INTRODUCTORY DIALOGUE

APOLLODORUS

IN FACT, YOUR QUESTION does not find me unprepared. *172A*
Just the other day, as it happens, I was walking to the city from my home in Phaleron when a man I know, who was making his way behind me, saw me and called from a distance:

"The gentleman from Phaleron!" he yelled, trying to be funny.[1] "Hey, Apollodorus, wait!"

So I stopped and waited.

"Apollodorus, I've been looking for you!" he said. "You know there once was a gathering at Agathon's when Socrates, Alcibi- *172B*
ades, and their friends had dinner together; I wanted to ask you about the speeches they made on Love. What were they? I heard a version from a man who had it from Phoenix, Philip's son, but it was badly garbled, and he said you were the one to ask. So please, will you tell me all about it? After all, Socrates is your friend—who has a better right than you to report his conversation? But before you begin," he added, "tell me this: were you there yourself?"

"Your friend must have really garbled his story," I replied, "if *172C*
you think this affair was so recent that I could have been there."

"I did think that," he said.

"Glaucon, how could you? You know very well Agathon hasn't lived in Athens for many years, while it's been less than three that I've been Socrates' companion and made it my job to *173A*
know exactly what he says and does each day. Before that, I simply drifted aimlessly. Of course, I used to think that what I

1. The joke is that Athenians addressed each other in this fashion (by the names of their demes) only on formal occasions, as in court. Cf. *Gorgias* 495B.

was doing was important, but in fact I was the most worthless man on earth—as bad as you are this very moment: I used to think philosophy was the last thing a man should do."

"Stop joking, Apollodorus," he replied. "Just tell me when the party took place."

"When we were still children, when Agathon won the prize with his first tragedy. It was the day after he and his troupe held their victory celebration."

"So it really was a long time ago," he said. "Then who told you about it? Was it Socrates himself?"

173B "Oh, for god's sake, of course not!" I replied. "It was the very same man who told Phoenix, a fellow called Aristodemus, from Cydatheneum, a real runt of a man, who always went barefoot. He went to the party because, I think, he was obsessed with Socrates—one of the worst cases at that time. Naturally, I checked part of his story with Socrates, and Socrates agreed with his account."

"Please tell me, then," he said. "You speak and I'll listen, as we walk to the city. This is the perfect opportunity."

173C So this is what we talked about on our way; and that's why, as I said before, I'm not unprepared. Well, if I'm to tell *you* about it too—I'll be glad to. After all, my greatest pleasure comes from philosophical conversation, even if I'm only a listener, whether or not I think it will be to my advantage. All other talk, especially the talk of rich businessmen like you, bores me to tears, and I'm sorry for you and your friends because you think your affairs are *173D* important when really they're totally trivial. Perhaps, in your turn, you think I'm a failure, and, believe me, I think that what you think is true. But as for all of you, I don't just *think* you are failures—I know it for a fact.

FRIEND

You'll never change, Apollodorus! Always nagging, even at yourself! I do believe you think everybody—yourself first of all—is totally worthless, except, of course, Socrates. I don't know exactly how you came to be called "the maniac," but you certainly talk like one, always furious with everyone, including yourself—but not with Socrates!

APOLLODORUS

Of course, my dear friend, it's perfectly obvious why I have these views about us all: it's simply because I'm a maniac, and I'm raving! *173E*

FRIEND

It's not worth arguing about this now, Apollodorus. Please do as I asked: tell me the speeches.

APOLLODORUS

All right . . .Well, the speeches went something like this—but I'd better tell you the whole story from the very beginning, as Aristodemus told it to me. *174A*

He said, then, that one day he ran into Socrates, who had just bathed and put on his fancy sandals—both very unusual events. So he asked him where he was going, and why he was looking so good.

Socrates replied, "I'm going to Agathon's for dinner. I managed to avoid yesterday's victory party—I really don't like crowds—but I promised to be there today. So, naturally, I took great pains with my appearance: I'm going to the house of a good-looking man; I had to look my best. But let me ask you this," he added, "I know you haven't been invited to the dinner; how would you like to come anyway?"

174B And Aristodemus answered, "I'll do whatever you say."

"Come with me, then," Socrates said, "and we shall prove the proverb wrong; the truth is, 'Good men go uninvited to Goodman's feast.'[2] Even Homer himself, when you think about it,

2. Agathon's name could be translated "Goodman." The proverb is, "Good men go uninvited to an inferior man's feast" (Eupolis fr. 289). Menelaus calls on Agamemnon at *Iliad* ii.408. Menelaus is called a limp spearman at xvii.587. For a different version of the proverb, see Hesiod, fr. 264.

did not much like this proverb; he not only disregarded it, he
174C violated it. Agamemnon, of course, is one of his great warriors, while he describes Menelaus as a 'limp spearman.' And yet, when Agamemnon offers a sacrifice and gives a feast, Homer has the weak Menelaus arrive uninvited at his superior's table."

Aristodemus replied to this, "Socrates, I am afraid Homer's description is bound to fit me better than yours. Mine is a case of an obvious inferior arriving uninvited at the table of a man of letters. I think you'd better figure out a good excuse for bringing me along, because, you know, I won't admit I've come without an
174D invitation. I'll say I'm your guest."

