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BOGDAN C. IACOB
CATERINA PREDA
LAURENȚIU RISTACHE
GHEORGHE OVIDIU SFERLEA
MIHAI-VLADIMIR TOPAN
IONUȚ-ALEXANDRU TUDORIE
RADU GABRIEL UMBREȘ
MUGUR ZLOTEA

Editor: Irina Vainovski-Mihai

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New Europe College Str. Plantelor 21 023971 Bucharest Romania

www.nec.ro; e-mail: nec@nec.ro Tel. (+4) 021.307.99.10, Fax (+4) 021.327.07.74



LAURENŢIU RISTACHE

Born in 1980, in Bucharest

Ph.D. in ancient history and archaeology, University of Bucharest Thesis: *Politics and Comedy in 411 BC*

Research grant:

Erasmus student at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (2003)

Participation to conferences and workshops in Romania, Poland and Germany

Has published articles and book reviews on the topic of classical history

ARISTOPHANES AND ARISTOCRACY. POLITICAL GENDER AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF DESIRE

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the study of gender as political metaphor. It argues that in ancient Athens, or indeed in other pre-industrial societies, the aristocracy had symbolic feminine attributes, and that "political gender" was performed by the people of the time in order to allegorically signify the political relationships between different social classes; essentially this means that gender and love were perceived as mediums of political expression. His-story, the contemporary production of the past through the lens of "big men", ignores the role of symbolic women, projecting instead today's hyper masculine worldview of what it means to be part of the elite. Mostly based on capital strength and the idea that the nobility was synonymous with warlords and brute force, this view has the direct result of excluding Eros from the political conversation that residually survives in ancient texts. Eros, thus exiled to an exclusively private sphere, such as the private life of individuals, has lost nowadays its multifaceted ancient meanings, and this paper is a step towards recovering them.

Keywords: political gender, political love, Eros, aristocracy.

"Do not raise a lion cub in the city, but if you do be ready to serve his every mood."

Aristophanes, Frogs, 1431-1432.

Observing that to translate "How are you?" into any given language one needs to translate the convention of greeting, not the individual items of "how", "are" and "you", David Bellos foregrounds the complexities that underpin a textual rendition. Meaning, he says, " is not the only component of an utterance that can in principle and in practice be turned

into something else; things said are always said in some tone of voice, with some pattern of pitch, in some real context, with some kind of associated body use (gestures, posture, movement)".² Asserting that humans are in constant need of translation and that meaning does not inhere solely in words,³ Bellos challenges the binary model of a direct, unmediated relationship between the signifier and the signified, envisioning the possibility for misapprehensions to arise notwithstanding familiar contexts, within one's own culture or language for example.

While countenance and manners are a source of meaning allowing feelings to be apparent even in the absence of verbal communication, including them alongside the latter may create dialogical exchanges that could supplement or even contradict the aforesaid, thus enriching communication in a coeval space. Faced with a text from the distant past though, emotions that transgressed the written account or other overt forms of expression are seldom sought after; instead the historian considers the written word as the sole repository of truth, thus limiting reality to whatever is manifest. Symptomatic for this approach is a drive to constantly accumulate "facts" and a belief that data and a detached observer establish the truth of a past "as it really happened". 4 Impossible situations, those that do not relate with the historian's weltanschauung, are either appropriated to fit his cultural bias or explained away as fantasy, and a guest to distinguish reality from fiction ensues. For example, translating from ancient Greek words like "man" or "woman" may seem nowadays straightforward in terms of the reality they convey, yet that of a pregnant man may not. This paper will advocate that none of the above can be grasped with the modern historical toolkit focused on rooting out emotions and symbolic expressions in the name of philological accuracy, and that, based on context and intuition, the role of the storyteller is to foresee an alternative and more inclusive reality by imaginatively approaching an age when allegories were paramount. If imaginatively pursued, these allegories will then be able to challenge the overt meanings historians have grown accustomed to consider objective, factual and therefore real.

Two thousand five hundred years ago, in Athens 416 BCE, at a symposium, in an atmosphere remarkably similar to the one preceding the mutilation of the herms, men became pregnant for the first time in recorded history and today modern scholarship struggles to explain such an extraordinary event. Various theories have been put forward; Plass considers that the *Symposium* is "a sophisticated plea for pederasty" and that the idea of male pregnancy and childbirth has to do with a "confusion"

of sexual roles in a homosexual relationship" which tries to mimic heterosexuality. 5 Against this theory, and following Morrison and Dover, E.E. Pender rejects, beyond the general formula of πάντες ἄνθρωποι and the presence of the verb κυεῖν, 6 otherwise known to designate the female experience of child delivery, a direct feminine reference to the metaphor of childbirth. He believes that Socrates carefully avoids it, trying to pander to his homosexual audience, and thus that male pregnancy must have been equated physiologically by seed retention and delivery, through orgasm and ejaculation. In support of this view, he takes Diotima's statement, ή γὰρ ἀνδρος καὶ γυναικὸς συνουσία τόκος ἐστίν / "For intercourse of man and woman is a childbirth", 7 to stand for the "birth of the seed", alleging, by drawing on testimonies from Diodorus Siculus, Euripides and Aeschylus, that the ancient Greek psyche relegated the woman's role in procreation to that of a mere incubator, and as result that ejaculation, in the aftermath of intercourse, must have been the "real" moment of childbirth that Plato actually had in mind.8

Cogent for an immediate reading, on closer inspection this literal interpretation is prone to debate at least on three accounts. Firstly, Diodorus narrates as a curiosity that, in Egypt, the father was considered the sole author of procreation, the mother's role being limited to that of a receptacle, but he uses this story in order to highlight an opposite custom, alien to the Greeks, for in Egypt, he says, "trees that bear fruit are "male" and those which do not "female", exactly opposite to the Greek usage". 9 Secondly, one could also argue that when it comes to theatre plays and especially tragedies, the poet can aggrandize ideas for the dramatic effect without them being necessarily representative for the society as a whole. Furthermore, in this particular case we cannot overlook the fact that these arguments were used to justify murder by one party in a trial; to discard the opposition's stance as less indicative for the ancient Greek thought is at least partisan, considering that even here, in the dramatic setting, the votes were equally split. Thirdly, in *Theaetetus*, another Platonic dialogue where men are pregnant and Socrates plays the role of the midwife, the language used abounds in explicit references to women and their experience in childbirth: pangs of labour, the cutting of the umbilical cord, miscarriages, etc. 10 It is therefore entirely possible that in Plato the metaphor of female pregnancy could have been applied to men as well, and I am of the opinion that in the Symposium childbearing, instead of being related with male orgasm and ejaculation, was an effeminizing process bringing forth a new creature. 11

Perhaps less convincing is Pender's reasoning that "Plato's audience was composed of well-educated, upper-class men, who were likely to have only a limited interest in the subject of female childbearing" and that "female pregnancy is out of place in the homosexual ambience of the dialogue, and it is therefore not surprising that when Diotima speaks of the male lovers procreating spiritual children, all reference to the female role is avoided. Plato is seeking to impress on his readers the pleasures of spiritual procreation and so concentrates on those aspects most familiar and most appealing to them". 12 But the Symposium does not stand alone among other Platonic dialogues in being designed for the "well-educated, upper-class men", indeed none were addressed to the plebs and neither was the aforementioned *Theaetetus*, Plato's dialogue on knowledge. As for the homosexual environment, or the specific reception and expectation of a homosexual audience, these ideas are very popular across the aisle of modern scholarship, from feminists to philologists and classical historians, but they are somewhat peculiar, as the conundrum we have to deal with is that in classical Athens homosexuals and homosexuality did not exist.

