of Tartarus, where truly ‘iron gates and brazen thresholds loom,’²⁸ so that he may never return from the prison where he is chained. Then, beating back the night with your dazzling light, you became the creator of all things, the animate and the inanimate. By means of the lofty sentiment of harmony you have inspired in men the noble passions of friendship, so that a soul still innocent and tender, nurtured in the shade of goodwill, will ripen into maturity.

“Marriage is a solution devised by the requirements of procreation, but male love alone must rule the heart of a philosopher. Everything fashioned uniquely for luxury is valued far above what arises from need, and everywhere people prefer the beautiful to the merely useful. As long as men were ignorant and lacked the ease for seeking something beyond the

²⁷ *Iliad*, I.152.

²⁸ *Ibid.* VIII.15.

fruit of their daily toil they deemed themselves content with bare necessities—they had no time to discover a better way of life. But once immediate needs were satisfied, the men who followed were free from the shackles of necessity and able to improve things; the whole gradual development of the sciences and of the arts that we see today is one interesting result. The first men were hardly born before they had to seek a remedy for daily hunger. Fettered by these pressing needs that deprived them of the freedom to pursue refinements they subsisted on roots and herbs, or largely on the fruit of the oak. But in short order these foods were relegated to the beasts and the farmers toiled to sow wheat and oats, which they had noticed grew anew each year. No one is so mad as to claim the acorn is tastier than grain.

“Furthermore, in ancient times did men not cloak themselves in the pelts of flayed animals? Did they not seek refuge from cold in mountain caves, or in the hollows of ancient stumps, or in the trunks of dead trees? But abandoning little by little these primitive ways they wove wool, built houses, and imperceptibly the art of these various crafts, with time for teacher, produced beautiful lace in place of plain cloth and lofty roofs instead of simple cabins. Magnificent stonework was erected and the depressing barrenness of the walls was daubed in luxuriant colors. Thus these arts and sciences, once mute and sunk in oblivion, shone bright after their sleep. Each artist handed down his invention to his successor, and each descendant added his own to this heritage, completing what was lacking.

“Let us not expect male love from these ancient times; men were compelled to conjoin with women so that the race would not die out for lack of seed. Manifold wisdom and the virtuous desires, fueled by love of the beautiful, could only come to light in a century that has left nothing unexplored; thus love of youths has blossomed together with divine philosophy. Therefore, Charicles, do not condemn as evil everything not invented long ago, and do not disdain the love of boys just because dealings with women have an older pedigree. Let’s remember that the very first discoveries were prompted by need, but those arising from progress are

only the better for it and worthier of our esteem.

“I could barely stifle my laughter when I heard Charicles laud the beasts and the barren wastes of the Scythians—in the heat of the tirade he seemed almost sorry to be Greek. Heedless of undermining his own argument, he did not hide his thoughts by speaking in low tones. Quite the contrary, he raised his voice and fairly roared: ‘Neither lions, nor bears, nor boars love another male, but their desires drive them solely towards their females.’ What’s so surprising about that? That which man chooses by dint of reason animals cannot, for they are too stupid to think. If Prometheus or some other god had endowed them with human reasoning, they would not be dwelling in the desert or the forest, and they would not be devouring each other, but like us they would build temples, gather around the hearth in houses, and subject themselves to common laws. Animals are condemned by their own nature to miss out on the providential gifts afforded by intellect. Is it any wonder that they should be deprived, among other things, of male love? Lions do not love each other but they are not philosophers; bears do not love each other but they have no understanding of the beauty of friendship. Among men, however, wisdom joined with knowledge, choosing after numerous trials that which it found most beautiful, has decreed that male loves are the most sound.

