

## *Heraclitus' Symposium*

### ABSTRACT

How does the *Symposium* (not) hang together? The overwhelmingly popular answer is that the *Symposium* has a teleological structure, culminating in Socrates'/Diotima's speech, which variously incorporates or dismisses noteworthy claims about *erōs* made in the preceding speeches. Whatever endures from a non-philosophical source does so not in anything like its original form, but rather by virtue of having undergone Platonic alchemy, as she translates, reworks and refines ordinary opinions into high-powered philosophical theory. This paper proposes a radical alternative. It argues that we should systematically reverse Eryximachus' reductive judgements concerning Heraclitus on harmonisation, and apply the results to the *Symposium* itself. There is discordant harmony which a complex, polyphonic *logos* embodies. Such a *logos* thrives on dissension, since its very existence as a unified whole depends on the maintained, unweakened opposition between elements agreeing to differ. The *Symposium* is many voices unified, but untrammelled. The paper concludes that, to avoid fundamental question-begging, the *Symposium* endorses a sort of epistemological contextualism anathema in other Platonic contexts. And that it is not a dialogue.

In Plato's *Symposium*, do Diotima the wise and her assiduous scholar Socrates victoriously carry all before them in the night's competitive praise of *erōs*? The impression that everything leads up to philosophy and the philosopher is very widespread: to the great majority of readers, it seems undeniable that the speeches form a teleological succession which culminates in Socrates/Diotima. True, there is some measure of resistance. For example, according to Straussians, the speech of Aristophanes is full of esoteric wisdom and presents a formidable political counterweight to the Diotiman doctrines which so many non-Straussians are prone to impute to Plato *in propria persona*.<sup>1</sup> Again, according to Martha Nussbaum's much-discussed reading, in the frustrated anger of Alcibiades'

<sup>1</sup> "I regard it as possible that Plato directs our attention in advance to this speech of Zeus and that Aristophanes' speech is the central speech of the whole work" (Strauss, L. (2001) *On Plato's Symposium*, London: 126). "The case can be made, then, that the unique placement of Aristophanes' speech in the dialectic of the *Symposium*

speech Plato liberates an erotic vision passionately focused on the uniquely personal, as opposed to austere Diotiman transcendentalism - a perspective he himself would come to share by way of the "recantation" of the *Phaedrus*.<sup>2</sup> Even so, monological interpretations which award the prize to philosophy's entry - or on which Plato does - rule the field. I break ranks: the many voices of the *Symposium* must be heard in unabated polyphony.

There is a brisk riposte to my imperative. "It is all very well to espouse such interpretative *politesse*. The fact remains that the *Symposium* is a sort of textual funnel tumbling the reader into Socrates' speech. One concedes that far from all of what comes before is jettisoned pure and simple: Diotima diversely modifies what Socrates has been reciting to the party on her behalf in order that that she might be married in so very appositely, incorporating some assertions, and dismissing others with a diagnosis of the vicious errors at their roots - but whatever endures from a non-philosophical source does so not in anything like its original form, but rather by virtue of having undergone Platonic sublation, as she translates, reworks and refines ordinary opinions into high-powered philosophical theory. So the unenthusiastic, muted best to be said for what comes before is that one can find therein humble doctrinal predecessors to Diotima's discourse. These predecessors are, without exception, mistaken, sometimes egregiously so, and liable to lapse into incoherence. As for what comes after, Alcibiades is nothing more - if nothing less - than an exceptionally graphic object lesson in love gone wrong, an unknowing, negative confirmation of what he feels acutely, but hasn't begun to understand. And to record a crude but weighty point, Socrates' re-telling of Diotima's authoritative tuition is by a long chalk the lengthiest speech in the *Symposium*: there is much more of it to take in and take seriously. When all is said and done, surely the fact that this speech is ever so much more *philosophical* than the rest carries the day. Even if mostly declamatory exposition, rather than closely-argued dialectic, a Platonist is in no doubt as to who should win over hearts and minds." My goal in this essay is to dismantle the principles underlying any such swift riposte expressive of the Platonist orthodoxy.

indicates that Plato intended his brief portrayal of the thought of this prominent Athenian artist and thinker to stand as the dialogue's most important statement on *erōs* from the limited viewpoint of the purely political" (Ludwig, P. W. (2002) *Eros and Polis: Desire and Community in Greek Political Theory*, Cambridge: 23).

<sup>2</sup> Nussbaum, M. C. (2001) *The Fragility of Goodness*. 2nd edn., Cambridge: 200-23.

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First some simplified cartography of the conceptualisations of *erōs* at work and play in the *Symposium*, for purposes of orientation. The father of the *logos*, Phaedrus, vehemently extols the sovereign influence of *erōs* as both a spur to virtue and a fetter on vice. But he is almost ostentatiously reticent concerning what *erōs* actually *is*; not so his successors. In accordance with his relentless determination to dichotomise, Pausanias assigns a common end, sexual gratification, to superior and inferior kinds of love, but separates them off by distinguishing how that end is pursued. Common or Pandemic *Erōs* indiscriminately seeks "to do the deed" regardless (181b5-6),<sup>3</sup> while Heavenly or Uranian *Erōs* ideally demands a conjunction of psychological and moral qualifications to permit sexual intercourse: that the *erastēs* be able and willing to deliver an education in virtue, eagerness for which renders the *erōmenos* amenable (184d3-e4). Despite the integral role of sex in Uranian relationships, *aretē* is their motor, and the object of the Heavenly lover is a "worthy character" (183e5).<sup>4</sup>

Eryximachus endorses his predecessor's hierarchical erotic dualism, but criticises its selective application (185e7-186a1); his chosen task is to sedulously amplify, or, rather, universalise it, in manifestations natural and supernatural (186a3-7). He promotes a generic, Presocratic/Hippocratic theory of the constitution of things which views them as containing, and perhaps consisting of, opposites; these opposites fall into kinds characteristic of, and perhaps demarcating, the various kinds of things (bodies: 186d7-e1; harmony and rhythm: 187b1, 3, 5-6; meteorological phenomena: 188a3-4). But since, so Eryximachus contends, what is most opposed is sundered by the greatest enmity (186d6-7), the moderating conciliation of these opposites, identified as "*erōs* and likemindedness [*homonoiā*]" (186e1-2, 187c3-4), is difficult to achieve and sustain, easy to rupture. His special interest lies in magnifying the technical expert's ability to implant and nourish healthy, harmonious and virtuous *erōs*, and to restrict and extirpate unhealthy, recalcitrant and vicious *erōs*, first and foremost the doctor's, but also that of other technicians.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> [οἱ φαῦλοι] πρὸς τὸ διαπράξασθαι μόνον βλέποντες.

<sup>4</sup> ὁ δὲ τοῦ ἡθους χρηστοῦ ὄντος ἐραστής.

<sup>5</sup> Medicine: 186b8-d6; gymnastics and farming: 187a1; "astronomy" (which includes meteorology): 188b5-6;

With good reason, Aristophanes closely assimilates the approaches of Eryximachus and Pausanias (189c3), and declares that in contradistinction to their type of discourse, his *logos* will serve to elucidate the *dynamis*, the special force, power or capacity, which belongs to *erōs*. True enough, in his peroration Eryximachus had pronounced love in its totality, the bad taken together with the good, not merely very powerful, but rather omnipotent (188d4-5), and accorded Heavenly *Erōs* taken alone unrivaled efficacy in promoting both human happiness, and our *philia* towards one another and the gods.<sup>6</sup> But Aristophanes' comeback is that we completely misperceive love's power:<sup>7</sup> this is his diagnosis of our otherwise inexplicable, irreligious disregard of *erōs*, in unmistakable, if tacit, concurrence with Phaedrus' introductory complaint (189c5-8). His (religious?) mission is to instruct his co-symposiasts as to the character of erotic *dynamis*, which true word they are in their turn to propagate at large (189d3-4).<sup>8</sup> The myth he recounts teaches that our "original nature" (192e9, 193c5, 193d4) has been tragically divided, so that *erōs* might be defined as "the desire and pursuit of the whole" (192e10-193a1); love is our greatest benefactor because it alone can make us blessed and happy through its curative capacity to restore "original nature" (193d3-5).

divination or prophecy: 188b6-c1, c5-d3. Astronomical or prophetic expertise will presumably often be a matter of prescription in the light of knowledgeable prognosis, rather than outright control.

<sup>6</sup> οὗτος τὴν μεγίστην δύναμιν ἔχει καὶ πᾶσαν ἡμῖν εὐδαιμονίαν παρασκευάζει καὶ ἀλλήλοις δυναμένους ὀμιλεῖν καὶ φίλους εἶναι καὶ τοῖς κρείττοσιν ἡμῶν θεοῖς (188d7-9: perhaps the wording (δύναμιν/δυναμένους) suggests (something like) a transmission theory of causation, on which it is the combinatory power of *erōs* which makes us capable of combining in relations of *philia*).

<sup>7</sup> ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι παντάπασι τὴν τοῦ ἔρωτος δύναμιν οὐκ ἠσθῆσθαι (189c4-5).

<sup>8</sup> One might have wondered whether, even if Aristophanes' *logos* is hardly a philosophical venture, the stress he places on erotic *dynamis* might nevertheless signify that the proceedings are taking a more philosophical turn, since capacity rightly conceived, as flowing from what a thing is, at least partially reveals that identity, and so furthers the project of discovering essences. All the same, the two subsequent claims in the dialogue about *dynamis* are not made in philosophical contexts: Diotima's personifying exegesis of daemonic lore (202e3-203a8), and Alcibiades' tribute to Socrates' educative powers (216c6-7, 218e1-2 - the latter Alcibiades' report of Socrates' self-ascription).

What does Agathon make of *erōs*? Since he rounded on all who have come before, accusing them of scanting proper method and engaging to put their error right by first retailing what *erōs* is like, and only then passing to how he benefits us, in virtue of the properties specified (194e5-195a5),<sup>9</sup> one has every reason to anticipate that we might easily read off an expansive description of *erōs* from Agathon's speech. But that expectation is disappointed. True, his *logos* leaves us in no doubt that love is just lovely, a thing of tender grace and coruscating charm; but, with the admittedly substantial exception of his identifying *erōs* as the fountain of all creativity, both artificial and natural (196e1-197b3), one would be hard put to articulate its features on Agathon's account. Actually, as regards reticence, there is little to choose between Phaedrus' production and Agathon's, and we might plausibly consider the latter as the perfection of what the former has put in train,<sup>10</sup> prior to Socrates' and Diotima's setting the entertainment on its head: a sophisticated compound of fine suggestiveness and innuendo, the turn of the party's host would be judged the most accomplished erotic *logos* of the evening on the conventional understanding of such discourse, as his guests' loud approbation testifies (198a1-3). His success is predicated on preservation of a flirtatious demeanour elegantly varied, but never abandoned; grossly explicit statement would be quite foreign to how he sets about theatrically beguiling the assembly (again).