"Let's go," he said. "We'll think about what to say 'as we proceed the two of us along the way.' "[3]

With these words, they set out. But as they were walking, Socrates began to think about something, lost himself in thought, and kept lagging behind. Whenever Aristodemus stopped to wait for him, Socrates would urge him to go on
174E ahead. When he arrived at Agathon's he found the gate wide open, and that, Aristodemus said, caused him to find himself in a very embarrassing situation: a household slave saw him the moment he arrived and took him immediately to the dining room, where the guests were already lying down on their couches, and dinner was about to be served.

As soon as Agathon saw him, he called:

"Welcome, Aristodemus! What perfect timing! You're just in time for dinner! I hope you're not here for any other reason—if you are, forget it. I looked all over for you yesterday, so I could invite you, but I couldn't find you anywhere. But where is Socrates? How come you didn't bring him along?"

So I turned around (Aristodemus said), and Socrates was nowhere to be seen. And I said that it was actually Socrates who had brought *me* along as his guest.

175A "I'm delighted he did," Agathon replied. "But where is he?"

3. An allusion to Homer, *Iliad* x.222–26. Plato quotes the same line more accurately at *Protagoras* 348D: "When two go together, one has an idea before the other."

"He was directly behind me, but I have no idea where he is now."

"Go look for Socrates," Agathon ordered a slave, "and bring him in. Aristodemus," he added, "you can share Eryximachus' couch."

A slave brought water, and Aristodemus washed himself before he lay down. Then another slave entered and said: "Socrates is here, but he's gone off to the neighbor's porch. He's standing there and won't come in even though I called him several times."

"How strange," Agathon replied. "Go back and bring him in. Don't leave him there."

But Aristodemus stopped him. "No, no," he said. "Leave him 175B alone. It's one of his habits: every now and then he just goes off like that and stands motionless, wherever he happens to be. I'm sure he'll come in very soon, so don't disturb him; let him be."

"Well, all right, if you really think so," Agathon said, and turned to the slaves: "Go ahead and serve the rest of us. What you serve is completely up to you; pretend nobody's supervising you—as if I ever did! Imagine that we are all your own guests, myself included. Give us good reason to praise your service." 175C

So they went ahead and started eating, but there was still no sign of Socrates. Agathon wanted to send for him many times, but Aristodemus wouldn't let him. And, in fact, Socrates came in shortly afterward, as he always did—they were hardly halfway through their meal. Agathon, who, as it happened, was all alone on the farthest couch, immediately called: "Socrates, come lie down next to me. Who knows, if I touch you, I may catch a bit of 175D the wisdom that came to you under my neighbor's porch. It's clear *you've* seen the light. If you hadn't, you'd still be standing there."

Socrates sat down next to him and said, "How wonderful it would be, dear Agathon, if the foolish were filled with wisdom simply by touching the wise. If only wisdom were like water, which always flows from a full cup into an empty one when we connect them with a piece of yarn—well, then I would consider 175E it the greatest prize to have the chance to lie down next to you. I would soon be overflowing with your wonderful wisdom. My own wisdom is of no account—a shadow in a dream—while yours is bright and radiant and has a splendid future. Why,

young as you are, you're so brilliant I could call more than thirty thousand Greeks as witnesses.[4]

"Now you've gone *too* far, Socrates," Agathon replied. "Well, eat your dinner. Dionysus will soon enough be the judge of our
176A claims to wisdom!"[5]

Socrates took his seat after that and had his meal, according to Aristodemus. When dinner was over, they poured a libation to the god, sang a hymn, and—in short—followed the whole ritual. Then they turned their attention to drinking. At that point Pausanias addressed the group:

"Well, gentlemen, how can we arrange to drink less tonight? To be honest, I still have a terrible hangover from yesterday, and I could really use a break. I daresay most of you could, too, since you were also part of the celebration. So let's try not to
176B overdo it."

Aristophanes replied: "Good idea, Pausanias. We've got to make a plan for going easy on the drink tonight. I was over my head last night myself, like the others."

After that, up spoke Eryximachus, son of Akoumenos: "Well said, both of you. But I still have one question: How do *you* feel, Agathon? Are you strong enough for serious drinking?"

"Absolutely not," replied Agathon. "I've no strength left for anything."

176C "What a lucky stroke for us," Eryximachus said, "for me, for Aristodemus, for Phaedrus, and the rest—that you large-capacity drinkers are already exhausted. Imagine how weak drinkers like ourselves feel after last night! Of course I don't include Socrates in my claims: he can drink or not, and will be satisfied whatever we do. But since none of us seems particularly eager to over-
176D indulge, perhaps it would not be amiss for me to provide you with some accurate information as to the nature of intoxication.

4. Socrates' style here is highly rhetorical and deeply ironic, as Agathon recognizes. Thirty thousand is the traditional number of male citizens in the assembly; the theater of Dionysus, however, where the tragic contests were held, accommodated no more than seventeen thousand spectators.

5. Dionysus was the god of wine and drunkenness. In fact, Agathon is unwittingly proved right, because the drunken Alcibiades will crown Socrates with the same ribbons he had earlier used to crown Agathon.