In his book, "One Hundred Years of Homosexuality", David Halperin reveals that homosexuality and by extension heterosexuality are fairly recent and somewhat odd, Western, bourgeois cultural constructs rather than universal "building-blocks of sexual identity for all human beings in all times and places" and as such that they are "inappropriate for the interpretation of sexual life in ancient Greece" or for that matter in any other non-western society. 13 Conversely, in another paper, he dismisses the universal explanatory aura surrounding them in psychology, gender studies and related disciplines, stating that, "the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality, between homosexuals and heterosexuals as individual types, had no meaning for classical Athenians; there were not as far as they knew two different kinds of "sexuality" two differently structured psychosexual states or modes of affective orientation, but a single form of sexual experience". 14 Furthermore, rather than an object of study for its own sake, sex was often used as a metaphor to access higher truths; he exemplifies with who we could now imagine as Freud's counterpart in classical antiquity, Artemidorus, the dream interpreter, for whom dreams, even those sexually explicit, were never really "about sex" but about politics, social and economic status, therefore reversing what western bourgeois intellectuals conceptualize as the natural flow of meaning: from overt, public signifiers to private, hidden, and repressed desires. 15

Halperin's iconoclastic contribution to the study of gender in antiquity unshackled eros from "sexuality" and outlined the possibility for its study as part of a wider social and political matrix. I would like to develop this approach by introducing *political gender*, a concept which I think will shed new light both on Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* as well as on his comedies in which women take centre stage.

What is political gender? I will start by arguing that this is not a new concept but a forgotten one. Current academic fashion dictates that sex is biological and that gender is the "sex of the brain" linked with personal identity, that they both belong to individuals defined simultaneously as cultural beings and biological organisms. Judith Butler famously described gender as a performative act, a "corporeal style" which is both intentional and performative, where "performative" itself carries the double meaning of dramatic and non-referential". 16 An "act" of the individual, gendered identity is linked to the ways bodies are acted in public. 17 But this view entails an enshrined division between public and private life which itself is a relatively recent concept. Originating in the nineteen century, in the follow-up of the French revolution, this dichotomy between the seen and unseen, between public, nuanced and therefore important information and a "private", allegedly simple, domestic, and as such an irrelevant enunciation for the wider society, forcibly expiated an imagination sensitive to allegorical political thinking. Previously, disembodied, abstract public entities such as political factions, social classes, could have been casually performed in ways that visualised and facilitated the understanding of social status through gender in face-to-face environments, but nowadays this is no longer the case. As a consequence of this contemporary trend, we have reached a point where one finds difficult to conceive sex, gender or even the entire body outside the exclusive empire of "the individual" in his private capacities, or to imagine the possibility that ancient political allegories could have been themselves objects of fantasy and desire, and that humans were able to fall in love or to have intercourse with them. Pre-bourgeois societies however experienced no qualms in these matters. In France, during the Old Regime, it was possible to imagine the entire nation as a body, with different social orders acting as different body parts. Anthropomorphic symbolism of the political bodies allowed then for a marriage between Lady Aristocracy and the "citizen body" to take place or, as the revolution progressed, imagined the monster Iscariot (an anagram for the aristocrat) savagely preying on the bodies of innocent revolutionaries. 18 Similarly, in classical Athens, Eupolis' comedy *Poleis* exhibited international politics through the lenses of gender in an interplay between the Athenian citizens and the female chorus of *Poleis*, which stood for the allied cities of the empire. It was a symbolism that cultivated the relationship of power and subordination within an imagined *oikos*, extrapolated from an actual "household" to the stage of the Athenian empire. As Rosen pointed out in the analysis of the "love affair" between Athenian men and their subject cities in this play:

The desire for "marriage" with individual allies, was analogous to the desire for a "real" marriage with a woman: in each case the relationship was intended to foster the higher goal of managing, maintaining, and enriching an *oikos*, whether it be the actual one of the Athenian household or the metaphorical one of the international hegemony which Athens claimed for itself.¹⁹

Overall I think that rekindling the idea of political gender may advance a new theory of erotic desire, capable of raising fresh perspectives by extrapolating masculinity, femininity, the feminine and pregnant men, from the organic agency we have boxed them in, and this will ultimately offer us an alternative to the readings focused on private experiences between individuals and go beyond the sexual templates we currently operate with.

In Plato's Republic Love is portrayed as tyrannical, but this was no dead metaphor lamenting some private, unrequited love. On the contrary, 'Έρως Τύραννος abruptly enters the public space to purge sobriety, cajole, seduce and subjugate the thrifty "democratic citizen". ²⁰ The metaphor is overtly political, Τύραννος is the epiclesis for 'Έρως and vice versa, for as Plato explicitly reveals, one cannot exist in the absence of the other. Tyranny aggregates political power that previously was equally dispersed, and it does so not through brute force, for a singularity could not openly overcome a multitude, but infecting its victims with desire and erotically enslaving them. Tyrants are sexy, wealthy, cunning, and insatiable; their love for luxury, deception and artifice renders them non-male in the all-male, democratic and egalitarian, imagined political universe.²¹ For ancient Greeks μαλακία (softness) and πολυτέλεια (magnificence, wealth) were stereotypical attributes that epitomized the tyrant in his capacity to derail the normative civic ideology which envisioned citizenship as contingent on ideas of frugality, manhood and military service.²² The tyrant was therefore the antipode of the democratic citizen in all walks of life, and most prominently in the imagery of gender. Biologically male and a Greek citizen of course, the tyrant's political gender however was

constructed symbolically, projecting otherness by showcasing a luxurious, effeminate and conversely oriental, non-Greek, lifestyle. Ideologically a "woman", on the fringes of the political system and rejected by Athens' official discourse, the tyrant's dominion was a paradox, as he extends his influence over the three traditional pillars that defined male democratic ideology, ultimately subverting them in the symbolic discourse: common interest and equality, confiscated through his rule despite the fact that in a face-to-face society power over many was not deemed to be exercised by one; physical prowess, boasted upon despite the fact that in an agonistic environment the numerically feeble could not rule over a fit multitude; and legal standing, for in the Athenian jurisprudence all the signifiers that relegated his social status to womanhood rendered him unfit to govern over the free men of a Greek polis. ²³ A paradox explained by Eros, tyranny is by no means unfathomable; its presence lingers even in the democratic discourse that, during the opening procedures of the Assembly, builds up its own identity by publicly expiating the tyrant's monstrous alterity only to succumb afterwards, in the proceedings, to the lovable tongues of tyranny, the sweet erotic speech of the rhetoric. It is no coincidence therefore that, both in Menexenos and in the Symposium, "political women" are called upon to initiate Socrates in the mysteries of rhetoric and erotics and subsequently, either directly or through the philosopher, the political leaders of the day, Pericles and Alcibiades. But who were those women and what did they stood for?

Political women were biological males involved in Athenian politics, but they were also part of a wide ranging, partisan discourse which equated etiquette, beauty and femininity with the aristocracy and opposed it with the coarse manners and behaviour of the male citizenry;²⁴ they existed in the realm of political allegory and shared with their biological counterparts certain features that when transposed in the agora acted like markers that symbolically gendered political identity. Άβρός and its more pejorative synonym, τρυφή linked with ὕβρις as the pursuit of vainglory, imagined a geography of otherness, pushing externally the boundaries of μαλακία and feminine luxuriance eastwards and internally upwards on the social ladder. This geography of alterities is also present in Aristophanes' Clouds, where it thoroughly demarcates political genders. Here Strepsiades is a peasant modestly living in the countryside, while his wife is the embodiment of high-class refinement. Member of one of the most illustrious Athenian aristocratic families, niece of Megacles son of Megacles, she is from "the" town (ἄστυ) which unlike the democratic, all-encompassing πόλις typifies

the pinnacle of the urban space associated with the high status of an urban elite.²⁵ In Greek, ἄστυ literally means the (upper) "town", and was associated with the original birthplace of the community through the city's aristocratic founding families, though, in the archaic period, it extended its semantics to incorporate the urban area marked by the city walls. In Oedipus Tyrannos, the tyrant proclaims himself ἀνερ αστῶν μέγιστος (the greatest of the men in town), ²⁶ to showcase power, wealth, and dominion over the most illustrious citizens, a vision replicated in Aristophanes' Lysistrata where the conflict between men and women is superimposed over the one between ἄστυ and πόλις. This, Nicole Loraux attributes to a division between "citadine et citoyen", 27 but I think that rather than a conflict between actual women and men with different topographic backgrounds, the onstage clash between ἄστυ and πόλις was intended as a metaphor, a symbolic enactment of the internal conflict that divided Athens in 411 BC, ultimately projecting a power struggle between aristocracy and democracy, political women and political men, the victory being claimed simultaneously in the stage drama and the social drama by the former.²⁸