Socrates' examination of Agathon is precisely designed to uncover his presuppositions, to isolate commitments made painfully explicit: nothing is to be left in fascinating obscurity, everything is to be exposed to the cold light of rational assessment. It is agreed that: *erōs* aims at acquiring what it does not have (200e8-9); that since *erōs* is of beauty, it has none; and in particular that since what is good is beautiful, *erōs* does not possess good things (201a9-c5). What Agathon's refutation paradoxically leaves to *erōs* appears nothing more than absolute lack, unadulterated

<sup>9</sup> See Sedley, D. N. (2006) "The speech of Agathon in Plato's *Symposium*", in B. Reis (ed.), *The Virtuous Life in Greek Ethics*. Cambridge, 47-69 for a judicious weighing of Agathon's procedural shortcomings, as doctrinal Platonism would regard them.

<sup>10</sup> "Agathon's speech - which may be more like Phaedrus' than any of the others', at least in the degree that it lacks a precise argument - is cleverer, and in a different, more brilliant mode..." (Rowe, C. J. (1998) *Plato: Symposium*, Warminster: 137).

desire for what, by definition, is not there for it. At this point love seems to be not so much deficient, as nothing beyond deficiency set on satisfaction - with which it would disappear. But, when Socrates substitutes for Agathon as hapless respondent and Diotima the wise takes charge, the unremitting negativity of these interim conclusions is qualified by a host of stipulations. *Erōs* figures as a sort of intermediary between the mortal and the divine (202e2-203a8), and is in itself an in-betweenener, e.g. philosophically aware of ignorance to be overcome (204a3-7). Contrary to the misleading restrictions of ordinary linguistic usage, an erotic disposition is a trait common to all human beings (205a9-b6): the desire in its entirety for good things and happiness is universal *erōs* at its most intense (205d2-3). Since it strives for eternal possession of the good (206a11-12), the function of *erōs* is somatic and psychic generation in beauty (206b7-8). Properly understood, beauty is the generative medium rather than the object of *erōs*, whose creative activity saves what good we have - so far as that is possible for transient, perishable beings (206e2-207a4).

Notwithstanding all this busy diversity of views openly advanced or artfully insinuated, the *Symposium's* degree of textual coherence is very high: Plato makes the speakers at the party attend most scrupulously to one another, whether to express approval or disapproval, endorsing, adjusting, or repudiating the claims and counter-claims already in circulation, and doing so in tones amused, bemused, passionately engaged or seemingly detached. Pausanias' chastising Phaedrus for his failure to discriminate higher from lower *erōs* (180c4-d1) and rectification of this supposed mistake do not measure the full extent of how his *logos* interlocks with that of his predecessor. He expatiates at length on the peculiar combination in Athens and Sparta of inhibiting social disapproval of the complaisant *erōmenos* with apparently inconsistent toleration or encouragement of the pursuing *erastēs* who indulges in what would be outrageously shameful behaviour, in the absence of *erōs* (182d4-185b5). So just as Phaedrus' erotic model of emulative cultivation centred on the dynamics of *aischunē*, so Pausanias too devotes most of his speech to a kind of imaginative sociological reconstruction of how modesty and shamelessness operate in complicated civilisations to validate paederastic relationships.

If Aristophanes so insistently distances himself from Pausanias and Eryximachus paired together, it does not follow that his *logos* breaks clear of the conceptual nexus they established in Phaedrus' wake - although the linkages

might be deflationary or ironic, rather than straightforwardly cooperative. In fact, his initial reaction to Eryximachus' presentation comes before his own speech, and is non-verbal. As the doctor speaks, the comedian is self-administering the hiccup remedies the symposium's resident medical man has prescribed and, one presumes, in so doing cuts a figure whose homely, undignified antics - holding his breath, gargling, and then sneezing, doubtless carried out with plenty of body language - disrespectfully jar with Eryximachus' cosmological sweep.<sup>11</sup> The doctor himself is quick to recognise that Aristophanes' affected wonder that "what is orderly in the body" desires such rude shocks (189a3-4) is no innocent commentary on his technocratic vision. And if Aristophanes appropriates the accolade of salvific healer for his *erōs*, the medicine it dispenses would seem to be supernatural, rather than the sober regimen touted by Eryximachus. Again, the assurance that only masculine descendants of the sun embark on glittering political careers, introduced with straight face to deflect the calumny that the early efflorescence of male homosexual proclivities is shameless (192a2-7), is a broadly satiric reflection on Pausanias' masculinist pretensions. Unsurprisingly, Aristophanic connections are pugnaciously amiable caricatures.

The narcissism of Agathon's Gorgianic virtuosity might seem so self-absorbed that external references, apart from the blanket methodological condemnation of those guests who have spoken, would be minimised; but his *logos* frequently harks back to Phaedrus' assumptions and themes. The correction that *erōs* is youngest, not oldest, of the gods is addressed directly to him (195a8). Since Agathon's rebuke is that the others have muddied up how *erōs* acts on us because of what he is like, we might well conclude that it bites most sorely for Phaedrus: if Agathon is right,

<sup>11</sup> Avlonitis argues that administration of the three remedies is synchronised with the tripartition of Eryximachus' *logos* into medicine, music and astronomy/divine communication, whence the sneeze becomes a mantic joke: "das Niesen galt ja als gottgesandtes Zeichen, wie unter anderen auch Aristophanes in seinen *Vögeln* (720) mit *παρμόν τ' ὄρνιθα καλεῖτε* bezeugt hat: 'auch das Niesen nennt ihr Menschen Vorzeichen' (eigentlich: 'Vogel'). Gleichzeitig ist natürlich vorauszusetzen, daß Eryximachos - ganz wie in Theater - einfach weiterredet, als würde er nichts hören bzw. nichts davon merken, daß seine Zurschaustellung lächerlich gemacht wird: ähnlich wie die an dem *βωμολόχος* leidenden Figuren der Komödie" (Avlonitis, S. (1999) "Aristophanes *βωμολόχος*: Platon, *Symposion* 185c-189b", *Rheinisches Museum* 142, 15-239: 19-20).

he not only left the relationship between age and benevolence unexplained, but had no basis for the causal assertion anyway.<sup>12</sup> Phaedrus had vituperated Orpheus for his soft effeminacy; Agathon positively luxuriates in sensitive delicacy (e.g. 195d7-196a1). The playful "demonstration" that *erōs* is most courageous because Aphrodite subjugates Ares (196c8-d4) punctures the strenuous militarism of the first speech, just as the idea that love makes poets of us all, no matter how unpromising (196e1-3), is a modulation into an irenic, literary key of Phaedrus' *erōs*, who inspires with warrior spirit.

As is only to be expected, Socrates/Diotima nod in every direction: either because his/hers is the Platonic master speech, processing, whether to accept or reject, or soaring beyond everything that has been - or might be? - said about *erōs*; or because this *logos*, as one expects from a philosopher, is most capaciously ambitious to reflect on, and theorise about, the validity and genealogy of the whole gamut of erotic beliefs.

Diotima's schooling of Socrates launches off from "what was agreed by me and Agathon" (201d6-7), since the philosopher had once floundered in "more or less" the same ignorant confusion as that from which dialectical examination has now rescued the chastened tragedian; Socrates has redeployed "the very arguments" she had turned against him to prove that rational consistency requires that *erōs* is neither beautiful nor good (201e3-7).<sup>13</sup> Thus the coincidence of states of belief which have been jettisoned is less than perfect - perhaps a courteous fiction? - while the premises on whose foundation Diotima will build are securely identified. Agathon's triumphant *tour de force* was very largely a matter of what was not said, and the manner in which he didn't say it. None of that survives; instead, what is preserved is a set of implications extractable from his *logos*, but alien to its tenuous substance. The comedian does not get off any more lightly than the tragedian, as Diotima seizes the opportunity to disqualify his doctrine that *erōs* aspires after the (re)acquisition of one's own (self) (205d10-e7).

<sup>12</sup> Not that Agathon doesn't reassure Phaedrus that they are in agreement on plenty of other scores (195b6): but given how much of a fuss Phaedrus makes of the antiquity of *erōs* - and what Agathon will go on to make of his youth - is this reassurance more than polite pretence?

<sup>13</sup> σχεδὸν γάρ τι ... ἕτερα τοιαῦτα ἔλεγον οἵαπερ ... τούτοις τοῖς λόγοις οἷσπερ.



If the two poets are under open fire, nor do any of the other speakers escape a philosophical going over, even if their presence in Diotima's *logos* is relatively oblique. Eryximachus steps forward into what was to have been Aristophanes' place because the hiccups have been brought on by "surfeit"<sup>14</sup> (*viz* over-eating) or some other cause (185c6-7). Crapulence is no idle conjecture. Eryximachus defines medicine as "knowledge of the workings of *erōs* in the body with regard to filling and emptying" (186c6-7);<sup>15</sup> so successful explanation and cure of Aristophanes' opportune indisposition should count as a minor, humorous test case of the doctor's aspirations to intervene and regulate. If the technical regulators of *erōs* occupied in other fields are not said to govern relative fullness, it remains a condition on which Eryximachus tends to harp: when in wrapping up he invites Aristophanes to "fill in" (188e3)<sup>16</sup> any such gaps as he may inadvertently have left in his praise of *erōs*, one suspects he assumes that there weren't any, that his *logos* was magisterially comprehensive. He characterised expert divination as "the craftsman of *philia* between gods and men through knowledge of those human erotic affairs which have a bearing on propriety and piety" (188c7-d3). Diotima is herself a religious authority (201d3-5). She asserts that the daemonic is the cosmic go-between which makes possible traffic between the divine and the human, which are immiscible: "being in the middle between both, it fills in the intervening space so that the whole is bound together with itself" (202e6-7).<sup>17</sup> Hence the ironic implication of Diotima's exposition, regardless of whether it is figurative, is that Eryximachus missed a beat, laxly failing to use his favourite concepts outside the medical sphere, and so branding himself an "undaemonic", "vulgar" technician (203a4-6).

Pausanias' legacy in Diotima's discourse is ambiguous. On the one hand, Diotima is second to none in her unhesitating, imperious demotion of what she categorises as inferior. Neither tokens of beauty, nor the reproductive impulses stimulated by exposure to them, are of the same quality; since *erōs* is goal-driven, some lovers do emphatically better than others. Furthermore, her major contrast, that between inferior body and superior soul,

<sup>14</sup> πλησμονῆς.

<sup>15</sup> ἐπιστήμη τῶν τοῦ σώματος ἐρωτικῶν πρὸς πλησμονὴν καὶ κένωσιν.