If I have learned anything from medicine, it is the following point: inebriation is harmful to everyone. Personally, therefore, I always refrain from heavy drinking; and I advise others against it—especially people who are suffering the effects of a previous night's excesses."

"Well," Phaedrus interrupted him, "I always follow your advice, especially when you speak as a doctor. In this case, if the others know what's good for them, they too will do just as you say."

At that point they all agreed not to get drunk that evening; 176E
they decided to drink only as much as pleased them.

"It's settled, then," said Eryximachus. "We are resolved to force no one to drink more than he wants. I would like now to make a further motion: let us dispense with the flute-girl who just made her entrance; let her play for herself or, if she prefers, for the women in the house. Let us instead spend our evening in conversation. If you are so minded, I would like to propose a subject." 177A

They all said they were quite willing, and urged him to make his proposal. So Eryximachus said:

"Let me begin by citing Euripides' *Melanippe*: 'Not mine the tale.' What I am about to tell belongs to Phaedrus here, who is deeply indignant on this issue, and often complains to me about it:

"'Eryximachus,' he says, 'isn't it an awful thing! Our poets have composed hymns in honor of just about any god you can think of; but has a single one of them given one moment's thought to the god of love, ancient and powerful as he is? As for 177B
our fancy intellectuals, they have written volumes praising Heracles and other heroes (as did the distinguished Prodicus). Well, perhaps *that's* not surprising, but I've actually read a book by an accomplished author who saw fit to extol the usefulness of salt! 177C
How *could* people pay attention to such trifles and never, not even once, write a proper hymn to Love? How could anyone ignore so great a god?'

"Now, Phaedrus, in my judgment, is quite right. I would like, therefore, to take up a contribution, as it were, on his behalf, and gratify his wish. Besides, I think this a splendid time for all of us here to honor the god. If you agree, we can spend the whole 177D
evening in discussion, because I propose that each of us give as

good a speech in praise of Love as he is capable of giving, in proper order from left to right. And let us begin with Phaedrus, who is at the head of the table and is, in addition, the father of our subject."

"No one will vote against that, Eryximachus," said Socrates. "How could *I* vote 'No,' when the only thing I say I understand
177E is the art of love?[6] Could Agathon and Pausanias? Could Aristophanes, who thinks of nothing but Dionysus and Aphrodite? No one I can see here now could vote against your proposal.

"And though it's not quite fair to those of us who have to speak last, if the first speeches turn out to be good enough and to exhaust our subject, I promise we won't complain. So let Phaedrus begin, with the blessing of Fortune; let's hear his praise of Love."

178A They all agreed with Socrates, and pressed Phaedrus to start. Of course, Aristodemus couldn't remember exactly what everyone said, and I myself don't remember everything he told me. But I'll tell you what he remembered best, and what I consider the most important points.

6. "The art of love": *ta erōtika.* See 198D1–2, 201D5, 207A5, 207C3, C7, 209E5 (where we have rendered it as "the rites of love"). A literal translation would be "erotics," as the formation is parallel to that of *ta physica* ("physics," or the science of nature) from *physis* ("nature"). In its usage in the *Symposium, ta erōtika* seems to range over both the science of love and the proper pursuit of love. On Socrates' claim to special knowledge in this area, see *Lysis* 204C and 206A.

THE SPEECH OF PHAEDRUS[7]

LOVE IS A GREAT GOD, wonderful in many ways to gods and men, and most marvelous of all is the way he came into being. We honor him as one of the most an- *178B*
cient gods, and the proof of his great age is this: the parents of Love have no place in poetry or legend. According to Hesiod, the first to be born was Chaos,

> . . . but then came
> Earth, broad-chested, a seat for all, forever safe,
> And Love.[8]

And Acousileos agrees with Hesiod: after Chaos came Earth and Love, these two.[9] And Parmenides tells of this beginning:

> The very first god [she] designed was Love.[10]

All sides agree, then, that Love is one of the most ancient *178C*
gods. As such, he gives to us the greatest goods. I cannot say what greater good there is for a young boy than a gentle lover, or for a lover than a boy to love. There is a certain guidance each

7. Phaedrus appears also in the *Protagoras* (at 315C) and in the *Phaedrus*, which is named after him, and which shows him as fascinated by speeches about love. It is noteworthy that all of the speakers in the *Symposium*, with the interesting exception of Aristophanes, appear in the *Protagoras*. For their shared interest in philosophy, see 218B.

8. *Theogony* 116–120, 118 omitted. The poet Hesiod was the first Greek writer to treat cosmology and the origins of things.

9. Acousileos was an early-fifth-century writer of genealogies.

10. Parmenides, B 13. "She," the unstated subject of "designed," is evidently the goddess of B 12.

THE SPEECH OF AGATHON[30]

I WISH FIRST TO SPEAK of how I ought to speak, and only then to speak. In my opinion, you see, all those who have spoken before me did not so much celebrate the god as congratulate human beings on the good things that come to them from the god. But who it is who gave these gifts, what he is
195A like—no one has spoken about that. Now, only one method is correct for every praise, no matter whose: you must explain what qualities in the subject of your speech enable him to give the benefits for which we praise him. So now, in the case of Love, it is right for us to praise him first for what he is and afterwards for his gifts.