Political gender is further emphasized in *Clouds* when the supercilious wife's portrait is inwrought with manifold qualities that baffle her thrifty husband. Haughty, spoiled, spendthrift and "thoroughly Coesyrized", the playwright fastidiously parallels her with Coisyra, a character famous for her exotic tastes, wealth and extravagance, and above all used here and elsewhere in the extant comedies as a signifier for an aristocratic lifestyle. Next, zoological and gender symbols coalesce to further the status divide between the two spouses, constructing a discursive and interconnected web of meanings around the "noble" horse and, implicitly, a "servile" donkey; this Mark Griffith has unveiled to be part of a deep social structure of power relations in antiquity which also gendered the roles of the horse and the donkey.²⁹ The explicit symbolic confrontation between the two equids can be found in Plato's *Symposium*, but *Clouds* also employs a pattern of beauty, wealth and power-display opposed to one of "hard work" in the compromise naming of their son, Phiddipides:

After that, when this son was born to us, I mean to me and my high-class wife, we started to bicker over his name. She was for adding *hippos* to the name, Xanthippus or Chaerippus or Callippides, while I was for calling him Phidonides after his grandfather. So for a while we argued, until finally we compromised and called him Phidippides. She used to pick up this boy and coo at him: "When you're grown you'll drive a chariot to the Acropolis, like Megacles, and don a saffron robe", and I would say "No

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you'll drive the goats from the Rocky Bottom, like your father, and wear a leather jacket". But he wouldn't listen to anything I said; instead he's infected my estate with these galloping trots.³⁰

Saffron dyed fabrics are extremely expensive and they functioned throughout history as a status symbol for the nobility. "Saffron, from dried stigmas of Crocus sativus, is the world's most expensive spice. It takes seventy thousand flowers to produce about half a kilogram of saffron" and "one kilogram of saffron contains about 10 g of crocin and 60 g of crocein (...) which are the actual dye components".31 Pictured together with the chariot's procession, the long saffron robe recalls Homeric kingly splendour but it is also an image of extreme hybris as this vain magnificence is set to challenge the Goddess worshiped on top of the Acropolis, rivaling the robe she was adorned with during the festival of the Panathenaea. Athena's garment is invoked also in Knights where noble "gentlemen worthy of this land and the Robe" lament the city's contemporary predicament, saying that base men serve the country nowadays only for free meals and monetary benefits.³² Beautiful, long haired, and wearing a tiara, the aristocratic knights are metaphorically associated with the animals they steer: long maned, proud, luxurious, their pursuit is vainglory not money or material goods. The aristocratic, "feminine", gender is therefore emphasized by expensive garments and these luxurious equine signifiers, for as Victoria Wohl observed, "long hair was the badge of a wealthy and snobbish elite" while "the tiara marks an ostentatious, even tyrannical, superiority". 33

Combed, clipped into patterns, arranged in pom-poms, perfumed and decorated with bows or ribbons, the horse's mane and indeed the entire animal exuded grace and femininity for the ancient Greeks.³⁴ Together with the lion, another feminine symbol of aristocracy and royalty, the horse's existence was opposed ideologically to the donkey's masculine, utilitarian, and labour intensive life. It is at this crossroad of symbolic gender identities that Strepsiades' plight can be understood through Semonides' imprecation of the "horsy wife". The latter is a picture of unattainable beauty for the common folk, of luxury and pampered femininity that cannot coexist with the dung, misery and hard labour so commonplace in the average household. It is not for the commoner to behold such beauty, the poet says, but for the tyrant and sceptre-bearing king, thus effectively segregating social relations in the seventh century BCE on a politically gendered framework:

But the one whom the mare, luxurious and long-haired, bore, she turns away from the works of slaves and misery, and she would never touch the mill, or lift a sieve, or throw the dung from the house, or sit beside the oven, since she avoids soot. But she makes her husband a friend of necessity, since she bathes away the dirt every day, two or three times a day, and anoints herself with fragrant oils, and she always wears her hair combed, hanging heavily, shadowed with flowers. Such a women is a beautiful sight for others, but an evil for the one to whom she belongs, *unless* he is a tyrant or a sceptre-bearing king, who rejoices his spirit in such things.³⁵

So what can we infer from all these various records that steer us towards defining gender as political? While there is no "hard evidence" to support the concept, if by evidence we mean a text whereby the aristocracy would be explicitly revealed as feminine or bluntly equated with "real" women, there is enough ground that will allow political gender to be corroborated by symbolic associations, fashion, countenance or the behaviour of aristocratic subjects. As was previously mentioned, meaning does not inhere solely in words, so we should follow the Greeks in imagining for instance Alcibiades', one of Athens' most prominent aristocrats, wanton walk, his lisp, largesse and conspicuous exoticism as sexy signifiers that enticed his audience and rendered him "erotically"36 desirable in the eyes of the Assembly. Indeed one of Plutarch's anecdotes substantiates this point of view. According to it, after Alcibiades' inaugural speech a quail hiding in his cloak and scared by the commotion caused by the frenzied clapping of the enraptured Ecclesia, flew away, prompting the mob to leave everything aside, hunt it down and return it to its owner; this behaviour, as Jaqueline de Rommily and Victoria Wohl's keenly observed, is reminiscent to the courtship rituals in ancient Greece, whereby a man (the erastes) would have given a bird as a token of love to his beloved (the *eromenos*).³⁷

The present obscurity of the aristocracy's feminine political gender has more to do with a contemporary scholarly agenda: feminist theory focuses on the broad issue of actual women in antiquity and tries to extract as much evidence as possible about their "real", "everyday life" from a limited and scattered corpus of textual and archaeological information, while classical scholars generally look for the minutiae trying to prove the actual existence even of theatrical characters. ³⁸ If we are to use an Alcimboldian metaphorical analogy, this leaves our perception pendulating between a quest to discover the actual, real existence of the God of seasons, Vertumnus, and an analysis aimed at identifying the beautiful and delicious individual fruits, vegetables and flowers that composed his portrait. To

grasp the concept of political gender, I think that what we need is an imaginative leap that will incite us, paraphrasing Clifford Geertz, "to look over the native's shoulders" to all those instances where sex, love and desire transcended the current erotic formulas that ascribe gender to the individual, and gaze instead at its social and political dimension. Strepsiades and his wife will thereafter appear not as fictional or actual characters in need to be identified onsite, but as archetypes that initiated through gender a discussion on the power relations in the Athenian politics. Reaching a point of allegorical understanding will provide incentives for a contemporary audience to appreciate the "hidden kingly image" and the meaning of *political love* in a context where love (eros), luxury and womanhood would have been coterminous, and subsequently to imagine and decipher who actually were, in the Republic and elsewhere, "these terrible charmers and tyrant makers" (οἱ δεινοὶ μάγοι τε καὶ τυραννοποιοὶ) that contrive to engender in men a ruling passion (ἔρωτά τινα αὐτῶ μηχανωμένους ἐμποιῆσαι), corrupting them to a decadent lifestyle.³⁹

Victoria Wohl's path breaking book revealed that in ancient Greece political eros was a palpable reality rather than the dead metaphor, "that ill-defined sense of attachment" contemporary patriots are accustomed to feel when they declare love for their country. She considers Greek politics intrinsic to the erotic manifestations that, based on the seductive speech of the rhetoric, enflamed desire between the *erastes* and the *eromenos*, men and women, orators and the Assembly. This living metaphorical love, however, was not disembodied, "platonic", rather one of most passionate and sexual of its kind and it involved political, symbolic genders; (re) imagining them provides us with a quest to recuperate the ancient "bodies" engaged in that loving, sexual encounter and Plato's *Symposium* is a good starting point.

 day binary theories about the "physical" and the "spiritual" pregnancies or other "feminine" activities present in the dialogue, because this view is employed nowadays only to explain away the women's "physical" experiences as mere vessels for higher, manly, "spiritual" truths; indeed these modern theories have tried to accommodate a very large foot in a Cinderella shoe and it is perhaps time we do away with them and imagine instead the Athenian *political men and political women*, by contextualizing the dialogue simultaneously with the events in the agora and the symbolic universe of Aristophanes' "women comedies" performed at about this time.