“So, Charicles, spare me these lectures more befitting the wanton lives of courtesans. Do not insult our dignity and modesty in such crude terms, and do not make out Divine Eros to be a silly fool. Consider, though it is late to educate oneself at your age, consider now since you have not done so before, that Eros is a twofold god. He does not always arrive by the same path, nor does he always excite the same desires in our souls. One, I would say, is a ceaseless prankster. No reason governs him—he inhabits the souls of the foolish and from him come the yearnings for women. He is the one who inspires rapes, for he pushes with irresistible force towards that which we crave. But the other Eros, father of the Ogygian age,²⁹ that

²⁹According to Varro, the time between the Ogygian deluge and the first Olympiad. This was the age termed “fabulous” by the Greeks, for it was the age of myth, the time of the heroic deeds, of the first great poets (Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod, etc.), and it was preceded by the so-called “time before time” (Browne

venerable and profoundly sacred vision, is the propagator of healthy desires and fills the souls with sweetness. Under the protection of this god, we taste pleasure melded with virtue. As the tragic poet once said, love has two breaths, and two completely different passions bear the same name. Shame also is a twofold goddess, simultaneously good and evil:

Both good and evil shame alike can weave
 And men in warring camps sunder apart.
 The first, no praise is there too high to give.
 As for the other,
 We blame her from the bottom of our heart.³⁰

“So it is not at all surprising if, passion having assumed the name of virtue, we should dub “Eros” unbridled lust as well as temperate affection. ‘Is marriage nothing then,’ Charicles would say, ‘and shall we banish the race of women? How will men ever propagate themselves?’ I would reply with the words of the all-wise Euripides: ‘Better far, rather than have dealings with women, to go into the temples and the sacred places and purchase children in exchange for gold and silver so as to assure our posterity.’³¹ In truth, necessity burdens us under her heavy yoke and compels us to obey. If, on one hand, thanks to intellect we opt for the beautiful, then on the other let the useful yield to the essential. Let there be women for making children, but as for the rest I will have none of it. What sane man could stand a woman who from morning onward bedecks herself with peculiar artifices? Her real figure is devoid of any beauty, and she covers up her natural indecencies with borrowed trinkets.

“Were we to see women as they arose from bed we would judge them uglier than those animals it is thought unlucky to mention before noontime—I speak of the monkeys. That is the reason they lock themselves in and do not wish to be seen by any man. A gaggle of servants, young and

VI:6).

³⁰ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 318, 11, 12, 13.

³¹ Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 618.

old, their peers in beauty, swarms round offering up to the unappealing face all manners of pomades. They do not refresh their mistress after the sloth of slumber with a splash of clear water, then to move on to serious concerns. No, they merely lend through the artifice of cosmetics a dash of color to an unappealing mien. Just as in the public processions each has her function: one bears a silver plate, another a pincushion, a mirror, a collection of little boxes like those in an apothecary shop, flasks filled with a myriad secret poisons for whitening teeth or blackening eyelids.

“But it is the care of the hair above all that takes the longest time. Some, by means of concoctions which make the curls shine brighter than the noonday sun, dye them as if they were wool and turn them blond, making them shed their natural tint. Others, imagining themselves more beautiful with black hair, spend their husbands’ wealth on that and reek of all Arabia. The curling iron heated over glowing embers will curl even the most unruly hair, so that the forehead, bordered with waves to the very eyebrows, is barely glimpsed through a narrow gap, while behind their tresses drape grandly over their shoulders.

“Next, they put on florid shoes that cut into the flesh and pinch their feet. So as not to appear completely naked they drape on veils light as air that they call attire, but whatever these pretend to hide stands out even more than their faces; only women with ugly breasts wrap them in nets. Why bother listing here their spendthrift ways? Those Eritrean pearls hanging from their earlobes, worth many a talent; those serpents twisted about their wrists and arms, would they were real and not golden! Tiaras star-studded with Indian gems circle their foreheads, rich necklaces hang from their necks; the gold must abase itself even unto their feet to wrap what shows of their heels—better it were to put their legs in irons. After the whole body, through some sort of witchcraft, has traded its bastard ugliness for a sham beauty they redden their shameless cheeks with makeup so as to spruce up their oily skins with a splash of purple.

“How do they behave, after all these preparations? They promptly leave the house and visit all those gods that side with them against their husbands. The women have in fact such gods as wretched men do not even

know their names. They are, I believe, Coliades, Genetyllides, or that Phrygian goddess whose rites commemorate her unfortunate love for a shepherd.³² Later they go to unspeakable initiations, to suspicious mysteries that exclude men. But I will not expose any further the corruption of their souls. Upon their return they take interminable baths, then they sit down to sumptuous meals and ply their men with come-ons. When their gluttony has had its fill and they are no longer able to stuff their mouths, they daintily finger the foods brought before them, chatting among themselves about their nights, their multi-colored dreams, and about their beds, filled with such feminine softness that one needs a bath immediately upon arising.