⌜I maintain, then, that while all the gods are happy, Love—if I may say so without giving offence—is the happiest of them all, for he is the most beautiful and the best. His great beauty lies in this: First, Phaedrus, he is the youngest of the gods.[31] He proves
195B my point himself by fleeing old age in headlong flight, fast-moving though it is (that's obvious—it comes after us faster than it should). Love was born to hate old age and will come nowhere near it. Love always lives with young people and is one of them: the old story holds good that like is always drawn to like. And

30. Agathon, the writer of tragedies, was famous for his personal beauty, for the originality of his plays, and for the influence on his writing of Sophistic rhetoric. Plato's *Protagoras* (315D–E) shows him listening to the Sophist Prodicus, and the speech here shows him to have been a disciple of Gorgias' style in rhetoric. Aristophanes satirized his style in the *Thesmophoriazousai* (101 ff) and speaks of his effeminacy (191–92). All Athens apparently knew that he was loved by Pausanias (see note 19).

31. See 178B.

though on many other points I agree with Phaedrus, I do not agree with this: that Love is more ancient than Kronos and Iapetos. No, I say that he is the youngest of the gods and stays *195C* young forever.⌟

Those old stories Hesiod and Parmenides tell about the gods—those things happened under Necessity, not Love, if what they say is true. For not one of all those violent deeds would have been done—no castrations, no imprisonments—if Love had been present among them. There would have been peace and brotherhood instead, as there has been now as long as Love has been king of the gods.

So he is young. And besides being young, he is delicate. It *195D* takes a poet as good as Homer to show how delicate the god is. For Homer says that Mischief is a god and that she is delicate—well, that her feet are delicate, anyway! He says:

> *. . . hers are delicate feet: not on the ground*
> *Does she draw nigh; she walks instead upon the heads of men.*[32]

A lovely proof, I think, to show how delicate she is: she doesn't walk on anything hard; she walks only on what is soft.⌜We shall *195E* use the same proof about Love, then, to show that he is delicate. For he walks not on earth, not even on people's skulls, which are not really soft at all, but in the softest of all the things that are, there he walks, there he has his home. For he makes his home in the characters, in the souls, of gods and men—and not even in every soul that comes along: when he encounters a soul with a harsh character, he turns away; but when he finds a soft and gentle character, he settles down in it. Always, then, he is touching with his feet and with the whole of himself what is softest in the softest places. He must therefore be most delicate.⌟ *196A*

He is youngest, then, and most delicate; in addition he has a fluid, supple shape. For if he were hard, he would not be able to enfold a soul completely or escape notice when he first entered it or withdrew. Besides, his graceful good looks prove that he is balanced and fluid in his nature. Everyone knows that Love has

32. *Iliad* xix.92–93. "Mischief" translates *atē*.

extraordinary good looks, and between ugliness and Love there is unceasing war.[33]

And the exquisite coloring of his skin! The way the god consorts with flowers shows that. For he never settles in anything,
196B be it a body or a soul, that cannot flower or has lost its bloom. His place is wherever it is flowery and fragrant; there he settles, there he stays.

Enough for now about the beauty of the god, though much remains still to be said. After this, we should speak of Love's moral character.[34] The main point is that Love is neither the cause nor the victim of any injustice; he does no wrong to gods or men, nor they to him. If anything has an effect on him, it is
196C never by violence, for violence never touches Love. And the effects he has on others are not forced, for every service we give to love we give willingly. And whatever one person agrees on with another, when both are willing, that is right and just; so say "the laws that are kings of society."[35]

And besides justice, he has the biggest share of moderation.[36]

33. Here and at 195B Agathon is probably poking fun at the man who shares his couch—Socrates. Now long past his youth and never good-looking, Socrates is nevertheless no stranger to love, as everyone present knows.

34. "Moral character": *aretē*. Justice, Moderation, Bravery, and Wisdom are four cardinal virtues (excellences of character), the same four that Socrates will treat in the *Republic*. Here Agathon methodically covers all four in his encomium, assigning them to Love on the basis of a series of palpable confusions: Justice he equates wrongly with nonviolence, courage and moderation with power, wisdom with technical skill.

35. "The laws that are kings of society": a proverbial expression attributed by Aristotle to the fourth-century liberal thinker and rhetorician Alcidamas (*Rhetoric* 1406A17–23).

36. "Moderation": *sophrosunē*. The word can be translated also as "temperance" and, most literally, "sound-mindedness." It is often wrongly translated as "self-control." Plato and Aristotle generally contrast *sophrosunē* as a virtue with self-control: the person with *sophrosunē* is naturally well-tempered in every way and so does not need to control himself, or hold himself back. Here Agathon plays on the idea of self-control, losing the sense in which *sophrosunē* is a real excellence of character. In any event, *sophrosunē* is not the sort of thing that one could have "the biggest share of." The passage is meant in fun.

For moderation, by common agreement, is power over pleasures and passions, and no pleasure is more powerful than Love! But if they are weaker, they are under the power of Love, and *he* has the power; and because he has power over pleasures and passions, Love is exceptionally moderate.