The Political Context

In 415 BCE, pandemonium erupted in Athens, in one night, at the cover of darkness, sacrilegious people mutilated the herms, the city's public monuments, whose beards were then chipped and phalluses chopped off. 41 The public inquiry which followed showed that the culprits were aristocratic hetairoi led by Alcibiades, on their way back home from a symposium. Together with the investigation into the mutilation of the herms, a parallel inquiry also indicted Alcibiades and his chums for profaning the Eleusinian mysteries, an event which allegedly took place also during a symposium, in the house of Plato's uncle, Charmides. The idea that a few decades later Plato would innocently write a dialogue titled the Symposium about another symposium, unrelated to the one which triggered those events, and which apparently only coincidently included all the most prominent perpetrators indicted by the Athenian courts, 42 is based on two premises: the first is that Plato's Symposium is either a dialogue about love between individual partygoers or a philosophical treatise that it is concerned with ethereal, timeless truths and therefore disconnected from its surroundings, and the second is that the date of the dialogue is fixed to a few months prior, owing to the celebration of Agathon's victory. The second reasoning is perhaps easier to dismiss, on one side because it is difficult to simultaneously argue for the *Symposium*'s timelessness and to wrangle for a few months, and on the other because paradoxically it does not have a fixed date, instead its narrative is based on a set of mirrors each placed at a different time, and each looking back at the dialogue from a different vantage point and thus, in hindsight, though the lens of subsequent events. Indeed the storytelling may start in 416 BCE, but it goes on, continued by the one between Plato's alter- ego,

Apollodorus and his companion, a dialogue which itself is a sequel to the one between him and his fictitious friend, Aristodemos of Cydathenaeum who, like Diotima, was an allegory rather than an obscure individual mentioned nowhere else. Aristodemos stood for the "aristocratic demos" that introduced the reader into the elegant atmosphere which typified the sympotic environment, a distinct figure from the "real" demos that gave Agathon the prize in the dramatic competition but at the same time analogous in his award giving capacity. Basically the story stems from him and he is the one that crowns the winner at the end. My view therefore is that Plato uses poetic licence to describe the drinking party which unleashed the *hetairoi* on the streets of Athens, and therefore one needs to approach its symbolic and allegorical dimension rather than being very precise about an imprecise date. As for the first reasoning, this is harder to dismiss because it goes against an exegetic tradition of what the Symposium is all about, for example the Victorian ideal of "platonic love", and, more importantly perhaps, against the grain of contemporary understanding of what love is, basically a feeling between two individuals, though recently this approach has been challenged as well by historians of classical antiquity, as outlined above.

What we know for certain about this drinking party is that it congregated upper class men that were all part of Alcibiades' inner circle and which included Plato's family, people that privately clamoured for at least a decade against what they perceived as the Athenian democracy's divide between public contribution for the war effort and decision-making. This dissatisfaction boiled over a few years later, in 411 BCE, when an oligarchic coup succeeded to overthrow democracy while most of the Athenian citizens were stationed at Samos, serving in the Athenian fleet.

The act of mutilating the herms' erect phalluses and chipping off their beards was charged with a political symbolism that unmanned the masculine political body of the Athenian citizens, expiated masculinity and with it democracy, feminizing and aristocracizing the public space. In this respect, Osborne convincingly illustrates how the herms acted much like theatrical props outside the theatre made by and for the Athenian men/ citizens to gaze at themselves. While ideologically they were part of a self-referential public discourse which, on the domestic front, symbolically emphasized the Athenian democracy's "masculinity", they also projected this "masculinity" abroad, as they were linked with the monument of the Eion victory which commemorated the first success of the Greek forces under Athenian leadership against a "feminine", luxurious monarchy represented by the

Persian Empire.⁴³ It is in this context that in 415 BCE, the herms collectively projected Athens' democratic hegemony now at its height, in a way that was at the same time sexually and politically explicit, since

they re-presented the individual Athenian to himself, and this not just on a few special occasions in the year, as with the Dionysiac mask, but every time he set foot outside his house. Whenever the Athenian prepared himself to make contact with another he had first to make contact with the other that was himself in the herm(...) It is undeniable that the mutilators chose as their target objects whose destruction was most certain to unman the Athenians and render them impotent.

For Osborne, in the Greek psyche, "herms and hoplites have a more fundamental link. As the herm is (and is not) the viewer, so every hoplite is (and is not) every other hoplite in the equality which is the foundation of the democratic polis, the equation of soldier and citizen.". 44

Following Osborne's insight into these theatrics of the phallus in classical Athens, I would also venture to link political gender with Zoe Petre's analysis of the Athenian democracy. Arguing that the vote is a mean to stage confrontation and that the Greek democracy was a sublimated form of violence, an overt mise en scène of brute force, measuring the strength of its citizens in rallying numbers, she demonstrates that democracy is all about the show, about flexing the demos' political muscle in an open display of imaginary force.⁴⁵ On the other hand, aristocracy and its extreme form, the tyranny of individuals, due to their minority status, operated on the political stage with a different, less "muscular" set of political tools. According to Detienne and Vernant, metis, cunning skill, artifice, along with persuasion were for the Greeks "feminine" attributes, used by those less physically endowed in order to overcome adversity. 46 It is therefore entirely plausible to extrapolate this idea to all those symbolic "political women" in their quest to rule the demos, and by doing so we could imagine, looking over the ideological Athenian shoulder, why openly, in a democratic environment, the tyrant or the aristocrats needed to role play the enchanters, winning power by pleasing and seducing the people.⁴⁷ What made that night in 415 BCE to stand out however was that a minority managed to successfully carry out an attack upon the majority's symbols of power, an unprecedented event in the Athenian democracy which had put into question the established order underlying an entire edifice of "sublimated violence" which the Athenian democracy was built upon. I think that for our following analysis of the *Symposium*'s

feminine paraphernalia and Aristophanes' contribution there, these points are important to solve the puzzle of the political symbolism of gender and desire which played out in the city. With those issues in mind one can imagine as well not just the political context of Aristophanes' women comedies but also how those gendered signifiers were the cornerstone of a lively, symbolic political debate.

The Dramatic Context

Aristophanes' hilarious account of Love in the Symposium offers a paradox for modern readers, which makes them miss out his political agenda and inherently the joke. He begins the story by telling us that once upon a time the nature of man was different inasmuch as there were three kinds of human beings rather than today's two sexes: the male, the female and the *hermaphrodite* (ἀνδρόγυνος), and that in terms of the form of body and spirit, each person was a totality comprising the other. This superhuman individual was "round", endowed with four legs, two set of ears, two faces and privy parts, and instilled with an ambition that would challenge the gods. It is for this reason and to diminish their strength that Zeus decided to cut them in two, and humorously thought about doing a further cut in case their impiety would not abate, so that guarter men would hop around in one leg. 48 Modern day humans, the playwright says, are but a half of the original ones, hence men who are a section of the primordial men love and pursue men, women who are a section of the primordial women are attracted to other women, and those that descended from the hermaphrodite, love and pursue the opposite sex. Aristophanes goes on to praise male-male bonding, love and desire as superior to the rest and especially the hermaphrodite figurehead, saying that only those that engage in male-male relationships are real men, having the most manly nature and therefore that they are the finest citizens worthy of doing politics.