<sup>16</sup> ἀναπληρῶσαι.

<sup>17</sup> ἐν μέσῳ δὲ ὄν ἀμφοτέρων συμπληροῖ, ὥστε τὸ πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συνδεδέσθαι.

aligns nicely with Pausanias' championing of Uranian over Pandemic Aphrodite/*Erōs*: his Uranian *erastēs*, avid to improve a noble *paidika*, is not so very distant from her lover, quick with edifying *logoi*. But on the other hand, they are, in other respects, not so very close either. First, never mind his upstanding words, the Uranian no less than the Pandemic couple focus on sexual intercourse. I do not mean that Pausanias is a hypocritical special pleader who imposes a moralistic veneer on his unseemly appetites, as has sometimes been suggested.<sup>18</sup> The point rather is that Uranian preoccupation with character and intellect is meant to enrich and legitimate physical sex, not dislodge it; whence the clear blue water separating Pausanias from Diotima, whose ascending lovers learn to leave somatic beauty behind, not hedge its enjoyment about with salubrious conditions. Second, Diotima would appear to be a woman, and promiscuously combines feminine and masculine in her remarkable report of erotic creativity (206c1-e1); nothing could be in sharper opposition to Pausanias' obduracy in separating off and denigrating the female.

First in, last out: Diotima and Phaedrus. The proposal that she accords him the lion's share of her attention is not preposterous, *pace* his bad press.<sup>19</sup> The claim that the least of the birds and beasts are propelled by *erōs* into willingness to do battle to the death for the sake of their offspring (207b3-4) might strike one at first blush as nothing but hostile belittlement of Phaedrus' glorification of erotic martyrs, Alcestis and Achilles brought down into the company of valiant sparrows. However, although Diotima does attribute the self-sacrificial drive to global *erōs*, she does not assimilate humans and other animals *tout court*. It is just because the latter are bereft of rational calculation that the lengths to which they go on behalf of their descendants must stem from *erōs* (207b6-c1). But, confronted by the ambition for honour of human heroes, one would be bewildered by the irrationality of its pitch, were one not alive to the fact that *erōs* as it bursts forth in superior people targets the achievement of perpetual *kleos*

<sup>18</sup> Rowe is spot-on: "it is he [Pausanias] who most directly provides what I have called the counterpoint to Socrates', and Diotima's, vision of *erōs*, describing ordinary, common-or-garden, *erōs* at its best, *i.e.* as properly educative as well as sexual. Pausanias is a particularly apt choice for *this* role, insofar as no one could accuse him of aiming only for sexual gratification" (Rowe 1998: 10).

<sup>19</sup> See Wardy, R. (2012) "Father of the Discourse: Phaedrus' Speech in Plato's *Symposium*", *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* 30: 133-84 for a defence of Phaedrus against the consensus of his detractors.

- as witnessed by Alcestis and Achilles (208c2-d4). Diotima reinstates, therefore, the traditional weighting of *philotimia* as a stimulus to noteworthy endeavours - but from a position on the meaning and finality of death which is anything but traditional.

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Why did I skip over Eryximachus' *logos* in reckoning up how Plato uses cross-references to weave the *Symposium* together so tightly? After all, he too fits the scheme, building as he does on Pausanias' effort; but perhaps his speech's main contribution to our understanding of the dialogue's deep structure is of a totally different order. He effects the transition from erotic medicine to other specialisms in a section which deserves to be quoted *in extenso* and analysed carefully:

As I say, all medicine governs through this god, just as with gymnastics and farming; and that this likewise holds good of music is clear to anyone who attends to the matter even briefly, as perhaps Heraclitus too wishes to say, although as far as his phrasing is concerned, he does not put it well. For he says of unity that "by being at variance with itself it is in agreement, like the harmony of bow or lyre". But the assertion that a harmony is at variance or composed of things still at variance is very irrational.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps what he wished to say was that it came about from the high and the low which, previously at variance, were subsequently brought into agreement under the agency of musical technique. For surely a harmony could not consist of the high and the low, if they are still at variance: for harmony is concord, and concord is a kind of agreement, but it is impossible for an agreement to consist of things at variance, so long as they are so; again, it is impossible to harmonise what is at variance and not in agreement. (186e4-187b7).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Lighting on the best English equivalent to mirror the connotations of *alogia* in this polemic is tricky. "Confusion" (because Heraclitus did not even think before he spoke?) and "incoherence" (for the same reason, or because Heraclitus cannot think logically?) are also possibilities; "irrationality" subsumes them both.

<sup>21</sup> ἢ τε οὖν ἰατρική, ὡσπερ λέγω, πᾶσα διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τούτου κυβερνᾶται, ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ γυμναστική καὶ γεωργία· μουσική δὲ καὶ παντὶ κατάδηλος τῷ καὶ σμικρὸν προσέχοντι τὸν νοῦν ὅτι κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχει τούτοις, ὡσπερ ἴσως καὶ Ἡράκλειτος βούλεται λέγειν, ἐπεὶ τοῖς γε ῥήμασιν οὐ καλῶς λέγει. τὸ ἐν γὰρ φησι διαφερόμενον αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συμφέρεσθαι ὡσπερ ἁρμονίαν τόξου τε καὶ λύρας. ἔστι δὲ πολλή ἀλογία ἁρμονίαν φάναι διαφέρεσθαι ἢ ἐκ διαφερομένων ἔτι εἶναι. ἀλλὰ ἴσως τόδε ἐβούλετο λέγειν, ὅτι ἐκ διαφερομένων πρότερον τοῦ ὀξέος καὶ βαρέος,

"Governed" is a resonant word, of ancient provenance in the tradition of Presocratic cosmogony and cosmology, and fittingly employed as Eryximachus prepares his patronising interpretation and amendment of Heraclitus.<sup>22</sup> The doctor is, of course, playing the symposiastic game of learned citation. However, in this instance the idea is not to inject some borrowed prestige into his speech, but rather to take a *soi-disant* "authority" down a peg or two: Heraclitus, notoriously contemptuous of the common run of folk and intellectual celebrities alike, is to be taught to say what he must mean, if he has any sense at all. The passage is suffused with sarcasm. On the formal level, Heraclitus is a philosopher whose proprietary plan of attack is the detection of recurrent instantiations of patterns and processes in very heterogeneous things and happenings, on scales small and vast. His dismissive epistemological stance is premised on the paradox that such recurrence is unobviously evident: that is, unimpeachable evidence for it virtually surrounds us, but its exacting construal calls for redoubtable, rare intelligence ("nature loves to hide", B 123). So what could be more ludicrous than Heraclitus hoisted with his own petard, if oblivious to the instantiation of the erotic pattern in music, manifest there to anyone of sound mind willing to spare the matter a moment's thought?<sup>23</sup>

As for the substance of the critique, it is an almost excruciatingly pedestrian appeal to common sense, a resolute jog through a sequence of blindingly obvious little syllogisms terminating in the conviction of the fierce advocate of an arcane *logos* on a charge of extreme irrationality, *alogia*. Since harmony is concord, its genus is

ἔπειτα ὕστερον ὁμολογησάντων γέγονεν ὑπὸ τῆς μουσικῆς τέχνης. οὐ γὰρ δήπου ἐκ διαφορομένων γε ἔτι τοῦ ὀξέος καὶ βαρέος ἁρμονία ἂν εἴη. ἢ γὰρ ἁρμονία συμφωνία ἐστίν, συμφωνία δὲ ὁμολογία τις, ὁμολογίαν δὲ ἐκ διαφορομένων, ἕως ἂν διαφέρωνται, ἀδύνατον εἶναι, διαφορόμενον δὲ αὖ καὶ μὴ ὁμολογοῦν ἀδύνατον ἁρμόσαι.

<sup>22</sup> The most palpable link, perhaps, would be with Anaximander. There is a recorded use of the term by Heraclitus: ἐν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην ὅτι κυβερνήσαι πάντα διὰ πάντων (DK B41); however, the text is problematic, and often emended. But that is neither here nor there, since choice of the word is most probably a general signal of the intellectual arena we have entered, not a specific allusion to this or some other, lost Heraclitean text.

<sup>23</sup> κατάδηλος (187a2), "clear", may conceal a jibe about Heraclitus' proverbial obscurity (he is σκοτεινός, "darkling"), aptly mocking the philosopher of opposites by means of an implied verbal polarity.

agreement, *homologia*, literally "sameness or similarity in *logos*". But *homologia* cannot brook dissension (that is, between those very things which go to make it up). Therefore if Heraclitus has not lapsed into utter nonsense, he is offering up the trivial observation that we get harmony when a previous state of dissension is succeeded by *homologia*, thanks to the good offices of the expert reconciler. Otherwise, since agreement and variance are opposites, the supposition that harmony might obtain between unreconciled elements would involve Heraclitus in a blatant contradiction. So in kindness we had best not take him at his egregious word.

I propose that we systematically reverse Eryximachus' facile judgements, and apply the results to the *Symposium* itself. Since I further propose that such an application is just what its author intended, what we are after is a reading consonant with what I shall argue are Plato's intentions for this text, not one that is necessarily viable outside this particular context, either according to Plato's lights or our own.<sup>24</sup>

Heraclitus is paradoxical through-and-through, most memorably in his insistence that although opposites are indeed opposed, opposition, so far from precluding affiliation, can coexist with or even, in some fashion, constitute it. The red-letter questions have always been: is he futilely attempting the impossible feat of embracing contradictions (Aristotle's version of him in *Metaphysics Γ*), or only ostensibly doing so? On the latter option, is he no better than a sophistical paradox-monger, or the proponent of a theory whose obscure profundities excuse his inescapably difficult way with words? Eryximachus, of course, will have none of it: the fatal dilemma for his poor Heraclitus is that the only alternative to ridicule as a knave or idiot is diminution to the status of peddler of the thinnest platitudes.

We are looking to avoid both incoherence and trivialisation. "An unapparent connection is stronger than an evident one".<sup>25</sup> As usually translated, *harmonia* here stands for whatever fits together, rather than (just) specifically

<sup>24</sup> This thesis is an elaboration of the leading idea of Wardy, R. (2002) "The unity of opposites in Plato's *Symposium*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 23: 1-61. That article homes in on elements ranged with and against each other, where the sense of "opposition" in play is fairly narrow; in comparison, this article works with a relatively relaxed notion of "(dis)agreement".