And as for manly bravery, "Not even Ares can stand up to" 196D
Love![37] For Ares has no hold on Love, but Love does on Ares—love of Aphrodite, so runs the tale.[38] But he who has hold is more powerful than he who is held; and so, because Love has power over the bravest of the others, he is bravest of them all.

Now I have spoken about the god's justice, moderation, and bravery; his wisdom remains.[39] I must try not to leave out anything that can be said on this. In the first place—to honor *our* profession as Eryximachus did his[40]—the god is so skilled a poet 196E
that he can make others into poets: once Love touches him, *anyone* becomes a poet,

> *. . . howe'er uncultured he had been before.*[41]

This, we may fittingly observe, testifies that Love is a good poet, good, in sum, at every kind of artistic production. For you can't give to another what you don't have yourself, and you can't teach what you don't know.
197A

And as to the production of animals—who will deny that they are all born and begotten through Love's skill?

And as for artisans and professionals—don't we know that whoever has this god for a teacher ends up in the light of fame,

37. From Sophocles, fragment 235: "Even Ares cannot withstand Necessity." Ares is the god of war. Here Agathon treats Courage (*andreia*) simply as the ability to win a contest.

38. See *Odyssey* viii.266–366. Aphrodite's husband Hephaestus made a snare that caught Ares in bed with Aphrodite.

39. "Wisdom" translates *sophia*, which in Agathon's usage is roughly equivalent to *technē* (professional skill), and refers mainly to the ability to produce things, an ability which should not in itself be counted an excellence of character. We have accordingly used "wisdom" to translate *sophia* in the first instance; afterwards in this passage it is "skill" or "art."

40. See 186B, where Eryximachus gives pride of place to the art of medicine.

41. Euripides, fr 663, *Sthenoboea;* quoted also at *Wasps* 1074.

while a man untouched by Love ends in obscurity? Apollo, for one, invented archery, medicine, and prophecy when desire and
197B love[42] showed the way. Even he, therefore, would be a pupil of Love, and so would the Muses in music, Hephaestus in bronze work, Athena in weaving, and Zeus in "the governance of gods and men."[43]

That too is how the gods' quarrels were settled, once Love came to be among them—love of beauty, obviously, because love is not drawn to ugliness. Before that, as I said in the beginning,[44] and as the poets say, many dreadful things happened among the gods, because Necessity was king. But once this god was born,
197C all goods came to gods and men alike through love of beauty.

This is how I think of Love, Phaedrus: first, he is himself the most beautiful and the best; after that, if anyone else is at all like that, Love is responsible. I am suddenly struck by a need to say something in poetic meter,[45] that it is he who—

42. The desire, evidently, is simply for success in each of these *technai* (see Dover *ad loc.*). "Love" is used as equivalent to desire, to facilitate the slide to "Love is the teacher." By this equivocating line of reasoning, Love would be the teacher of anyone who desired to learn.

Contrast this with Pausanias' speech (where the love that teaches is between a suitable role model and an aspiring youth) and with Socrates' speech (where it is love of absolute Beauty, manifesting itself first in love for a boy).

43. The construction is unusual, and this has suggested to most editors that this is another quotation from poetry, but we can only speculate as to the source.

44. 195C.

45. The lines that follow (197C5–197E5) are Agathon's own composition; they are an extreme parody of the style introduced by the Sophist Gorgias, whose exciting method of speaking had taken Athens by storm about ten years before the dramatic date of this dialogue.

The speech displays a rich variety of lyric meters, and is laced with internal rhymes, balanced phrases, and the other poetic devices Gorgias taught his students to use in formal speaking. It is in fact notably more poetical in its use of meter than the examples we have from Gorgias, as Dover points out. This invites us to think of the passage as a parody not only of Gorgias, but of Agathon's own style as well, in the parts of his tragedies that were in lyric meters. See the similar passage in the encomium by Gorgias on Athenian war heroes (fragment B6), and the parody of Agathon in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai*, 101 ff.

Gives peace to men and stillness to the sea,
Lays winds to rest, and careworn men to sleep. 197D

Love fills us with togetherness and drains all of our divisiveness away. Love calls gatherings like these together. In feasts, in dances, and in ceremonies, he gives the lead. Love moves us to mildness, removes from us wildness. He is giver of kindness, never of meanness. Gracious, kindly[46]—let wise men see and gods admire! Treasure to lovers, envy to others, father of elegance, luxury, delicacy, grace, yearning, desire. Love cares well for good men, cares not for bad ones. In pain, in fear, in desire, or speech, Love is our best guide and guard; he is our comrade 197E
and our savior. Ornament of all gods and men, most beautiful leader and the best! Every man should follow Love, sing beautifully his hymns, and join with him in the song he sings that charms the mind of god or man.

This, Phaedrus, is the speech I have to offer. Let it be dedicated to the god, part of it in fun, part of it moderately serious, as best I could manage. 198A

When Agathon finished, Aristodemus said, everyone there burst into applause, so becoming to himself[47] and to the god did they think the young man's speech.

Then Socrates glanced at Eryximachus and said, "Now do you think I was foolish to feel the fear I felt before?[48] Didn't I speak like a prophet a while ago when I said that Agathon would give an amazing speech and I would be tongue-tied?"