And here lies the paradox for modern scholarship. Rather than imagining that Aristophanes is using love as a political allegory, the assumption is that he refers to personal relationships, and furthermore that he departs from his views in his comedies where time and again he chastises Agathon for his femininity, in order now to praise him and his lover, Pausanias, for their manliness. This would be done either out of politeness so as not to insult the host, or because allegedly this was the comic effect that he was after: by praising Agathon's "homosexual" relationship with Pausanias he would

have delivered a tongue-in-check rebuttal since everyone knew his "real" stance on the subject matter. ⁴⁹ I disagree with these opinions because they are informed by contemporary views on homosexuality and also because they are unimaginatively based on a straight, fact based reading. The key to the puzzle I think is to be found elsewhere, in *Thesmophoriazusae* and with it one can decipher both Agathon's (as well as Alcibiades' and the rest of the company's) rightful place in Aristophanes' comic panoply of love, and the subtle humour that informs the poet's myth. The issue of "male" pregnancy in Socrates' contribution, as well as the meaning of his betwixt nature, will thereafter also fall into place.

Written and performed in a time when democracy was abolished or not entirely reinstated, Thesmophoriazusae is a play about the playwrights' freedom of speech or, to be more precise, the lack of it which places Euripides in mortal danger. Comedy and tragedy are both represented and they coalesce for the common good. Comedy is the symbolic kinsman of tragedy and it is performed by Aristophanes himself who, in the role of Euripides' histrionic "relative", saves him in the end from his predicament. 50 At the start of the play both playwrights arrive at Agathon's house wishing to learn how to become a woman so as to infiltrate the women's undemocratic Good Council (Eubule) that took over the city during the festival of women, and to speak there on Euripides' behalf. As Agathon enters in the orchestra his appearance baffles the comedian who thinks he is going to meet Cyrene, a famous courtesan, and immediately afterwards, when Agathon has delivered his lavish entry song, he explicitly mocks him for his feminine attire, his seductive song and his gender ambiguity:

Holy Genetyllides what a pretty song! How feministic and tongue gagged and deep kissed! Just hearing it brought a tingle to my very butt! And you, young lad, I want to ask you, a la Aeschylus Lycurgeia what kind of female are you. Whence comes this femme? What its homeland? What's its dress? What confoundment of living is this? What has a lute to chat about a party dress? Or a lyre with a hairnet? Here's an oil flask and a brassiere how ill fitting! And what's this society of mirror and sword? And you yourself child, are you being raised male? Then where is your dick? Your suit? Your Spartan shoes? All right, say you're a woman: then where are your tits?⁵¹

Debra Nails considers that presenting Agathon in *Thesmophoriazusae* "as a luxuriant Asian drag queen" was "obviously offensive to Athenian sensibilities", ⁵² however on the basis of the arguments so far presented in

this paper I would say that Agathon's appearance could have intrigued the public mostly on the basis of what his image stood for, as it was underlying the quintessential qualities of an eastern despot: luxury, extravagance and the exulted "Persian" femininity that Athenian aristocrats were identified with. In my opinion, for reasons already discussed, Agathon's comic portrait was not intended to cause uproar or "offend" the public's sensibilities, if by that we understand presenting a "homosexual" to a "heterosexual" audience, for these are modern bourgeois concepts that had no place in an ancient mind-set; rather what was meant was to issue a warning to the spectators concerning the perils of tyranny, and I think precisely Agathon's symbolic display of a decadent power grab through seduction and artifice is what made his staged persona funny and politically significant at the same time. For the ancient Greeks, love, seduction and desire were tools of tyranny; with them one could enslave the people, while nonetheless they offered an ideological alternative to the democratic system of sublimated violence which regulated the democratic, face-to-face relationship between Athenian males.

In the above excerpt from *Thesomphoriazusae*, after an open display of poetic luxuriance, Agathon's song was described by the comedian as irresistible, having the melodic and poetic qualities to inflame desire, seduce and subjugate the audience just like the tyrant Lycurgus of Thrace has done in Aeschylus' Lycurgeia, when he subdued the satyrs and made them perform for him rather than for Dionysus.⁵³ What makes this passage relevant however is not just the indirect reference to the satyrs, which have a significant symbolic presence in the Symposium although in an altered, betwixt form, but the deep comic analysis of what Agathon stands for. This provides us with the backdrop for deciphering Aristophanes' contribution in the Symposium, since the subtle humour behind the playwrights' myth and his relationship with his host in the platonic dialogue stem from successive definitions of Agathon's duality. An Athenian young man and a foreign woman at the same time, Agathon's portrait emerges out of an array of gender contradictions which culminate with an unnatural communion between two very distinctly gendered utensils: the mirror and the sword, making him the epitome of the androgynous figurehead from the Symposium, the aristocratic "woman" filling the common folk with longing and teaching Athenian men how to become feminine. It is precisely this image that Aristophanes, with stealth and ingenuity, will mock again in the *Symposium*, where he will deliver the most biting satire directed at the aristocracy, Eros and his impersonator, Agathon.

Eros, from Ridicule to Extolment. Love, Politics and the Hermeneutics of Desire in the Symposium

A straight reading of Aristophanes' myth of circle humans has led to multiple fallacies which scholars have tried to no avail to reconcile with logic and common sense. One of them is that "homosexuals" are more masculine than the "heterosexuals" and that somehow Agathon becomes here a scion of manliness. According to this interpretation of the myth, a man "who prefer men are *ipso facto* manly because his preference proves him part of the original male (...) in fact, real effeminates are heterosexual males, an astounding reversal but a logical result of the same argument".⁵⁴ Following this *ad litteram* path, the text offers no surprise and we would have to take whatever it gives, however illogical. But what Aristophanes appears to be saying is not what he actually conveys, rather, in the subtext, his stance is logical and consistent with the one from his comedies, both as far as Agathon and the aristocracy are concerned.

To access this hidden comic meaning we start from the premise that there was no homosexual or heterosexual involved in his speech, and that what the myth was all about concerned the political relationships in the city. Male-male desire is centred around labour, work and livelihood, the masculine embrace between citizens gives surfeit, freeing them to pursue the basic necessities of live, such as gathering food and crafting so as to sustain themselves rather than to debate here, at this drinking party, Socrates' abstract and useless notions of virtue and beauty. The male half of the primordial man is the democratic man, for as the playwright explicitly reveals, "upon reaching maturity he alone is able to prove himself as man in a political career". 55 Unlike the working men, the other feminine halves of the primordial humans are concerned exclusively with pleasure. To the extreme is the woman-woman desire, which having no contact with men is apolitical and stands for an aristocracy in love with her own beauty, remote from the civic life and therefore not elaborated upon. Male-woman desire on the other hand is vilified here just like in the comedies. The male tally, which stands for a debauched and gullible demos that has traded his manliness for the oratorical pleasure provided by the elite, is the city's lustful adulterer, while the woman half is a ravenous aristocracy, "man-courting" and possessed by an insatiable desire. 56 In the Acharnians, we have this image where the woman in question is the beautiful and noble Alcibiades derogatory referred to as εὐρύπρωκτος, while other orators try to transform Demos (who on this occasion is played openly, without a name substitute) into an eromenos. The "politics of Eros" in this comedy is explicit: charmed

or rather entranced by the orators, Demos sits on his rock, the Pnyx, "mooning with the open mouth as one who gapes for figs".⁵⁷ With the figs being a code word for the clitoris, the politics of Eros, the playwright contends, is destructive for the wellbeing and manliness of Demos which stands now to be effeminated by the "women" of Athens.