<sup>25</sup> ἁρμονίη ἀφανῆς φανερῆς κρείσσων (B 54).

musical "harmony"; but that need not mean that Plato cannot intend the educated and astute reader to couple Eryximachus' *harmonia* quotation with this one: and what could be neater than that the *Symposium* should exemplify Heraclitus' tenets by incorporating a citation with hidden connections to other remarks of his? "By being at variance with itself unity is in agreement".<sup>26</sup> We dismiss from consideration both the Aristotelian gloss that this is the crazy would-be flat equation of agreement and disagreement, and Eryximachus' reduction to "what *was* at variance...". What we want is a mode of organisation establishing a unity richer than a homogeneous mixture. But that, of course, isn't nearly enough: the constituents of an Eryximachean pacified harmony are heterogeneous - their identity isn't blended away - but subsist compounded only because the technician has reined in their countervailing tendencies: the different specialisms all conciliate what is discordant in their respective areas by instilling *homologia*, *erōs* and "likemindedness" (187c2-4). Nor have we yet covered the entire distance: the demand is to unearth an arrangement whose parts are somehow integrated not despite, but just because of their being at odds, that is, they are joined by the least apparent of connections.

To this point we have done no more than delineate a thoroughly uncontroversial, indeed platitudinous, *résumé* of some elementary postulates of Heraclitus' metaphysics. Since the reward of the exercise is to come from experimenting with the hypothesis that the *Symposium* itself is some manner of Heraclitean unity, now we must build up such a characterisation. Let us turn back to the cross-references, *etc.*, I mapped out which contribute to the coherence of the text. As I noted, it is not as if very much of this disputatious material is looking to set up any bland harmonisation of propositions about or even attitudes to the communal erotic enterprise; but how it cumulatively works to make the *Symposium* hang together is not demonstrably Heraclitean. That this is so emerges from the realisation that, for all I have argued so far, Diotima and Socrates enjoy exclusive access to final truths, as my

<sup>26</sup> Others render "[by] being at variance unity is in agreement with itself" *vel sim*. As with other formulations of B 51, the grammar of Plato's Eryximachus' version permits one to attach "with itself" to either "being at variance" or "in agreement": perhaps Heraclitus courted the ambiguity, as he so often does. But since in any case we must understand how unity might arise in or from diversity, construing one way or the other only serves to shift the rhetorical emphasis of the paradox without altering its core.

hypothetical objector would have it: whatever anyone else has to say or imply is there as a fragmentary adumbration of her philosophy or an *explanandum* to be analysed by it, or maybe a salutary object-lesson in how *erōs* goes wrong without philosophical discipline - but the others' value resides in nothing but their relation to the dominant *logos*. If so, the *logoi* might well be "at variance", but cannot add up to a whole abstrusely unified by that variation, when validity is monopolised by the philosophers *because* they are philosophers.

To begin with how we can retool some of Eryximachus' vocabulary, that it should conform more readily with our present purposes. In the first instance, his psychological language ("enmity", "likemindedness") might seem to read most smoothly as metaphorical personification. For if his intention is to do one better than Pausanias by dichotomising universally, the *erōs* which he would submit to technological supervision throughout nature cannot be the same as the mental states and emotional urges of human *erastēs* and *erōmenos*. And one might have thought that the credentials of his *logos* as (at least relatively) sober science stand or fall with its freedom from atavistic animism: neither the parts of our bodies nor the seasons have minds to entertain any feelings, amiable or unfriendly. But, on second thought, one sees that such residual or fossilised animistic holdovers as might persist in the traditions of archaic natural philosophy and Hippocratic medicine<sup>27</sup> would, in this context, constitute a convenient resource for Eryximachus' exploitation. His speech - like Diotima's - seems to many readers to be vulnerable to the criticism that it only feigns to be about the *erōs* which human beings experience, whether in rapture, agony, or both: the accusation is that in their different ways, both Eryximachus and Diotima so depersonalise *erōs* as to rob it of its passionate dimension. How Diotima is to be judged is a question for another occasion. But as for Eryximachus, leaving the issue of whether the ascription of intentional states to impersonal (and inanimate?) nature is literal or metaphorical undecided only helps to insulate him from the suspicion of having strayed from the assigned topic.

Be that as it may, since the components of the conversation at the symposium are linguistic performances - the discourses of the symposiasts - nothing, of course, prohibits employment of a full-blooded psychological

<sup>27</sup> The actual justice or otherwise of what some now regard as an old-fashioned, hyper-rationalistic take on the evolution of Greek science is not germane to Eryximachus' tactics here. Konstan, D. and Young-Bruehl, E. (1982) "Eryximachus' speech in the *Symposium*", *Apeiron* 16: 40-6 is an unusual defence of the quality of his theorising.

vocabulary in developing a Heraclitean model of their structural interrelations; and, if I am right about the speculative use to which Plato would have us put this passage, the ease of retooling is not serendipitous. Agathon's guests are far too well-behaved to break out into open enmity, as distinct from cultivated disagreement (unless one were to detect an admixture of hate in the late-comer Alcibiades' love for Socrates); but most of them are very far indeed from likemindedness.

An Eryximachus would exhort them: "a party goes swimmingly when no untoward acrimony mars the steady accumulation of interlocking speeches. The *logoi* needn't complement one another in quite the same way: similarity less than strict identity suffices for all-important *homologia*. One *logos* might alert us to a subject crying out for the grand treatment, but itself fall short in its execution (Phaedrus). Another might start to make this good by bringing within our grasp the concepts and distinctions necessary for handling the subject as it ought to be treated (Pausanias). But not sufficient: a third *logos* carries through by bringing to bear a panoptic learning which synthesises multifarious insights (me). It remains for others to complete the initiative by dotting such i's and crossing such t's as I *might* have overlooked. But what a congenial gathering won't abide is a downright, uncooperative breakaway - especially one that threatens insolence (Aristophanes, I fear?). Harmony dissolves if conflict is not vanquished through mutual compromise".

In reverse: "Eryximachus envisions a diachronic progression from disorderly congeries to regimented subordination. Instead we hunt for a synchronic structure whose unity curiously supervenes on the unreduced differences between its parts. To clarify (somewhat - a completely sanitised Heraclitus purged of obscurity would be unfit for Platonic esotericism). The act of reading the *Symposium* (again) unfolds in time, as one imagines speaker after speaker taking turns to praise *erōs*; but a reading of the *Symposium* is not obliged to keep temporal replacement intact, to respect narrative movement and the concomitant inclination to espouse a teleological conception of the text (Diotima as *telos*, Alcibiades as rueful epilogue). We must flout common sense and invert the conclusions of the syllogistic sequence Eryximachus constructed to cut Heraclitus down to size. There is discordant harmony which a complex, polyphonic *logos* embodies. Such a *logos* thrives on dissension, since its very existence as a unified whole



depends on the maintained, unweakened opposition between elements agreeing to differ. The *Symposium* is many voices unified, but untrammelled".

The earliest anticipation of Pausanias' dichotomising is to be found in Hesiod, where, however, it is Strife, not *Erōs*, which is doubled: "so there was not only a single birth of *Erides*, but on earth there are two" (*Works and Days* 11-12).<sup>28</sup> As it happens, *Eris* for *Erōs* might possibly confirm the claimed anticipation, rather than undermining it: for Hesiod is correcting the acknowledgement in his other epic of only the one Strife (*Theogony* 225). Thus the Hesiod of the *Theogony* stands to Phaedrus (one *Eris*, one *Erōs*) as the Hesiod of the *Works and Days* stands to Pausanias (doubled *Erides* and *Erōtes*). And the genealogical complications do not stop there. Hesiod not only distinguishes between Strifes, he also designates one *Eris* evil, the other, beneficial: the senior of the pair (*Works and Days* 17 - again like Uranian *Erōs*), she incites humankind to healthy emulation (20-4). So it is no great strain to think of this spirit of beneficial rivalry as the ultimate literary ancestor of Phaedrus' trumpeted *philotimia*, the aristocratic stiving kindled by *erōs*: the Hesiodic heritage is spread across the first two speeches of the *Symposium*.<sup>29</sup>

Eryximachus' *bête noire* would have none of this. With strident, calculated aggression he proclaims: "one must know that war is common and strife is justice" (B80): Heraclitean *eris* is everywhere undiminished and untamed, the recurrent patterns and processes onto which he latches are always oppositional. The formidable challenge is to perceive unity-in-diversity. Most gnomically: "things taken together: wholes and not wholes, in agreement at variance, in unison dissonant; both unity from all things and all things from unity" (B10).<sup>30</sup> How to fathom this and transfer our understanding to the *Symposium*? We can be negatively confident that these groupings should *not* be "taken together" in the way one grasps an inference, whose constituent premisses must cohere logically: the syntax is pared back to the absolute minimum, opposite terms baldly collocated, readable as units - or not. "In agreement at

<sup>28</sup> οὐκ ἄρα μόνον ἔην Ἐρίδων γένος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν / εἰσὶ δύο.

<sup>29</sup> Rosen is very confident of this: "...Hesiod's doctrine of the good and bad *Eris* is undoubtedly one of the antecedents for the doctrine of the double *Erōs* in the *Symposium*" (Rosen, S. (1987: revised 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) *Plato's Symposium*, New Haven: 130).

<sup>30</sup> συλλάμπτες· ὅλα καὶ οὐχ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾶδον διᾶδον καὶ ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα.

variance" could also be translated "coming together coming apart". Since some of our speakers are at loggerheads, to look for "agreement" in the sense of *homologia* would be a chimerical quest: the propositions to which they (claim to) subscribe are flat out incompatible. How, then, might *logoi* comprising uncombinable assertions themselves be brought together into a unitary composition? We set aside the threadbare reply, "all the speeches are erotic, if on widely disparate conceptions of *erōs*": a solution more provocative than some quantity of thematic overlap is wanted. Heraclitus collocates words the semantics of which keeps them strictly segregated elsewhere than in his extraordinary sentences - if that is what they are, or what he intends them to be. I argue that Plato similarly, and in deliberate imitation of Heraclitus, collocated whole speeches in praise of *erōs* whose asserted contents cannot be unified: but if that is so, what else in or about them might hold the *Symposium* together?

Here are some topical cuts through the body of the text. Sexual intercourse: the speeches of Phaedrus and Agathon do not so much deny or repress sex as silently take it for granted, so that it might be displaced by their excursions through erotic *aretē* and charismatic creativity. For Pausanias, intercourse is in itself a neutral activity, taking on value or disvalue as generated by the circumstances in which sex occurs (183d4-6). The doctor Eryximachus predictably underscores the importance of sexual hygiene. No one would imagine that sex is the source of erotic passion, says Aristophanes (192c4-7). If, in Diotima's book, physical sex and pregnancy are authentic expressions of the *erōs* quickening mortal nature, they nevertheless represent an inferior phase which, if not transcended, hardens into a stage of arrested development.