"You were prophetic about one thing, I think," said Eryximachus, "that Agathon would speak well. But you, tongue-tied? No, I don't believe that." 198B

"Bless you," said Socrates. "How am I not going to be tongue-tied, I or anyone else, after a speech delivered with such beauty and variety? The other parts may not have been so wonderful, but that at the end! Who would not be struck dumb on

46. Dover prints Usener's emendation of ἀγανός for ἀγαθός, and we have translated this.

47. "To himself": as the youngest and best-looking man present, he has "appropriately" emphasized youth and good looks.

48. By playing with "fear" in this way, Socrates makes fun of the alliterative style Agathon has been using at the end of his speech.

hearing the beauty of the words and phrases? Anyway, I was worried that I'd not be able to say anything that came close to
198C them in beauty, and so I would almost have run away and escaped, if there had been a place to go. And, you see, the speech reminded me of Gorgias, so that I actually experienced what Homer describes: I was afraid that Agathon would end by sending the Gorgian head,[49] awesome at speaking in a speech, against my speech, and this would turn me to stone by striking me dumb. Then I realized how ridiculous I'd been to agree to
198D join with you in praising Love and to say that I was a master of the art of love, when I knew nothing whatever of this business, of how anything whatever ought to be praised.[50] In my foolishness, I thought you should tell the truth about whatever you praise, that this should be your basis, and that from this a speaker should select the most beautiful truths and arrange them most suitably. I was quite vain, thinking that I would talk well[51] and that I knew the truth about praising anything whatever. But now it appears that this is not what it is to praise
198E anything whatever; rather, it is to apply to the object the grandest and the most beautiful qualities, whether he actually has them or not. And if they are false, that is no objection; for the proposal, apparently, was that everyone here make the rest of us think he is praising Love—and not that he actually praise him. I think that is why you stir up every word and apply it to Love;
199A your description of him and his gifts is designed to make him look better and more beautiful than anything else—to ignorant listeners, plainly, for of course he wouldn't look that way to those who knew. And your praise did seem beautiful and respectful.

49. "Gorgian head" is a pun on "Gorgon's head." Agathon had parodied the style of Gorgias, and this style was considered to be irresistibly powerful. According to mythology, the sight of a Gorgon's head (such as Medusa's) would turn a man to stone. Homer tells of the threat of a Gorgon's head to Odysseus (*Odyssey* xi.633–35).

50. Rhetoric as practiced by Gorgias and his followers was famous for being at the service of any cause, good or bad. Here Socrates gently reminds his audience of this charge and alludes to Agathon's method for praising anyone (195A2).

51. Socrates here uses a pun; the word for "talk" is a homonym for "lover" (*erōn*).

But I didn't even know the method for giving praise; and it was in ignorance that I agreed to take part in this. So "the tongue" promised, and "the mind" did not.[52] Goodbye to that! I'm not giving another eulogy using that method, not at all—I wouldn't be able to do it!—but, if you wish, I'd like to tell the truth my 199B way. I want to avoid any comparison with your speeches, so as not to give you a reason to laugh at me. So look, Phaedrus, would a speech like this satisfy your requirement? You will hear the truth about Love, and the words and phrasing will take care of themselves."

Then Aristodemus said that Phaedrus and the others urged him to speak in the way he thought was required, whatever it was.

"Well then, Phaedrus," said Socrates, "allow me to ask Agathon a few little questions, so that, once I have his agree-
199C ment, I may speak on that basis."

"You have my permission," said Phaedrus. "Ask away."

52. The allusion is to Euripides, *Hippolytus* 612.

SOCRATES[53] QUESTIONS AGATHON

AFTER THAT, said Aristodemus, Socrates began:[54]
"Indeed, Agathon, my friend, I thought you led the way beautifully into your speech when you said that one should first show the qualities of Love himself, and only then those of his deeds. I much admire that beginning. Come, then, since you have beautifully and magnificently expounded
199D his qualities in other ways, tell me this, too, about Love. Is Love such as to be a love of something or of nothing? I'm not asking if he is born *of* some mother or father,[55] (for the question whether Love is love of mother or of father would really be ridiculous), but it's as if I'm asking this about a father—whether a father is the father *of* something or not. You'd tell me, of course, if you

53. It is characteristic of Socrates as Plato represents him that, instead of giving a speech as his own, he first questions the previous speaker and then supplies a speech as coming from someone else. The views presented by Socrates, however, are generally held by scholars to be those of Plato and not those of the historical Socrates (see our Introduction, p. xii). But readers in search of Plato's own views should keep in mind that Plato is the author of all seven speeches.
54. In contrast with Agathon's, Socrates' style in these early questions is deliberately rough; the structure of his sentences is governed by the complex points he is trying to make.
55. Socrates puns here on "of" (expressed in Greek by the genitive case). He is treating love (*erōs*) here as a species of desire, which must be desire *of* something. It will follow that love is not symmetrical: if A loves or desires B, it does not follow that B loves or desires A. See above, p. 11, n. 16 (on Phaedrus' speech), and below, 205D.