In the Symposium too, Aristophanes' speech is covertly directed against Eros, the tyrant and the aristocrat trailing throughout the city his soft pleasures and appetites, a leitmotif present in Plato's Republic as well as in his comedies. Unlike LoveCleon from Wasps, an alter-ego of Demos played by a boorish man invited to a high-class symposium, Aristophanes does not need to be lectured on etiquette and decorum, but the subtle mock of his companions, of their "impressive stories" (λόγους σεμνούς) and his reliance on a funny myth to debunk theirs, is not dissimilar in outcome from that of his comic antihero and nonetheless biting. Staunchly standing against Eros, Aristophanes delivers an encomium of manliness through hard labour, where the hardworking men that form the city's political backbone are revealed as the true heroes of the story. Subsequently, Eros is altogether flushed away from his comic performance because he is deemed irrelevant and counterproductive for a relationship between "real" men, since that relationship "no one could imagine to be a mere amorous connection". 58 To add insult to injury, immediately afterwards, Eros, the god of love, is replaced with Hephaestus, the masculine god of crafters and ordinary citizens, which unites with his bellows, anvil and hammer the working men of Athens. Sweat, not perfume, is what Aristophanes celebrates, and it is Hephaestus, not Eros, who "joins and fuses" together in the "closest possible union so that they shall not be divided by night or day"59 the male – male, democratic, citizens of Athens.

Jocularly, Aristo-phanes' speech "sheds light" on the true face of the aristocracy, he outs Agathon and his companions as women which are in the business of seducing the people with their "deep kissed songs", in a way that is consistent with his approach in *Thesmophoriazusae* and elsewhere. Far from transforming Agathon into a poster boy of manliness, he makes him here once more pose as the female half of the political hermaphrodite, the "society of mirror and sword" he ridiculed in the above mentioned excerpt from *Thesmophoriazusae*. To enforce this view, towards the end of his speech, he warns Eryximachus not to think that the male-male mythological couple refers to Agathon and Pausanias, because while they are "males by nature", "they belong to the fortunate few". ⁶⁰ By now he has left the myth behind and he is blunt with Eryximachus as well as with the rest of the audience; as he divulges that the "males by nature"

are not the political males he had in mind, he issues a clear warning to the doctor who, due to his profession, might have confused the actual sex with the symbolic political gender the comedian just performed. The physician thus finds out in the most explicit fashion that Aristophanes is not concerned with, or in the business of mocking Agathon's, Pausanias' or indeed the rest of the company's natural sex, but their political gender.

Dismissed by Aristophanes in favour of Hephaestus, Eros nevertheless makes a magnificent entrance onstage in Agathon's glittering speech. As soon as he starts, the latter elucidates that his praise of Eros is synonymous with the highest qualities and that these are to be found only among the most illustrious citizens, not the commoners. As a result, instead of boasting his recent victory in the dramatic competition and the prize awarded to him by the Athenian people, he makes the disparaging comment that "an intelligent speaker is more alarmed of a few men of wit than a multitude of fools", 61 thus dismissing the importance of the event he was supposed to celebrate, and, in the subtext, revealing that there is another, hidden, purpose for this gathering. Socrates' opinion as well as that of his fellow symposiasts far outweighs the Demos', in a move which on the aristophanic erotic scale recalls the woman-woman erotic involvement. Having this idea in the background and under the rapturous applause of an aristocratic demos (Aristodemos), Agathon delivers an encomium of Eros which elevates the God to the status of the city's absolute monarch. Soft, delicate and gentle, Love is a tyrant and an aristocrat situated above the city's common law. A champion of idle appetites, he is the most beautiful and the best, κάλλιστον ὄντα καὶ ἄριστον, ⁶² and in this capacity that he rules over the city's lesser sovereign, the law, not with violence but with charm and persuasion. The violence of men (citizens), sublimated or manifest, falls under his spell, and any attempt to use it against him proves useless, for just as Ares, the god of war, succumbed and was enslaved by Aphrodite, so too will those that rally strength and power to face him.

Agathon is the embodiment of the God; as the definition progresses, through wordplay, Agathon "the good" becomes interchangeable with Eros both in name and in purpose, both being associated with the fairest qualities: luxury, beauty, elegance, and the aristocratic good life which is opposed to the ugly and the commonplace:

[&]quot;τρυφῆς, ἀβρότητος, χλιδῆς, χαρίτων, ἱμέρου, πόθου πατήρ. ἐπιμελὴς ἀγαθῶν, ἀμελὴς κακῶν."

[&]quot;Father of luxury, tenderness, elegance, graces, longing and yearning; careful of the good ($\dot{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\tilde{\omega}v$), careless of the bad."63

Άβρός and τρυφή, markers of aristocratic glory and source of its hubris, ⁶⁴ are flaunted in front of an ecstatic aristocratic audience (Aristodemos), together with all the other qualities that point to excellence and perfection. Sending an arrow towards Aristophanes, Agathon places under Love's command the two gods that previously, in comedy, challenged his imperium, Zeus and Hephaestus. Cunningly, in their company he also assigns the virgin goddess Athena, now a servant of Eros, weaving his clothes. Subjecting the poliad goddess to his whims, Eros Tyrannos resurfaces in the subtext as master of the Athenian people, while his tyranny appears as the sweetest form of enslavement. Next, we are covertly informed that this tyranny is not limited to commoners; trying to "bring us (the aristocrats) together in such friendly gatherings as the present, at feasts and dances, Eros makes himself a leader; politeness contriving moroseness outdriving, kind giver of amity, giving no enmity, gracious and benign (...)".65 It is to the general acclaim that Eros is crowned the leader of the people but also of the aristocrats, of Demos and of Aristodemos, proving that aristocracy is just an expanded form of tyranny and that every aristocrat aims to become a tyrant; as Oedipus in Sophocles' Oedipus *Tyrannos* remarked, the tyrant is the greatest of the great men.

The next two speakers are Socrates, accused and convicted of impiety but one who brings in the conversation the prophetess Diotima, the personification of godly piety according to her name, and Alcibiades the man accused and found guilty for the mutilation of the phallic public statues in the agora and for the profanation of the Eleusinian mysteries, but who ironically will now praise an \Breve{ayabaa} the godly gold statue residing within Socrates. ⁶⁶ These are not just coincidences but the incriminating evidence in favour of a political reading.

Much ado surrounds the idea that in Socrates' (or Diotima's) speech, men allegedly become pregnant. Indeed this would be without precedent both in literature and in reality, for men cannot be pregnant or give birth; this is a fact. To solve the puzzle scholars have put forward a few solutions such as the "pregnancy of seed", alleging that the ancient Greeks thought that men were pregnant with their semen. We have discussed the issue in the first part of the article and we outlined the reasons why this theory is problematic. I think that the solution lies elsewhere, that Socrates' exhortation was not about men becoming pregnant but about the symbolic women of Athens going through all stages of their womanhood.

In *Symposium* 206 C we learn that humans, not men, are pregnant, and this I think is a salient feature if we consider Nicole Loraux's persuasive

argument that for the Greeks there were two very distinct categories of humans, the ἀνήρ and the ἄνθρωπος and that there was a dichotomy which was simultaneously gendered and politically inscribed. Άνήρ represents masculinity in its purest form, while ἄνθρωπος is fluid. The opposition between the two terms consists in aligning ἀνήρ with hoplites and the masculine citizen body, while the "humane human", associated with its feminine qualities, is the source of civil strife in the polis.