Gender: Diotima is a wise woman, and one side of the fluctuating nature and history of her *Erōs* derives from his mother *Penia* - but is a maternal inheritance of destitution anything but a curse? Agathon's *Erōs*, delicately soft and moistly supple (195c7-196a4), is flauntingly effeminate. Phaedrus sets greatest stock by manly militarism - which does not hinder him from applauding the heroism of Alcestis. Perhaps Aristophanes even-handedly celebrates the genders and all permutations of sexual orientation - or tars them all with the same brush. Pausanias is a misogynist.

Religion: Agathon's peroration (197d1-e5) is, in effect, a lyric hymn, the recitation of which is at once itself an act of worship and an invitation to everyone else to demonstrate their erotic piety by succumbing to his poetic

charms and joining the chorus. Formally, Aristophanes' and Socrates' enunciations of their missionary labours seem very close. Both allege that they convey hitherto neglected truths about the *dynamis* of *erōs* which, if disseminated, might effect our salvation (189d3-4, 212b1-8) - albeit the gist of their revelations could hardly be more different. Then again, their speeches are alike in extending the dominion of a selfsame *erōs* over us all (although what some of us do under the influence of Socratic *erōs* is much better than others manage). Pausanias and Eryximachus do not concede so much: what is worse is to be ascribed to an altogether distinct *erōs*, itself a lesser divinity. For her part, Diotima's daemon *erōs* is, if more than mortal, less than the gods, and accordingly not to be rendered worship in the way they are to be honoured.

Scope and essential associations: Eryximachus eagerly contemplates the prospect of the technical regulation of both the microcosm of the human body and, to a degree, of the macrocosm housing us and the gods. The reach of the *erōs* of Diotima is incommensurably greater, encompassing as it does both phenomenal and intelligible realms. Otherwise with both Uranian and Pandemic *erōtes*, which ignite between human beings: Pausanias is fixated on how the access of paederastic excitement, at least, might be channeled and refined by suitable social institutions. For Agathon, creativity, artistic as well as natural, is inseparable from *erōs*. Diotima's *erōs* is born of mortal being's recoil from extinction, and that repulsion never dissipates. Phaedrus preaches that the better sort of lover and beloved cannot but hunger to appear as attractively, that is, as virtuously as possible, in each other's eyes.

Approach or methodology: Aristophanes' story of what we once were and yearn to regain takes the form of a flight of fantasy, reminiscent of the real playwright's extravagant inventions. Agathon's mannered, intricate display is set squarely in the Gorgianic tradition, fitted out with a brief theoretical preface, baroque conceits, and the sting in the tail of a concluding disclaimer. Diotima's episodic tuition elaborately evolves as one surprising disclosure supplements or supersedes the shocks of previous lectures, and avails itself of didactic techniques ranging from mythological story-telling matching Aristophanes' to the explication of recondite metaphysics.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Is hers the most variegated performance? In which case, doesn't doing her justice palpably demand more than is to be expended on the other *logoi*, if one is to be balanced? But what *is* it, "to do justice" to a symposiastic *logos*?

I present these topical clusters schematically, for the sake of illustrating how one might generate an assortment of bundles of alternative views culled from the text; if what I have selected are salient subjects - my choice should seem reasonable enough - evidently other selections could be made with equal justification. It would also be possible to cut by trope rather than topic. For example, I have adverted to Eryximachus' professional engrossment in monitoring states of fullness and emptiness, and the simultaneous and retrospective ironies brought forth first by the surfeited Aristophanes' hiccups as the doctor speaks, and then by Diotima's suggestion that technical mastery takes advantage of the daemonic, which makes a *plenum* of the cosmos. Add to this list the *badinage* between Agathon and Socrates concerning the dream of the ignorantly empty being filled with wisdom by cognitive osmosis, as it were (175c6-e2) and, perhaps, Diotima's gravid souls, and we can follow Plato's playing the changes on full/empty throughout the *Symposium*.

I have intentionally both gathered bundles which are not all of a size, and also freely diverged from the running order of the speeches: the point is twofold. First, to highlight the exceptional variety of lines of multiple association which might be traced non-arbitrarily through the *Symposium*; for such variety should itself be seen as a suggestive criterion for very dense textual unification, coherent, but unhomogeneous. Second, to liberate us, at least momentarily, from the constraints of consecutive reading. That is, my hope is that these non-linear samples might encourage us to linger over or even, at the limit, to find ourselves wedded, for the nonce at any rate, to what has been put forward by some symposiast other than Socrates. Needless to say this manoeuvre is *pro tem.*, a measure to help us shake off the temptation to sit entranced at Diotima's feet; the permanent transformation of the *Symposium* into one or another static miniature is obviously not tenable. The narrative transports its readers along a trajectory of interactive opportunities for assenting to or dissenting from what is said or implied; so what we undertake is to ourselves explore readings which do not submit to the imperative of always locating the climax of the trajectory at the apex of the philosophical mysteries or, failing that, to tolerate such explorations on the part of others.

Plato does not offer grounds for thinking that any of the participants fails to persevere in unswerving allegiance to what he claimed about *erōs*, irrespective of whatever corrective judgements he might have elicited from his

Certainly not insidiously permitting philosophy to dictate terms to the others.

successors.<sup>32</sup> If that is so, then each of them furnishes a node where some of us might settle, or even stay put.<sup>33</sup> The one reader leaves the *Symposium* a committed Uranian; for another, Aristophanes' Hephaestus speaks to what, all along, they have most desired; yet another, in some moods, has no truck with dialectical asperities, and is delightedly swept away by Agathon's seductive incantations. Diotima would censure these and similar readers as benighted, and be ready with a philosophical explanation of the genesis of their erroneous beliefs. Such unpacking would strengthen her disciples' confidence in philosophy's unique privilege to tell it as it is: but why should the others be listening? Why should they not neutralise that confidence as an article of faith whose existence they acknowledge, but do not share? On this tack it is best to (try to) say not that the *Symposium* is a synchronic unity of opposites, but rather that stalwart refusal to shut the text down allows for multiple, if mutually exclusive, unifications happening in the course of different diachronic readings. Some such unifications will seem more durable than others, given that they are more inclusive, or persuade us that they successfully include volatile parts at "enmity", as Eryximachus would put it. But none of them could have the final say: permanent resolution eludes the best efforts of *erōs*. We have the philosophers' word for that.

§§§§§§

Why is my Heracliteanism not merely a perverse replication of Alcibiades' faltering rejection of the Socratic way of life at the end of our text? Socrates' first, abortive attempt to get to grips with Agathon is stifled by Phaedrus, who warns that giving the philosopher his head will put paid to the joint undertaking to praise *erōs* (194d1-4). In the *Protagoras* - a dialogue regularly associated with the *Symposium* - Socrates takes such indignant

<sup>32</sup> Aristophanes notices that Diotima/Socrates took notice of him (212c4-6), but we never learn what form his response might have taken, since Plato arranges for Alcibiades to crash the party at that very moment. Does the refuted Agathon recant under dialectical pressure, or simply crumple under it?

<sup>33</sup> Foley is to be congratulated for insisting on the significance of what he calls the "Order Question", but continues to subordinate everything else to Diotima: "by seeing what each speaker cites as the flaw in the earlier speech, we can trace an Erotic ladder isomorphic with the Socratic ladder" (Foley, R. (2010) "The order question: climbing the ladder of love in Plato's *Symposium*", *Ancient Philosophy* 30, 57-72: 62).

exception to the sophist's predilection for *makrologia*, the delivery of lengthy, uninterrupted speeches about what is under discussion, that Alcibiades' mollifying intervention is required to keep the dialectician from withdrawing in dudgeon. But here in the *Symposium*, he does not evince any such bloody-minded dedication to dialectic, to the exclusion of any and all other modes of investigation. When Phaedrus raises the alarm, Socrates does not demur: is his silent concession not tantamount to the admission that (too much) dialectic would hijack the party? And after the deferred dialectical episode with Agathon, what Socrates so volubly says Diotima said is, over almost all its considerable length, pure, expository *makrologia*: Socrates' occasional interjections are humble petitions for clarification, not a bid for recourse to question-and-answer scrutiny of *erōs*. So the *Symposium* itself seems to disclose that its existence is conditional on restraining the philosopher at the party from going about his daily business (leastways as he routinely discharges that business, as one reads elsewhere in Plato).

Suppose one grants that the *Symposium* makes as if to keep the philosopher within bounds, lest dialectic subvert the plan to glorify *erōs*. If this is so, four questions should immediately occur to us: does the move to contain philosophy originate in the nature of *erōs*? Or of praise? Or of the symposium? And however these issues be decided, why do I argue that Heraclitus is implicated in their difficult solution?

It should not come as anything of a surprise that the relations binding together the first three of these questions are not contingent. Why should *erōs* and philosophy be awkward bedfellows? The *Theogony* admonishes us that love disturbs the equilibrium of the mind.<sup>34</sup> Hesiod is no lone voice crying in the wilderness: the apprehension that erotic passion badly upsets the lover's thinking is, of course, commonplace. The deformation might assume either or both of two shapes, internal and external to *erōs* itself, as it were. In the first, the very fact that one is in love bespeaks a psychological disorder, since nothing could begin to justify such overpowering obsession with the beloved. In the second, even mental operations executed in departments of the soul from which the object of *erōs* is absent are infected by the malaise: love systematically clouds the judgement. Consider the aged Sophocles' influential rebuke to one enquiring whether he was still capable of copulating with a woman, as reported by

<sup>34</sup> Ἔρωτες ... πάντων τε θεῶν πάντων τ' ἀνθρώπων δάμναται ἐν στήθεσσι νόον καὶ ἐπίφρονα βουλήν (120-2):

Phaedrus' omission of this warning in his incomplete quotation (178b5-7) is not casual.

Cephalus in the *Republic*: "hush, man, most gladly have I escaped this thing you talk of, as if I had run away from a raging and savage beast of a mistress".<sup>35</sup> Or again, "desire doubled is *erōs*; *erōs* doubled is madness" (Prodicus B7). If *erōs* is so manifestly inimical to the basic functioning of reason, how should philosophy (*viz* "rationality doubled"?) not stand forth as its implacable enemy? Praise in general and encomiastic rhetoric in particular are bound to prove inherently troubling to those who have assumed a philosophical posture: people who praise often, if not always, harbour ulterior motives all too liable to corrode the truth of the matter; and rhetorical culture malignantly abets uninhibited falsification. Finally, symposia are where men privately assemble with the express intention of besotting themselves with wine and Aphrodite: the last place, one would have thought, a philosopher willingly enters.