“That is how the more tranquil among them live. But if we examine closely those less staid, we would curse Prometheus, all the while reciting Menander’s lament:

Prometheus, does it not serve you well
Bound to Caucasian rock to suffer hell?
The firebrand to mortals you did give,
But hated by the gods do you now live
For bringing women upon Earth to dwell.

Alas, men marry and tie firm the knot!
Then secret passions follow, the whole lot.
When cheating in the marriage bed lies down,
From it rise poisons and the jealous frown:
Such gifts the women for mankind have wrought.³³

“What man would seek such boons? What man would enjoy such a miserable life?

“It is only fair to now contrast a boy’s manly conduct to that of these degraded women. Rising early from his solitary bed he splashes clean water

³² The love of Cybele for Attis, which resulted in his death.

³³ Menander; fr. 718.

over his eyes, still veiled by the night's sleep, then pins his sacred mantle over his shoulder with a clasp. He leaves his father's house with downturned gaze, not gawking at the passers by. He is escorted by his stalwart slaves and tutors carrying the sacred implements of virtue: not combs with close-set teeth to caress his hair, nor mirrors that show his portrait without an artist's help, but many-leaved writing tablets, or scrolls relating the virtues of olden days, or, if bound for his music master, his melodious lyre.

“After having tempered his mind with philosophical teachings and nourished his soul with all forms of knowledge, he develops his body with noble athletics. He informs himself about Thessalian horses and, his youth once tamed, he makes use of peace to ready for war, hurling spears and javelins with a sure hand. Then come the games of the palaestra. Glistening with oil, he wrestles in the dust under the searing noonday sun, his sweat streaming down. Then a quick bath and a frugal meal allow him in short order to resume his activities. Anew his tutors return to relate to him the ancient feats, engraving in his memory the heroes who distinguished themselves by their courage, prudence, restraint, or fairness. After thus watering his soul with the dew of these virtues, evening brings his labors to an end. He metes out the tribute demanded by his stomach, and then sleeps surrounded by dreams all the sweeter for that his rest follows the toils of the day.

“Who would not be the lover of such a youth? Who so blind of sight or dense of mind? How could one not love him, a Hermes at the palaestra, an Apollo with his lyre, as fine a horseman as Castor, manifesting divine virtues in a mortal body? As for me, heavenly gods, may my life eternally be spent seated before such a friend, hearing his gentle voice up close, sharing with him in all things! A lover would wish to see him reach, after joyful years, an old age free of ills without ever having felt the spite of Fate. But if, as is the wont of human nature, he is laid low by sickness I would ail with him; and should he put to a stormy sea I would sail with him; and should a powerful tyrant cast him in irons I would be chained with him. Whoever hates him would be my enemy, and those who wish him well I would love.

Were I to see bandits or enemies fall upon him I would take up my weapons and fight with my last ounce of strength. Were he to die I could not bear to live. My last wish to those dearest to me after him would be that a single grave be dug for us both, and that our bones be mingled so none could tell our mute ashes apart.

“Nor is my love for those worthy of it the first one to be written down. The heroes who were close to the gods thought up this law, whereby love born of friendship draws breath till the moment of death. Phocis joined Orestes and Pylades from infancy; they took a god for witness of their mutual love, and sailed through life on a single ship. Together they put Clytemnestra to death, as though both had been Agamemnon’s sons; by both was Aegisthus slain. Pylades suffered even more than Orestes, when the latter was hounded by the Furies. When Orestes was accused of being a criminal, Pylades stood by his side. Their loving friendship was not hemmed in by the boundaries of Greece, for they sailed together to the farthest shores of Scythia, one ill and the other nursing him. When they reached the land of the Tauri, the Fury herself, avenger of Orestes’ mother’s murder, prepared their welcome: barbarians attacking from all sides, just as Orestes was laid low by his mad ravings.