C'est bien aux á*ndres* en tant que tels – entendons, come hommes virils, indissociablement citoyens et soldats- que la guerre civile s'attaque (...) Or, lorsque Thucydide donne son nom au principe d'un reversement aussi destructeur, il s'avère que, derrière la stásis et ses effets catastrophiques c'est bel et bien la nature humaine (*phúsis anthrópon*) qu'il faut incriminer (...) la nature humaine est pour l'*anér* à la fois source et lieu de regression, et cela tout au long de *La Guerre du Péloponnèse*.⁶⁷

At the crossroad of masculine and feminine, the humane human is the political hermaphrodite outlined by Aristophanes. She is the fusion of donkey and horse, of labour and idleness, of poverty and wealth and as she claims universality and cosmopolitism she gives birth, and challenges the pre-eminence of city's democratic masculine citizen body. Socrates was a woman, and though in the *Symposium* she acted through a medium, the midwife from *Theaetetus* introduced us to the inner world of female procreation and offered a political alternative to the extrovert phallic statues erected in the public square. Claiming to have privileged access to the gold statue she was pregnant with, Alcibiades, the man with Eros on his shield, the dainty aristocrat on horseback and the most notorious woman in Athens, recalls the image of Phidippides from Aristophanes' *Clouds*, himself a "compromise" between a woman and a man, wealth and poverty.

In conclusion, present-day dominant narratives on sex, gender and desire have displaced the significance of the aristocratic Eros and the loving interplay of political genders. In the past couple of centuries there has been a steady scholarly tradition that equated the status of Athenian women with slaves when it fact they, or rather their symbolic counterparts, were the city's absolute masters. Imagination is all that remains to recover them and glimpse into Eros' ancient aristocratic beauty. In the meantime, having to navigate the literal meanings of today's impoverished somatic or "spiritual" Eros, we conclude with the words of Umberto Eco: "stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus".

NOTES

- David Bellos, Is That a Fish in Your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything. London & New York, 2011, p. 76.
- ² *Ibidem* pp. 30-31.
- ³ *Ibidem,* p. 70.
- ⁴ Charles Martindale, *Thinking Through Reception*, in Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas (ed.)., *Classics and the Use of Reception*, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 3.
- P. C. Plass, "Plato's «Pregnant» Lover", *Symbolae Osloenses* 53, 1978, p. 50; in E. E. Pender, "Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato's Symposium", *CQ*, 42. 1, 1992, p. 72.
- ⁶ Plato, *Symp.* 206 C. At best, for Pender, female pregnancy is an "absent presence" *ibidem*. p 79.
- ⁷ Plato, *Symp.* 206 C.
- ⁸ Pender, *op. cit.* p. 74.
- Diodorus Siculus I. 80. 4; Aeschylus Eumenides, 658-659; Seven Against Thebes 754, Sophocles Oedypus Tyrannos 1211.
- Plato, *Theaetetus*, 148 E- 151 D.
- Aside from various literary sources that infirm the exclusively paternalist theory, Halperin's reasoning about the kinship structure of classical Athens effectively ends this controversy. "The law permitted half-brother and -sister to marry only if they were descended from different mothers thereby in fact denying the claim of the Aeschylean Apollo that the father is the only true parent. The thesis that Plato's contemporaries generally disbelieved that women played any contributory role in conception cannot plausibly be maintained" David M.Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality. And Other Essays on Greek Love*, Routledge London & New York, 1990, p. 139.
- "The homosexuals in the audience (both Socrates' and Plato's) at this point may be pleasantly surprised to learn that all the time they were courting their beloveds with a view to physical intercourse at a later stage, their souls during these conversations were already having sexual intercourse!" Pender, op cit. p. 79.
- David M. Halperin, *op. cit.* p. 8 9. See also the analysis focused on Charles Gilbert Chaddock's invention, in 1892, of the word "homosexual" and that of the "heterosexual" shortly afterwards. *ibidem*, p. 15 sqq.
- David M. Halperin, "Is There a History of Sexuality?" in Robert M. Burns (ed.), Historiography. Critical Concepts in Historical Studies, vol. 3, Routledge, London & New York, 2006, p. 380. Some of the ideas here can be found in the book as well, p. 36-40. Halperin considers that in ancient Greece a single form of sexual experience was conceptualized and it involved the ideas of "penetrator" and "penetrated": "1 have already argued in the title essay of this collection that sex, as it is represented in classical Athenian documents, is a deeply polarizing experience: constructed according to a model of penetration that interprets "penetration" as an intrinsically unidirectional act", David M.Halperin, op cit., 1990, p. 132.

- ¹⁵ *Ibidem.* p. 379.
- Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", in Philip Auslander (ed.) *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies.* Routledge, London & New York, Volume IV, p. 100.
- ¹⁷ *Ibidem* p. 102.
- Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporal Metaphor in Revolutionary France 1770-1800*, Stanford University Press, 1997; for the marriage between "Monsieur Third-Estate" and "Madame Nobility" see pp. 94- 96, for Iscariot pp. 157- 165.
- Ralph M. Rosen "The Gendered Polis in Eupolis" Poleis" pp. 149-176 in G. Dobrov (ed.), The City as Comedy. Society and Representation in Athenian Drama. Chapel Hill & London, 1997, p. 160.
- Plato, Republic, IX, 573 B. Plato narrates a progressive moral degradation from a golden age of frugal manhood in the past generations, represented by the "democratic man's" father, to present generations that are increasingly swayed by soft, erotic desires.
- 21 "He (the tyrant) is assimilated to all those other Others to the ideal Athenian man. In his uncontrollable appetite, his love of finery, his tendency toward deception and artifice, he is like a woman; the ostentation and autocracy of his power equates him to an Eastern despot; in thrall to the demands of his own pleasures and the necessities of his rule, he becomes a slave" Victoria Wohl, Love Among the Ruins. The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens. Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 224. Wohl's analysis is astute, I depart however from her belief that multiple "Others" are at play in the tyrant's portrait: women, eastern despots and slaves. In the Greek psyche the eastern despot was conceived as the epitome of femininity while Aristophanic comedies often describe women as slaves of their own desires. Symbolically, the woman is a foreign "oriental" despot and a slave at the same time, master and slave of unlawfulness (παρανομία), and that is why the tyrant's association with all of those "other Others" was not part of a competition of alterities but symbiotic, enforcing his femininity. For the agglutinating notions of άβροσύνη (luxury, delicacy, refinement), Asians, women and the Greek aristocrats see Lezlie Kurke, "The Politics of άβροσύνη in Archaic Greece", Cl. Ant. Vol 11, No 1, 1992, pp. 91-120, Kurke reads Sappho's affirmation "I love άβροσύνη" [Fr. 58.25] as "politically programmatic (...) endorsing a particular style of aristocratic luxury", and dismisses the "misreading of the archaeological evidence". The actual gender of characters donning eastern lyres, long flowing garments, earrings, and parasols on sixth century BCE vase paintings is seminal for contemporary archeological debates, with opinions split between those who say that the images stand for transvestite women with "fake" beards or transvestite men. *ibidem*, p. 98- 99. For more information on the "feminine", oriental and aristocratic paraphernalia see also M. C. Miller, "The Parasol: An Oriental Status-Symbol in Late Archaic and Classical Athens", JHS, 112, 1992.