That the party is a relatively dry one, with the compulsion to drink wine lifted, cannot begin to compensate for its devotion to the praise of *erōs*: it is as if Plato has been possessed by the fancy to plump Socrates down in an unusually inhospitable environment, so as to conduct the experiment of observing how he might fare, despite such markedly uncongenial conditions. Why? Throughout the corpus Plato returns to *erōs* again and again; but on most occasions he limits himself to minatory pronouncements and brisk analysis. Only twice did he invent frontal confrontations between philosophy and *erōs*; and both times he takes every pain to accentuate the sense that this is not business as usual for Socrates. Why should he be put at what might seem a gratuitous disadvantage? A pair of independent possibilities suggest themselves. First, that if his society is awash in currents of debate over the import of the varieties of erotic experience, the philosopher cannot very well stand aloof: and what venue could be more appropriate for entering the fray than a symposium, where he can add his voice to the polyphony, without drowning out the others? A monophonic victory heeded only by those already speaking the same language would be hollow indeed: hence the *Symposium*. Second, that to capture what might be uniquely good in *erōs*, the philosopher must relinquish his unalloyed disapproval of irrationality and all its works: hence the *Phaedrus*.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> 329c, translation adapted from Shorey, P. (1937) *Plato: Republic*.

<sup>36</sup> Points of comparison: much is made in both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* of their anomalous settings (the interior seclusion of Agathon's home and the exterior seclusion of the Attic countryside *vs.* the Socratic stomping

And why do I pretend that Heraclitus holds an important key to the confrontation between philosophy and *erōs* in the *Symposium*? I have been trying to bring out the inanity of preaching solely to the philosophically converted, when *erōs* presents itself as so potent a theme for intellectuals hailing from very diverse camps in Plato's society: if they are all keen to conjure with it, dialectic does not begin to set the ground rules for how they do so, or to what effect. Nothing less than a radically pluralistic treatment will do for Plato - but one which, by the same token, adds up to much more than an anarchic jumble of conflicting declarations. Heraclitus' renown - and notoriety - rest on not only the theory of oppositional unification, but also his allied relativism, perhaps adopted as a prophylactic against the neglect or suppression of opposites strange, or even repugnant, to our parochial sentiments.<sup>37</sup> If the speakers of the *Symposium* discover something of what they would make of or for themselves in *erōs*, might that be because differing erotic temperaments inevitably colour their fundamental perceptions? Each inhabits his own *Weltanschauung*, an individuating perspective which generates an answering *erōs*. That distinctive, defining *erōs* in grounds of the *agora*, the Lyceum, *etc.*) and Socrates' unwonted appearance or deportment in these novel settings. Phaedrus is, of course, the instigator in both dialogues; and both are dominated by theorising about and illustrations of *erōtikos logos*. *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* alike not only reach an accommodation between *erōs* and philosophy, but go so far as to declare the erotic philosopher to be the lover *par excellence*; and both derive this supremacy from the ascent to transcendental Forms. Points of contrast: the *Phaedrus* alone moots a rehabilitation of rhetoric (see Wardy (2009) "The philosophy of rhetoric and the rhetoric of philosophy", in E. Gunderson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, Cambridge, 43-58 for the severe but little-recognised limitations on the reclamation project). In the *Phaedrus*, tripartite psychology both explains the dynamics of *erōs* and is invoked to prove the immortality of the soul; in the *Symposium*, Diotima's psychology is Heraclitean, and no explicit position on (im)mortality is taken.

<sup>37</sup> I repeat that we are fleshing out the hypothesis that recognising Heraclitus as the *éminence grise* of the *Symposium* is vital to comprehension of Plato's strategic policies for giving *erōs* its due in this text - our conclusions, however tentative, do not extend beyond the *Symposium* to other Platonic works, let alone feed into the interpretation of the purported relativism or other doctrines of the historical Heraclitus.



turn supports its complementary *Weltanschauung*, in a process of mutual reinforcement. Philosophers rigorous in their probing for what they think must be a shared epistemic infrastructure will decry this symbiosis of perspective and *erōs* as flagrant question-begging, and at the root of all things, to boot. For their part, relativists remain unmoved. Strands in the web of belief are individually and collectively self-sustaining; if they cling together, their attachment into some oppositional nexus must be the Heraclitean product of unresolved tensions, since there is no common infrastructure to be had.

But how can one seriously affirm that the *Symposium* is some kind of Heraclitean text, when relativism is anathema to the transcendental absolutism of Platonic metaphysics? Granted, Diotima will be imparting just such metaphysical instruction, and Socrates will solemnly aver that he is her dedicated acolyte, an unqualified adherent of absolutism; but we do not thereby find ourselves under any obligation to collapse them together with Plato himself. Nor, of course, have we made the startling discovery that the author of the *Symposium* was a card-carrying Heraclitean. The Socrates about whom Plato wrote in the *Theaetetus* spins out a Heraclitean account of the perceptual modalities and their objects, but only on the presumption that survival of the definition "knowledge is perception" depends on acceptance of such an account. That is an unproblematic, if intriguing, substantive condition. The Plato who wrote about erotic Socrates in the *Symposium* can do so convincingly only in consequence of integrating the philosopher's voice within a polyphonic discourse. That is a highly problematic, if hugely stimulating, condition on participation in communal *erōtikos logos*. Nothing follows concerning Platonic beliefs, absent these conditions.

At this juncture, even my best-disposed reader might likely protest that what I have dubbed the "containment" of philosophy in the *Symposium* is a mere feint: "for when Diotima erupts with a fine vengeance into the party, she surely does submerge all preceding thoughts on *erōs* in her privileged *logos*, definitive because philosophical. Obedience to her decrees governing initiation into the transcendental mysteries is mandatory for anyone whose erotic impulses are to reach fruition. The notion that endorsement of her teachings is at our discretion is glaringly inadequate to the rational weight of her behests. That they command our unflinching respect is just what the self-

respecting intellect promptly confesses - so Socratics of all stripes exceptionlessly say, perhaps not excluding Socrates' most illustrious pupil in his own right".

There is no profit in denying that such negative conclusions appear inescapable - from the philosophical point of view. From there, to countenance the very possibility of relativistic "moderation" in some area of discourse smacks of irrational depravity, the pathological renunciation of the stable truths which the right investigative procedures would yield up. For sure, daylight Socrates might give the impression of never wavering on the existence of absolute truth. But the Socrates who voluntarily comes to the nocturnal party and most happily seconds the proposal that he in company with the rest should supply an *erōtikos logos* (177d6-e6) must beat a tactical retreat from such vehemence; not to do so would not only seem churlish, but in fact also be disingenuous - in these special circumstances. The partial analogy and disanalogy which can be drawn with *Metaphysics Γ* might prove illuminating. In *Γ*, Aristotle labours under the handicap that a denier of the principle of non-contradiction is irrefutable without begging the question, since a refutation cannot be mounted without appeal to the principle itself. In parallel, the Socrates of the *Symposium* cannot sincerely accede to Eryximachus only to importune the others to desert their perspectives for his own, that he might dress them down on his terms. But in *Γ*, Aristotle assures us (justifiably or not) that once the denier utters any proposition he is done for, since even the simplest assertion presupposes the principle. Contrariwise, the non-dialecticians of the *Symposium* can and do express themselves with the greatest facility - they just don't care for dialectic, which Socrates here cannot pretend is the only game to be played.

These strictures apply to what Socrates can, in good faith, bring to the party; philosophers enjoy considerably greater latitude when it comes to what they choose to take away from it. At the minimum, they depart with only Diotima's message ringing in their ears. Her sermonising *makrologia* as filtered by Socrates is noticeably short on argument. Perhaps that paucity is unavoidable because this is a philosopher's *logos*, as distinct from a philosophical *logos*, served up for the delectation of the non-dialecticians: of course her Mysteries are and will be impenetrably

mysterious to them.<sup>38</sup> But even if arguments as such are hard to come by in her speech,<sup>39</sup> the inference that it is undiluted truth, or rather that Socrates supposes it is, is a robust one, since he castigates his companions for larding their encomia with falsehood. Not uniformly the literal truth - we needn't, for example, become Platonic fundamentalists persuaded that Penia really did have her way with Poros - but such that the truth and nothing but the truth is always recoverable from what she says, if it is interpreted correctly. As for the other *logoi*, they are more or less irritating distractions from her lesson, devoid of compensatory value.

At the maximum, philosophers respond to the philosopher's *logos* as a component of the polyphony. What might that come to? At the minimal maximum, so to say, those in Diotima's train are attentive to divergence from sublime truth the better to familiarise themselves with the luxuriance into which erotic psychopathology morbidly effloresces. And why is that not a waste of time? Perhaps some of the deluded might become receptive to dialectical stimulation; foreknowledge of the specificities of their corruption will sharpen the reformative strategies individually tailored to their delusions. If others are hopeless cases impervious to dialectic, knowledge of the ways of stunted and diseased *erōs* still amounts to the science of the common run of humanity, melancholy as that study might be.<sup>40</sup> Could there be anything more to gain? Here we come upon an enigma not unlike one which baffles the student of Heraclitus: where does one go from recognition that a plurality of perspectives exists, since that leaves one unequipped to occupy more than one at a time?<sup>41</sup> My summary of what *erōs* is said to involve in the *Symposium*

<sup>38</sup> Not that relevant argumentation is available anywhere else in the corpus: is plain oversight responsible for the lacuna, or does philosophy encounter something intractable in *erōs*?

<sup>39</sup> Unless, that is, one presses Socrates' claim that he himself had already been the brunt of the *logoi* recycled to bring Agathon to grief (201e6), so that their rarity in the speech as such is an artefact of (fictional) reportage: there were arguments aplenty in the preceding refutation! But that is to press too hard: Plato takes pains to flag up that during the dialectical episode the party rules are in suspension, just because the episode is *dialectical*.

<sup>40</sup> On some interpretations the devolution traced in *Republic* VIII - IX might be roughly comparable.

<sup>41</sup> If the god or *logos* of Heraclitus is the sum of the opposites, then maybe it occupies all points of view - or none. However that may be, quasi-divine fusion or abandonment of perspectives is irrelevant to the mortal philosopher

went into some detail so as not to flatten out the sheer abundance of what is on offer: at the extreme, is it open to the philosopher to reconstrue excessive, morbid luxuriance as an exuberant profusion, the inventive plenitude of erotic expressivity? If *erōs* and *Weltanschauung* marry up, then to say that erotic dispositions determine forms of life, ways to be in the world, is a scant exaggeration. That can be said without any relativistic levelling of these ways, whether enthusiastic or indifferent; and how is it not incumbent on philosophers to prosecute their researches into the forms of being by whatever means renders them accessible?<sup>42</sup>

Oppositional unification and relativism do not exhaust Heraclitus' loans to the *Symposium*: here are two additional instances, the first generally acknowledged as a borrowing, the second not previously recognised as such. The inspiration for Diotima's proposition that mortal identity is maintained through constant renewal (207d2-208b2) is incontrovertibly Heraclitus. But we should also register that Pausanias' vindication of Uranian love is deduced from the intrinsic neutrality of the sex act, which he gets by universal instantiation from the principle that all actions are intrinsically neutral: "for every action is like this: as done in itself it is neither fine nor base. For example, none of what we are now doing, drinking or singing or talking, is in itself fine, but acquires its character from the manner in which it is done, becoming fine if done in a fine and correct manner, and base if done incorrectly" (180e4-181a4).<sup>43</sup> With this compare the pungent "were it not for Dionysus that they made a procession listening to the *erōtikos logos* emanating from other persuasions.