wanted to give me a good answer,[56] that it's *of* a son or a daughter that a father is the father. Wouldn't you?"
"Certainly," said Agathon.
"Then does the same go for the mother?"
He agreed to that also. 199E
"Well, then," said Socrates, "answer a little more fully, and you will understand better what I want. If I should ask, 'What about this: a brother, just insofar as he *is* a brother,[57] is he the brother of something or not?'"
He said that he was.
"And he's of a brother or a sister, isn't he?"
He agreed.
"Now try to tell me about love," he said. "Is Love the love of nothing or of something?"
"Of something, surely!" 200A
"Then keep this object of love in mind, and remember what it is. But tell me this much: does Love desire that of which it is the love, or not?"
"Certainly," he said.
"At the time he desires and loves something, does he actually have what he desires and loves at that time, or doesn't he?"
"He doesn't. At least, that wouldn't be likely,"[58] he said.
"Instead of what's *likely*," said Socrates, "ask yourself whether it's *necessary* that this be so: a thing that desires desires something of which it is in need; otherwise, if it were not in 200B need, it would not desire it. I can't tell you, Agathon, how strongly it strikes me that this is necessary. But how about you?"

56. "A good answer": Here and elsewhere in questioning Agathon, Socrates uses forms of *kalos*, which in other contexts means "beautiful." Socrates chooses this term of commendation to suit Agathon's interest in the aesthetic qualities of love.
57. "Just insofar as he *is* a brother": literally, "that which a brother is." Such language usually refers to a Platonic Form. Here Socrates asks after what it is to be a brother; his point is that being a brother involves being the brother *of* another sibling.
58. The standard of what is likely (*to eikos*) was associated with Gorgias and his school of orators. See *Phaedrus* 267A.

"I think so too."

"Good. Now then, would someone who is tall, want to be tall? Or someone who is strong want to be strong?

"Impossible, on the basis of what we've agreed."

"Presumably because no one is in need of those things he already has."

"True."

"But maybe a strong man could want to be strong," said Socrates, "or a fast one fast, or a healthy one healthy: in cases
200C like these, you might think people really do want to be things they already are and do want to have qualities they already have—I bring them up so they won't deceive us. But in these cases, Agathon, if you stop to think about them, you will see that these people are what they are at the present time, whether they want to be or not, by a logical necessity.[59] And who, may I ask, would ever bother to desire what's necessary in any event? But when someone says 'I am healthy, but that's just what I want to be,' or 'I am rich, but that's just what I want to be,' or 'I desire the
200D very things that I have,' let us say to him: 'You already have riches and health and strength in your possession, my man; what you want is to possess these things in time to come, since in the present, whether you want to or not, you have them. Whenever you say, *I desire what I already have,* ask yourself whether you don't mean this: *I want the things I have now to be mine in the future as well.*' Wouldn't he agree?"

According to Aristodemus, Agathon said that he would.

So Socrates said, "Then this is what it is to love something which is not at hand, which the lover does not have: it is to desire the preservation of what he now has in time to come, so
200E that he will have it then."

"Quite so," he said.

"So such a man or anyone else who has a desire desires what

59. It is necessary, as a matter of logic, that a strong man is strong. What is not necessary, as Socrates will point out, is that a strong man *remain* strong.

is not at hand and not present, what he does not have, and what he is not, and that of which he is in need; for such are the objects of desire and love."

"Certainly," he said.

"Come, then," said Socrates. "Let us review the points on which we've agreed. Aren't they, first, that Love is the love of something, and, second, that he loves things of which he has a present need?"[60] 201A

"Yes," he said.

"Now, remember, in addition to these points, what you said in your speech about what it is that Love loves. If you like, I'll remind you. I think you said something like this: that the gods' quarrels were settled by love of beautiful things, for there is no love of ugly ones.[61] Didn't you say something like that?"

"I did," said Agathon.

"And that's a suitable thing to say, my friend," said Socrates. "But if this is so, wouldn't Love have to be a desire for beauty, and never for ugliness?"

He agreed. 201B

"And we also agreed that he loves just what he needs and does not have."

"Yes," he said.

"So Love needs beauty, then, and does not have it."

"Necessarily," he said.

"So! If something needs beauty and has got no beauty at all, would you still say that it is beautiful?"

"Certainly not."

"Then do you still agree that Love is beautiful, if those things are so?"

Then Agathon said, "It turns out, Socrates, I didn't know what I was talking about in that speech." 201C

"It was a beautiful speech, anyway, Agathon," said Socrates. "Now take it a little further. Don't you think that good things are always beautiful as well?"

60. The first point was agreed at 200A1, the second at 200E6.
61. 197B3–5.

"I do."

"Then if Love needs beautiful things, and if all good things are beautiful, he will need good things too."

"As for me, Socrates," he said, "I am unable to challenge you. Let it be as you say."

"Then it's the truth, my beloved Agathon, that you are unable to challenge," he said. "It is not hard at all to challenge Socrates."

DIOTIMA[62] QUESTIONS SOCRATES

NOW I'LL LET YOU GO. I shall try to go through for 201D
you the speech about Love I once heard from a woman of Mantinea, Diotima—a woman who was wise about many things besides this: once she even put off the plague for ten years by telling the Athenians what sacrifices to make. She is the one who taught me the art of love, and I shall go through her speech as best I can on my own, using what Agathon and I have agreed to as a basis.