“But Pylades wiped away the froth and tended him, covering him with a finely-woven robe,³⁴ showing not so much the tenderness of a lover as that of a father. When it was decided that one would remain behind to be sacrificed, while the other journeyed to Mycenae to deliver the letter, each wanted to spare the other, deeming he would live on in the one who survived. Orestes refused the letter, as if Pylades was worthier of carrying it. and was the beloved and not the lover: ‘If he were to die I could not bear the torment, for my ship is already overburdened with misery.’ And later he says: ‘Give him the letter. He will go to Argos as you have wished, and as for me, let me die as you see fit.’³⁵

“That’s how things stand. When an honest love, nourished from childhood, gathers strength and reaches the manly age of reason, then the

³⁴ Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 311-312.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 598-599, 603-605.

one we have long loved is able to return that love. It is hard to tell who is whose lover; just as in a mirror, the tenderness of the lover is reflected by that of the beloved. Why ever do you reproach as a lust alien to our lives that which has been decreed by divine law, and handed down from one generation to another? We have received it with joy, and we cherish it as sacred treasure. Truly happy is he, as the wise have justly said, who has

Young boys and horses strong of hoof!
 Joyful ages the old man
 Who receives the love of youths.³⁶

“The precepts of Socrates, that admirable judge of virtue, were sanctified by the Delphic tripod. The Sybil spoke truly when she said, ‘Of all men, Socrates is the wisest.’ Beside all his other teachings benefiting the human race, he taught us that there is nothing better than the love of boys.

“There is no doubt that we must love boys the same way in which Alicibiades was loved by Socrates, who slept the sleep of a father with him under a single cloak. As for me, I will end this speech with a bit of advice useful for all, taken from these verses of Callimachus:

May all you who upon youths
 Do cast your longing glances,
 As Erchius³⁷ has bid you,
 So be lovers of these boys.
 Thus ought you to love the young,
 The land with righteous men to fill.³⁸

“But know this, young lovers, if you would be wise: only have dealings with virtuous boys. Do not barter lasting devotion for a cheap thrill, else in

³⁶ Callimachus, *Aetia* fr. 41.

³⁷ Some scholars like R. Peyrefitte and M.D. MacLeod identify Erchius as Xenophon, “the sage of Erchia,” a subdivision of Athens; others, such as Schneider, maintain that he was the founder of a village in Attica called Erchia (R. Peyrefitte 150; Lucian, *Dialogues* 226-27).

³⁸ Callimachus, *Aetia*, p. 571. Tr. A.C.

short order your love will be nothing but a lie. If, however, you worship divine Eros, your beloved's sentiment will remain constant from childhood until old age. Those who love in this fashion live delightful lives. Their consciences are unstained by anything shameful, and after death the glory they won spreads their renown to all men. If one is to believe the sons of philosophers, the heavens themselves receive those devoted to this love after they leave this world. They go toward a better life, there to enjoy immortality as the reward of their virtue."

After Callicratidas' speech, solemn yet brimming with youthful elan, I stopped Charicles who was about to reply, and pointed out that it was time for us to go down to the ship. Both my companions, however, pressed me to pass judgment. I reflected briefly on their speeches, and said, "You do not seem, my friends, to have spoken idly or thoughtlessly. By Zeus, your words give proof of deep and lengthy consideration. You hardly left anything for another to use of that which needs be said on this topic, and your eloquence matched your erudition; I wish I were Theramenes the Buskin,³⁹ so you could remain on equal footing, winners both. But because you will not spare me, and also because I wish the rest of our trip to not be troubled by such arguments, I will tell you what, at this point, seems most equitable.

"Marriage is a useful thing for men, and a happy one if a good match is made. But I believe that boyish loves, to the extent they obey the chaste laws of friendship, are the only ones worthy of philosophy. Therefore all should be compelled to marry, but let only philosophers be permitted the love of boys. In truth, virtue does not reach perfection among women. So do not be angry, Charicles, if Corinth cedes to Athens."