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- See the criticism on Alcibiades' effeminate, dissolute and luxurious life in Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, 16.1, and analyzed by V. Wohl, *op cit.* p. 132-133.
- Herodotus' Artemisia is not an exception. She is an eastern despot therefore her political powers would have not been conceptualized within the confines of a Greek polis.
- Aristophanes, Wasps 1450-1454.
- ²⁵ Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 46-55.
- Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, 775-6.
- Nicole Loraux, "Aristophane, les femmes d'Athenes et le theatre", Aristophane, Entretiens sur l'antiquite Classique. Tome XXXVIII, Vandoeuvres- Geneve, 1991, p. 217 sqq.
- On the symbiotic relationship between *social drama* and *stage drama* see Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play,* New York 1982, p. 76.
- Griffiths argues that in ancient Greece there was an overlap of cultural and practical distinctions between the "aristocratic" prestigious activities of the horse (cavalry actions, ceremonial riding, chariot racing), and the "lower-class" "banausic" activities of the donkey; differences that were observed through display, function and transgression and had correspondences with gender. Mark Griffith, "Horsepower and Donkeywork. Equids and the Ancient Greek Imagination", *Cl Ph.* 101, 4 (October 2006) p. 307-308.
- Aristophanes, Clouds, 60-74.
- Sir Ghillean Prance, Mark Nesbitt (eds.), *The Cultural History of Plants*. Routledge, London & New York, 2005 pp. 168; 308.
- Aristophanes, Knights, 566.
- The offer made to the democratic city in exchange for the knights' war time effort comes subtextually at the expense of the community, for what the noble knights ask is to be allowed to continue, in peacetime, to enjoy their undemocratic ways. Victoria Wohl, *op.cit.* p 109. Aristophanes, *Knights*, 579-580.
- Mark Grriffith, op cit. pp. 308-309.
- Semonides of Amorgos, Fr. 7.57-70. For the symbolic connection between horses, women and tyranny see also Aristophanes, Wasps 500-503, Lysistrata, 616-633.
- ³⁶ 'Έρως (love) in Greek includes but is not limited to sexual connotations.
- The anecdote is in Plutarch, Alc 10.1. see the commentary in V. Wohl, op. cit. p. 147, and Jaqueline de Rommily, Alcibiades, ou les dangers de l'ambition, Paris, 1995, pp. 45-46.
- D.M. Lewis, "Who was Lysistrata?", Annual of the British School at Athens 50, 1955. For scholarship on women in classical antiquity, see for example Pauline Schmitt Pantel (ed.), Historire des femmes. L'antiquite, Plon, Paris, 1991., Sarah B. Pomeroy Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves. Women in Classical Antiquity, New York, Shocken Books Inc. 1995, Laurie O'Higgins, Women and Humor in Classical Greece, Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- ³⁹ Plato, *Rep.*, IX, 572 E.
- David Schaps, "The Woman Least Mentioned: Etiquette and Women's Names", CQ, 27, 1977, pp 323 –330.

- Olivier Aurenche, Les Groupes D'Alcibiades, de Léogoras et de Teucros. Remarques sur la vie politique athénienne en 415 av J.C. Paris, 1974. p. 14.
- 42 From among the participants to Plato's drinking party, almost everyone, with the exception of Aristophanes and the fictitious characters of Diotima and Aristodemus, were accused with profaning the Eleusinian mysteries and/ or mutilating the herms. Thus, Agathon and Pausanias fled to the Macedonian court, Eryximachus, was accused by the metic Teucrus and charged by the Athenian courts with desecrating the herms, Phaedrus was accused by Teucrus and charged with profaning the Eleusinian mysteries and he too fled into exile, Alcibiades was accused by Agariste, wife of Damon, and the slave Andromachus for profaning the Eleusinian mysteries and mutilating the herms, he then deserted to Sparta where he received asylum, Charmides son of Glaucon was charged with profaning the mysteries and fled into exile as well, while Socrates himself was later charged with impiety. Though I do not agree with Debra Nails as far as the actual existence of Diotima and Aristodemus is concerned, she makes a compelling argument for the aftermath of the Symposium, see Debra Nails, "Tragedy Off-Stage", in Debra Nails, J. H. Lesher, and C. Frisbee (eds.), Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 179-180; 202-203.
- Robin Osborne, The Erection and Mutilation of the Hermai, PCPhS 31, 1985, p. 61.
- idem.
- ⁴⁵ Zoe Petre Cetatea greacă între real și imaginar, Ed. Nemira, București, 2000, pp. 12- 15.
- Marcel Dietenne, Jean Pierre Vernant, Vicleşugurile inteligenţei. Metis la greci. Bucureşti, Editura Symposion, 1999, p. 33, 36-67.
- ⁴⁷ V. Wohl, *op. cit*, p. 82.
- ⁴⁸ Plato, *Symp.* 189 E- 190 D.
- See the discussion in Paul Ludwig's "Politics and Eros in Aristophanes' Speech: Symposium 191e-192a and the Comedies", AJPh vol 117, n 4, 1996, pp 537-562. and K. J. Dover, "Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's Symposium", JHS, Vol. 86, (1966), pp. 41-50.
- 50 In a chapter from my PhD dedicated to the analysis of *Thesmophoriazusae*, I asserted that the play narrated metaphorically the struggle of the playwrights during the new oligarchic regime of 411 BCE, and that it involved Aristophanes as Euripides' unnamed kinsman. This goes against the grain of current scholarship on the subject, which tries to identify a real life in-law for Euripides. In a nutshell, the argument supporting a symbolic kinship between the playwrights, aside from the fact that very few people would look nowadays for real life characters in Shakespeare or more recent plays as we systematically do when we analyse these ancient plays, is twofold: firstly, Aristophanes provides us elsewhere, through wordplay, with an encrypted reference to τρυγφδία (*Ach.* 497-501.) as a synonym for comedy in a way that suggests a metaphoric kinship between the two sister art forms: the comic and the tragic drama, while here, in *Thesmophoriazusae* 85, Euripides' conceptualises a link between his craft

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and comedy using τραγωδεῖν, which signifies to dramatize or to portray, as the synonym for κωμωδεῖν, which means to satirize in comedy. Secondly, when it comes to finding a precedent for symbolically charged relatives there are plenty in Aristophanes' comedies, for example the portrait of Euripides' mother. Despite being repeatedly depicted in the comedies as a garland seller (Thesm, 387, 456, Ach. 457, 478, Knights 19, Frogs 840) in real life she was actually a noble woman, having no connection whatsoever with her staged persona, see Philochorus in F. Jacoby, Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker, Berlin- Leiden 1923-1958, 328 F218. I think that a symbolic understanding that does not programmatically equate the staged personas with actual people can, along with imagining Euripides' mother performed by the garland seller in Aristophanes' comedies as a symbol of the tragedian's profession, imagine, in Thesmophoriazusae, the kinsman of tragedy, represented by Euripides, as the comedy of Aristophanes. And since Aristophanes performed before characters in his own plays, we can further imagine him onstage now as well, in which case the hard evidence that philologists are after, namely an explicit, written reference to Aristophanes as the kinsman of Euripides, would have been redundant for an Athenian audience.

- Aristophanes, *Thesm.*, 130- 144.
- ⁵² Debra Nails, *op. cit.* p. 182.
- A. Sommerstein, Aeschylus, *Fragments*, III, Loeb Classical Library, 2009.
- Paul W. Ludwig, op. cit. p. 555.
- ⁵⁵ Plato, *Symp.* 192 A.
- ⁵⁶ Plato, *Symp.* 191 E.
- Aristophanes *Ach.* 755
- ⁵⁸ Plato, *Symp.* 192 C.
- ⁵⁹ Plato, *Symp*. 192 D- E.
- 60 Plato, *Symp.* 193 B.
- 61 Plato *Symp.* 194 B.
- 62 Plato, *Symp.* 195 A.
- 63 Plato, Symp. 197 D.
- "Wealth, hubris and arrogance were intimately conjoined in Athenian perceptions of the rich. Lysias notes that poor men who possess little are not likely to commit hubris, but rather those men who possess much more than they need" Josiah Ober, Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens. Rhethoric Ideology and the Power of the People. Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 208. For an analysis of "status and social standing" in classical Athens see also p. 248 sqq.
- 65 Plato, *Symp.* 197 D.
- For an analysis of ἄγαλμα in Alcibiades' speech see C.D.C Reeve, "A Study in Violets: Alcibiades in the Symposium", in *Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, p 124 sqq.
- Nicole Loraux, *La tragédie d'Athènes. La politique entre l'ombre et l'utopie.* Editions du Seuil, 2005, pp. 77; 78.

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