<sup>42</sup> In the introductory framing conversation, Apollodorus announces that he derives superlative pleasure and profit from delivering and receiving philosophical *logoi* (τινας περὶ φιλοσοφίας λόγους, 173c3), but is irritated by any other kind of discourse whatsoever (c5-7). Since he is here indicating his wholehearted acquiescence in the request that he run through the *erōtikoi logoi* one more time, Apollodorus for one would seem to have a very broad church attitude to what places a *logos* at least in the vicinity of philosophy itself.

<sup>43</sup> πᾶσα γὰρ πράξις ὧδ' ἔχει· αὐτὴ ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς πραττομένη οὔτε καλὴ οὔτε αἰσχρά. οἷον ὁ νῦν ἡμεῖς ποιοῦμεν, ἢ πίνειν ἢ ἄδειν ἢ διαλέγεσθαι, οὐκ ἔστι τούτων αὐτὸ καλὸν οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ πράξει, ὡς ἂν πραχθῆ, τοιοῦτον ἀπέβη· καλῶς μὲν γὰρ πραττόμενον καὶ ὀρθῶς καλὸν γίγνεται, μὴ ὀρθῶς δὲ αἰσχρόν. Oddly enough, substitution of "unqualified" for "in itself" produces something with which Platonic metaphysicians might live comfortably.

and sang the hymn to the shameful parts, they would have acted most shamelessly" (B15). The descriptions of actions to be fed into this slippery principle need to be managed carefully, if it is to be validated; just as do many of Heraclitus' sweeping generalisations, if they are not to badly overreach themselves. That Heraclitus must be reckoned with at more than one point is, I think, undeniable; and the larger conjecture that he is the presence underlying or looming over central aspects of the *Symposium*, with his input to its organisation taking pride of place, has, I trust, at least come to seem plausible enough. Note that the idea is that Heraclitus holds an important key to the *Symposium*: that is not to be amplified into holding a master key, which could only straitjacket interpretation of the text, to its impoverishment.

We round off development of the Heraclitean hypothesis with replies to two relatively peripheral questions. First, why should Plato have cast Heraclitus in this pivotal role, rather than some philosopher - Xenophanes, say - who actually takes an interest in the social meaning of the symposium? That Heraclitus did so is attested nowhere. But that is easy enough to understand: Xenophanes' sympotic poetry is all very well, but nothing in him, or anyone else, remotely rivals the potential of Heraclitean hermeneutics for accommodating the erratic turns of *erōtikos logos*. Second, why should Plato have fixed on Eryximachus, of all people, to serve as the Trojan horse for Heraclitus' infiltration into the *Symposium*?<sup>44</sup> Again an easy answer is forthcoming. Without any implausible strain it is possible to correlate a symbolic array of thinkers with the sequential *logoi*.<sup>45</sup> Hesiod presides over the veneration of

<sup>44</sup> I do not dissent from Hunter's judgement that "...the critical assumption has been that Eryximachus takes himself perfectly seriously (and is therefore more than a little ridiculous), whereas Aristophanes and Agathon, at least, and perhaps also Pausanias, are conscious of the sympotic atmosphere to which their discourses must be adapted. Such a way of reading seems, however, overly harsh" (Hunter, R. (2004) *Plato's Symposium*, Oxford: 54). The question simply arises because Plato was at liberty to match Heraclitus with another of the featured speakers - or, for that matter, to have composed some other *logos* altogether, customised for Heraclitus.

<sup>45</sup> But the utility of such symbolic schemata has limits: "...Plato's subtextual story of the genesis of culture is paralleled by a kind of theogony or genealogy of the gods. Behind each of the *logoi* on *erōs* we will find a presiding theological presence, each the hermeneutical province of one of the gods of the traditional succession-

ancient beginnings overspreading Phaedrus' speech.<sup>46</sup> Pausanias' emphatic promotion of Uranian and derogation of Pandemic *Erōs* might bring to mind Parmenides' call to turn off the Way of Seeming in favour of the Way of Being.<sup>47</sup> Aristophanes' undivided ur-people are relations of Empedoclean Love, and Agathon's speech has Gorgias on its face.<sup>48</sup> Socrates' Diotima is Plato in disguise,<sup>49</sup> while Socrates himself is the genius who plagues Alcibiades. So why the marriage of Eryximachus with Heraclitus? It's a good Platonic joke: the champion of techniques of orthodox harmonisation, read backwards, writes his intimidating nemesis into the *Symposium* - that is, opposite spawns opposite, as the text's truth hides in the unlikeliest of places. At the furthest limit, strife and war are unilaterally

story" (Salman, C. (1991) "Anthropogony and theogony in Plato's' *Symposium*", *The Classical Journal* 86: 214-25: 219). He goes on to correlate speakers with stages of the *Theogony* (sometimes at a very fanciful stretch): Phaedrus = "unsundered Uranus-and-Gaea"; Pausanias = Cronus; Erximachus = Prometheus; Aristophanes = Zeus; then (no longer Hesiod) Agathon and Alcibiades = Dionysus (who has a "dual nature").

<sup>46</sup> The correlation is not necessarily one-one; for example, we have remarked on Hesiod's seepage across the first two speeches.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. μία δὴ λείπεται τῷ ἡμετέρῳ νόμῳ ὁδός (184b5) with μόνος δ' ἔτι μῦθος ὁδοῖο λείπεται (Parmenides B 8.1-2).

<sup>48</sup> And as should come as no surprise, an intersecting correlation with Gorgias as the shared figure also suggests itself if one makes a specifically rhetorical slice through the text, to produce the truncated series Phaedrus: Lysias; Pausanias: Isocrates (on which see Bury, R. G. (1932) *The Symposium of Plato*, 2nd edn., Cambridge: xxxv with Robin, L. (1929) *Platon: Le Banquet*, Paris, ad 185c); Agathon: Gorgias.

<sup>49</sup> And also, perhaps, Sappho. I am taking a leaf from the book of Maximus of Tyre, to whom whether Sappho or Diotima deserves the title of ἡ τοῦ λόγου μήτηρ in the *Symposium* is unclear (*Or.* 18.7). That Sappho might be summoned as a prefiguration of Diotima (and Plato himself) should not be dismissed out of hand. In addition to the pronounced erotic tenor of her verse, her prodigious generic versatility makes her a suitable forerunner of Socrates' wise woman (see Schlesier, R. (2011) "Presocratic Sappho: her use of Aphrodite for arguments about love and immortality", *Scientia Poetica* 15: 1-28: 9 on Sappho's reputation for metrical and generic range; but her depiction of the poet as a kind of Presocratic *philosopher* is unpersuasive).

presented by Heraclitus as the dynamic essence of all things; but the *Symposium* is all about *erōs*. So their themes are opposites, which, according to Heraclitus' own premises, should create an encompassing, discordant concordance. And perhaps there is another, subsidiary inversion to add. Socrates makes as if he has been badly ruffled by the stupefying beauty of the diction and phrasing of Agathon's peroration, while Eryximachus feels only disdain for Heraclitus' gauche language:<sup>50</sup> I hazard the guess that if his disgraceful verbal infelicities (to the doctor's ear) are opposed to Agathon's winning rhetoric, Heraclitus' noetic worth for the *Symposium* might be the opposite of Agathon's light weight too.

It is hardly perspicuous that the *Symposium* is a *Platonic* dialogue, on the prevalent acceptance of that label. Most of the serial erotic discourses are uninterrupted monologues. True, as I have emphasised, their delivery is punctuated by critical asides, and Plato has at his disposal all manner of authorial devices to subserve the purpose of tacit comparison and contrast. Nonetheless, apart from a single dialectical interlude on the one hand, the interrogation and refutation of Agathon (explicitly marked as a disturbing Socratic intervention in the fabric of the text), and a demonstrative interlude on the other, Diotima's grand exposition of erotic theory, this Platonic work is devoid of what contemporary philosophers recognise as their staple argumentative fare. There are persistent complaints that in his more dilated and systematic writings, Plato dispenses with dialectic in favour of formidably protracted didacticism - to their detriment. By his own account, Socrates was almost resistlessly malleable in Diotima's hands, restricting himself to repeated expressions of gormless wonder or admiration, and the occasional helpful question. Accordingly one might speculate that this is an example of self-parody, of a piece with the other speakers' diverting spoofs of themselves.<sup>51</sup> And, as with most samples of *elenchus* in the corpus, the supposed refutation of Agathon is not short of vociferous detractors. One might conclude that in the *Symposium*, shifty

<sup>50</sup> Cf. τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὀνομάτων καὶ ῥημάτων (198b4-5) with τοῖς γε ῥήμασιν οὐ καλῶς λέγει (187a4).

<sup>51</sup> Hunter 2004 sees self-parody as the principal *motif* of the *Symposium*. This is a credible and rewarding reading, which leads one to question a number of settled assumptions (e.g. that Eryximachus is a straight exemplar of unrelieved pomposity).

Socratic logic-chopping is made to combine with speciously lofty Platonic theorising to form a deliberately distorted image of the philosophical modes familiar to readers of the dialogues "proper". Plato guays himself.

This scepticism should be ventilated: if the designation "Platonic dialogue" is meant to convey more than the honorific "genuine Platonic writing (never mind the letters)", a dialogue worth its salt should in some sense be authentically dialogical, if not necessarily dialectical, while most of the *Symposium* is compartmentalised, as one speaker (not interlocutor) in turn takes over from another. With the (very important) exception of Agathon's interrogation, dialogue on any definition is confined within either the transitional scenes, or the comic routine of Socrates' meek enquiries and Diotima's brusque responses. But if the preceding argument holds water, that the *Symposium* is not a "dialogue" in any more ambitious sense should hardly occasion disappointed surprise, since coming at *erōtikos logos* as it does entails letting the symposiasts speak almost entirely unmolested by dialectical gadflies.