Having pronounced this verdict in spare and restrained words, I rose to my feet. Charicles hung his head like one sentenced to death. But the Athenian, his brow held high, stepped forward joyfully. He looked as if he just had singlehandedly defeated the Persians at Salamis. I received from him a further reward for my decision, for he invited us to a splendid triumphal feast, one in keeping with his generous lifestyle. I quietly

³⁹ A buskin is a thick-soled shoe that can be worn on either foot.

comforted Charicles, praising his eloquence, even more admirable for having defended the weaker cause. Thus ended our stay in Cnidus and our conversation by the temple of the goddess, where we joined playfulness with culture. But you, Theomnestus, who evoked these old remembrances of mine, how would you have decided had you been judge?

Theomnestus: By the gods, do you take me for a fool like Melitides or Coroebus,⁴⁰ to render an opinion contrary to yours? Your delightful tale made me feel as if I had been with you in Cnidus myself, and I almost took this little dwelling to be the temple of Aphrodite. Nevertheless, as one may say anything on a holy day, and the fun, even if heavy-handed, is part of it, I was somewhat taken aback by the pompous bombast of the speech on male love. In fact, it seems hardly pleasant to pass all your days in the company of a boy already past puberty, bearing the torments of Tantalus as you suffer from thirst, his beauty bathing your eyes, yet remaining impossible to drink. It is not enough merely to see the one you love, to remain seated before him, nor just to listen to him talk. Pleasure for Eros is like a ladder: Sight is the first step, but as soon as he has seen, he desires to get closer and to touch; and as soon as he has touched with his fingertips, enjoyment courses through his whole body. When the occasion presents itself, he risks, thirdly, a discreet kiss, lips gently pressing lips. Hardly have they met when he draws back, to quell suspicion. Taking advantage of new opportunities, he indulges in longer embraces. His mouth draws back time and again, but his hands must not remain idle—daring caresses through the clothes excite desire. Or perhaps he will gently slide his furtive right hand into the bosom, to press nipples that swell a bit more than usual; he then slowly explores the whole expanse of a firm stomach, then the flower of puberty in its early down. “But why must I utter secret things?”⁴¹ Finally, Eros, having attained the power, goes about a hotter business and, leaping from the thighs, as the comic poet says, “strikes where he must.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Legendary fools. See Aristophanes, *Frogs* 991, and Lucian, *The Lover of Lies* 3.

⁴¹ Euripides, *Orestes*; 14.

⁴² Reference unknown.



*Pederastic courtship*⁴³

⁴³ Pederastic courtship, “up-and-down” gesture. Man sensually caressing a boy, while touching his cheek with the other hand so as to look him straight in the eye. Detail from an Attic black-figure cup found in Athens, ca. 530–520 BCE. The Louvre Museum, Paris: Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities. Source:

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Pederastic_courtship_Louvre_CA3096_n2.jpg>

That, in my opinion, is how one should love boys. Let these inspired windbags and all who aspire to highbrow philosophy nourish the ignorant with the ringing sound of honest words. Socrates was a true lover if ever there was one, and Alcibiades, who lay down under the same tunic with him, did not get up unstruck. Don't be surprised: Patroclus, in fact, was not loved by Achilles just because he was seated before him, "waiting for Achilles to finish his song."⁴⁴ It was lust that mediated their friendship. Achilles, moaning upon the death of Patroclus, lets his unchecked passion burst out with the power of truth when he says, "My tears mourn the holy union of our thighs."⁴⁵ And, by the way, it seems to me those whom the Greeks dub "revelers"⁴⁶ are nothing but hired lovers. Some might deem this a shameful thing to say, but at least it is the truth, by Aphrodite of Cnidus!

Lycinus: I will not permit you, my dear Theomnestus, to launch into a third speech just as this holy day is drawing to a close. I would merely hear the beginning, the rest never to reach my ears. Come, let us not tarry any further but head for the agora: the pyre of Hercules is about to be put to the torch. The show is not devoid of interest, and brings to mind his sufferings on Oeta.⁴⁷

I, Andrew Calimach, hereby place this work in the public domain. February 17, 2024



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⁴⁴ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 191.

⁴⁵ Aeschylus. *The Myrmidons* fr. 136.

⁴⁶ Participants, known as komastes, at komoi, drunken feasts associated with Dionysiac festivals.

⁴⁷ The legendary place where the hero met his end on a pyre.