§§§§§§

To finish with an expansion of my earlier suggestion that a Heraclitean text must rely heavily on unglossed collocation to achieve its characteristic effects. A sound, if defeasible, assumption is that textual order matters, that the juxtaposition of the parts of the *Symposium* is meaningful, and might carry indicators of or, more strongly, recommendations for how it could be brought together.<sup>52</sup> What might we infer on this basis? Those who adhere to the teleological conception will feel that Socrates' ventriloquism comes where it does because Diotima looks back to the earlier *logoi*, putting them right and putting them down; and they may also believe that Phaedrus comes where he does because his *logos* is the weakest, so that the movement of the *Symposium* is from worst to best. But it would

<sup>52</sup> Socrates himself could not be clearer that speaking order has heavy implications, when he bewails his discomfiture at succeeding Agathon: "if you were where I am, or maybe rather where I shall be when Agathon too has spoken well..." (194a2-3). If he is merely pretending distress, the point concerning the significance of order within the sequence remains unaffected, of course.



not follow that the speeches just get better and better; and the argument that they fall into a steadily improving series is not popular.<sup>53</sup>

Prescinding from the teleological conception, can we locate fixed points in the structure of the *Symposium*? A few simple-minded observations are worth recording, so that something solid might underlie our speculations. Phaedrus' *logos* must be the first one - not to get the least and worst out of the way, but because it is from what he says and does not say that the *Symposium* grows.<sup>54</sup> Alcibiades' Socratic coda cannot but be attached to Diotima; and, if she is to mount a case for the preeminence of philosophical *erōs*, Socrates must be kept waiting until she has a collection of non-philosophers on whom to cast back a critical eye. More particularly, if the dissection of Agathon is to be the dialectical prolegomenon to her theorising, his speech too falls into place. And, since Eryximachus is Pausanias inflated, he "naturally" succeeds him.

But that, we are told, was a felicitous accident, since Aristophanes *should* have spoken next (185c4-6), that is, in compliance with the etiquette for polite progression around the couches on which the symposiasts recline, were he not incapacitated by his hiccups.<sup>55</sup> Is the attack a real indisposition, or fake burlesque? Thinking over what might prompt the shift, albeit inconclusively, is not to be likened to peering into the murky kettle of fish where Lady Macbeth's children lurk, or other such disreputable vessels. It's not that "how many children had Lady Macbeth?" lacks a conclusive answer; the question is bogus because there is nothing in *Macbeth* to decide it, and nothing

<sup>53</sup> So far as I am aware, Sedley 2006 is unique among the moderns in discerning linear improvement throughout (according to Hug, A. (1884) *Platons Symposion*, Leipzig: lxiv, Sedley has a forerunner in Rötcher).

<sup>54</sup> As argued in Wardy 2012.

<sup>55</sup> "Contriving Aristodemus' omission is the primary dramatic purpose of the episode: it is required to make plausible this oversight... This Aristodemus is without doubt one of the most enigmatic characters in the Platonic corpus. In a contrary fashion he is made conspicuous by his omission; and, once one has realised that the hiccuping episode, one of the dialogue's most remarkable portions, is precisely devoted to contriving this omission, the conspicuousness of the absence is sharpened considerably" (O'Mahoney, P. (2011) "On the 'hiccuping episode' in Plato's *Symposium*", *Classical World* 104: 143-59: 149). Ingenious but utterly unconvincing.

outside the play is relevant. Contrariwise, Plato deliberately solicits our engagement in an imaginary rewriting of the *Symposium*, on which things go as planned - but, of course, the hiccup in speaking order itself creates the planned, "actual" speaking order, there can be no unmeaning, spontaneous disruption.

To whose plan? Aristophanes' own? He not only asseverates that his *logos* will be different in kind from those of Pausanias and Eryximachus; his *erōs* also has in its gift a sort of sexual healing well beyond the ken of Eryximachus and his patron Asclepius. Horrific, punitive amputation, then redemptive surgery: Aristophanes' medical fantasy plays out as a piratical raid on the doctor's territory. Therefore one would be very hard put to imagine *this* speech as it is, only delivered before rather than after Eryximachus'. Aristophanes' satire must bide its time; the "indisposition" is a delaying tactic. All the speakers after Phaedrus show themselves to be cognisant of the fact that they do not hold forth in a social vacuum, that their *logoi* are essentially reactive, to both the givens and uncertainties of their culture in the background, and what is being said about *erōs* at this party. Aristophanes' manipulation, if that is what it is, then stands out as a rather spectacular example of aggressively smart self-positioning.

Or is the non-disruption Plato's alone? If so, one might suspect him of flexing authorial muscle, of exerting such total control over his textual cosmos as the likes of Eryximachus can only dream of. Artistically airy Agathon grants his servitors licence to extemporise - or rather denies that he's ever a hands-on master - and bids them excel, in order that we guests, himself passively included, might congratulate them on their spontaneous, independent exertions (175b6-c1).<sup>56</sup> Does he really? Behind the scenes, might our host not have issued the most strict and minute of instructions, so that his people slavishly act out a little play of simulated liberty, in a show of domestic *sprezzatura*? This would be the humblest stratum, on which the charade of autonomy is performed by the meanest contributors to the symposium, to garner the praise of their betters, who a level up fluently praise *erōs* that, in part,

<sup>56</sup> Difficult to believe that Montaigne didn't have this passage in mind, despite the absence of any explicit allusion:

"la plus sottie contenance d'un gentilhomme en sa maison, c'est de le voir empesché du train de sa police, parler à l'oreille d'un valet, en menacer un autre des yeux; elle doit couler insensiblement et représenter un cours ordinaire" ("De la vanité").

they might earn the esteem of their co-symposiasts, and then ours, until at the top the author himself, who makes and arranges every last detail so meticulously that even the brutally "accidental" makes for Platonic order, basks in our unstinting admiration.

I recommend a less suffocating articulation of the option on which it is true-in-the-fiction that Aristophanes really is prostrated by the hiccups, and that Plato thus bears sole responsibility for the re-ordering of the *logoi* in the *Symposium*.<sup>57</sup> The disgruntled Alcibiades will petulantly demand to know how Socrates has contrived to position himself with surpassingly attractive Agathon, rather than with Aristophanes or some other voluntarily ridiculous person (213c3-5). The reader is aware that no contrivance on Socrates' part was necessary, since he did no more than accept his host's invitation to occupy the spot which *just happened* to remain vacant:<sup>58</sup> but where, and with whom, does Aristophanes best belong? The textual hiccup is Plato's cunning way to let us face this question, rather than a capricious gesture demonstrating authorial omnipotence. He phrases it non-coercively, since we can, at the least, glimpse counterfactual *Symposiums* wherein Aristophanes unmoved delivers himself of comic speeches in praise of *erōs* a little, or very, dissimilar to his shuffled speech. Since Aristophanic *erōs* holds out the promise of a restitution of original nature, after its fragmentation and the repositioning of our bodily parts, Aristophanes authors a discourse dramatising dispersal and unification, and thus itself symbolising the destructive and reconstructive energies which animate Heraclitean hermeneutics: no wonder this *logos* could prove to be a labile rogue!

The narratological hint which Plato had already discreetly planted in the prologue has escaped the commentators' notice. Well before the actual speechifying is underway, a template for speaking order appears. First Pausanias pipes up to confess his hangover and beseech the assembly for release from obligatory heavy boozing; Aristophanes and Agathon follows suit; and Eryximachus welcomes the plan on behalf of the weak heads for drink,

<sup>57</sup> *A façon de parler*: since Plato wrote the *Symposium*, it is trivially the case that he is responsible for what he authors. I speak this way because it is more digestible than spelling out the embedded qualifications within the scope of operators, viz "A did not φ [= it is not true that A φ-ed]; but it is true-in-the-fiction that A really, rather than feignedly, φs".

<sup>58</sup> τυγχάνειν γὰρ ἔσχατον κατακείμενον μόνον (175c6-7).

himself, Aristodemus, Phaedrus *et al.* - to Socrates it's all one, wet or dry (176a5-c5). The apparently random sequence of this interchange pre-establishes the running order Pausanias - Aristophanes - Agathon - Eryximachus - [Aristodemus] - Phaedrus - [others], with Socrates left hovering to be spliced in *ad lib.* This is a revisionary matrix: since erotic/symposiastic discourse is in principle endlessly cyclical, it makes no odds who initiates any given cycle; Aristophanes has not yet been "displaced"; the inclusion of Aristodemus (no speech at all) *et al.* (speeches idly dropped from the record or not worth remembering? (178a1-4)) is open-ended authorial permission to both re-order what is there to read and conceive of imaginary *logoi* for the occupation of actually vacant textual nodes. Let us rewrite, if so inclined.

And I finally recommend plumping for a modification of these options which will give us non-exclusive choices. True, if the character Aristophanes is not knowingly manipulating his situation, then it is the author Plato who is wanting us to see the "dislocation" for what it is, or might be. But better, perhaps, to read the *Symposium* as indeterminate on whether or not Aristophanes went in for such machinations; however, this is not the radical indeterminacy of the number of Lady Macbeth's children.<sup>59</sup> That is, in the fiction it really is possible that his comic shenanigans are all an act - or not: Plato makes the fictional truth of what Aristophanes is (not) up to inaccessible to the reader. Why? The *Symposium* is rife with abundant ambiguities falling into different kinds. Tonal: comic? Serious? Seriocomic? Emotional: is the frequent erotic byplay coquettish affectation, or sincere enticement? Logical: when Socrates or Diotima constructs the rare argument, does it have a unique form, assessable for validity? And attributional: when connections seem to materialise, do the signals emanate from Plato to the exegetical reader, or from his characters to their fellows, or both? If the hiccups are a ruse, then Aristophanes' self-positioning restructures the whole evening's *erōtikos logos* as it is happening within the fiction; if not, Plato endows that *erōtikos logos* with a flexible shape allowing for counterfactual adjustments. Just what and whose the authorial

<sup>59</sup> This difference is well worth spelling out rigorously with the help of a scope distinction. My preference is to reject "it is indeterminate in the *Symposium* whether A really, rather than feignedly, φs"; but that formula twins with "it is indeterminate in *Macbeth* how many children Lady Macbeth had", which is true. What I am accepting for Plato is "it is true-in-the-*Symposium* that it is indeterminate whether A really, rather than feignedly, φs".

intentions are is kept dark. "Nature loves to hide; an unapparent connection is stronger than an evident one." Plato intends that his readers appreciate that the *Symposium* is a Heraclitean unity - better, that in reading the *Symposium*, one variously unifies it: what grounds that intention? That one appreciates such creative unification contributes directly to the understanding of *erōs*. Readerly *erōs*, its wonder, does not come to an end. It does not reach an end in the *Symposium* - where it has its best chance for reiterated satisfaction, not frustrated deflection into other texts, by Plato or anyone else.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> My thanks to Gábor Betegh, Nick Denyer, Malcolm Schofield, David Sedley, Shaul Tor and Christian Wildberg for their comments, and especially to Stephen Makin, for inducing me to think through the semantic intricacies.