Following your lead, Agathon, one should first describe who Love is and what he is like, and afterwards describe his works. . . .[63] 201E

I think it will be easiest for me to proceed the way Diotima did and tell you how she questioned me. You see, I had told her almost the same things Agathon told me just now: that Love is a great god and that he belongs to beautiful things.[64] And she used the very same arguments against me that I used against Agathon; she showed how, according to my very own speech, Love is neither beautiful nor good.

So I said, "What do you mean, Diotima? Is Love ugly, then, and bad?"

62. Diotima is apparently a fictional character contrived by Socrates for this occasion. See the introduction and our notes on 202D4 and 205D10.

63. See Agathon's introduction at 195A, and Socrates' ironical allusion to the method at 199A–B.

64. "That he belongs to beautiful things": The Greek is ambiguous between "Love loves beautiful things" (objective genitive) and "Love is one of the beautiful things" (partitive genitive). Agathon had asserted the former (197B5, 201A5), and this will be a premise in Diotima's argument, but he asserted the latter as well (195A7), and this is what Diotima proceeds to refute.

way that Beauty can be seen—only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he's in touch with no images), but to true virtue (because he is in touch with the true Beauty). The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any
212B human being could become immortal, it would be he."

This, Phaedrus and the rest of you, was what Diotima told me. I was persuaded. And once persuaded, I try to persuade others too that human nature can find no better workmate for acquiring this than Love. That's why I say that every man must honor Love, why I honor the rites of Love myself and practice them with special diligence, and why I commend them to others. Now and always I praise the power and courage of Love so far as
212C I am able. Consider this speech, then, Phaedrus, if you wish, a speech in praise of Love. Or if not, call it whatever and however you please to call it.

ALCIBIADES' ENTRANCE

SOCRATES' SPEECH finished to loud applause. Meanwhile, Aristophanes was trying to make himself heard over their cheers in order to make a response to something Socrates had said about his own speech.[95] Then, all of a sudden, there was even more noise. A large drunken party had arrived at the courtyard door and they were rattling it loudly, accompanied by the shrieks of some flute-girl they had brought along. Agathon at that point called to his slaves:

"Go see who it is. If it's people we know, invite them in. If not, tell them the party's over, and we're about to turn in." *212*

A moment later they heard Alcibiades shouting in the courtyard, very drunk and very loud. He wanted to know where Agathon was, he demanded to see Agathon at once. Actually, he was half-carried into the house by the flute-girl and by some other companions of his, but, at the door, he managed to stand *212* by himself, crowned with a beautiful wreath of violets and ivy and ribbons in his hair.

"Good evening, gentlemen. I'm plastered," he announced. "May I join your party? Or should I crown Agathon with this wreath—which is all I came to do, anyway—and make myself scarce? I really couldn't make it yesterday," he continued, "but nothing could stop me tonight! See, I'm wearing the garland myself. I want this crown to come directly from my head to the head that belongs, I don't mind saying, to the cleverest and best looking man in town. Ah, you laugh; you think I'm drunk! Fine, *213* go ahead—I know I'm right anyway. Well, what do you say? May I join you on these terms? Will you have a drink with me or not?"

Naturally they all made a big fuss. They implored him to join

95. Cf. 204D–E.

them, they begged him to take a seat, and Agathon called him to his side. So Alcibiades, again with the help of his friends, approached Agathon. At the same time, he kept trying to take his ribbons off so that he could crown Agathon with them, but all he succeeded in doing was to push them further down his head until they finally slipped over his eyes. What with the ivy and all, he didn't see Socrates, who had made room for him on the couch as soon as he saw him. So Alcibiades sat down between
213B Socrates and Agathon and, as soon as he did so, he put his arms around Agathon, kissed him, and placed the ribbons on his head.

Agathon asked his slaves to take Alcibiades' sandals off. "We can all three fit on my couch," he said.

"What a good idea!" Alcibiades replied. "But wait a moment! Who's the third?"

As he said this, he turned around, and it was only then that he saw Socrates. No sooner had he seen him than he leaped up and cried:

213C "Good lord, what's going on here? It's Socrates! You've trapped me again! You always do this to me—all of a sudden you'll turn up out of nowhere where I least expect you! Well, what do you want now? Why did you choose this particular couch? Why aren't you with Aristophanes or anyone else we could tease you about?[96] But no, you figured out a way to find a place next to the most handsome man in the room!"

213D "I beg you, Agathon," Socrates said, "protect me from this man! You can't imagine what it's like to be in love with him: from the very first moment he realized how I felt about him, he hasn't allowed me to say two words to anybody else—what am I saying, I can't so much as look at an attractive man but he flies into a fit of jealous rage. He yells; he threatens; he can hardly keep from slapping me around! Please, try to keep him under control. Could you perhaps make him forgive me? And if you can't, if he gets violent, will you defend me? The fierceness of his passion terrifies me!"

96. "Anyone else we could tease you about": literally, "anyone else who is willingly an object of fun."

"I shall never forgive you!" Alcibiades cried. "I promise you, you'll pay for this! But for the moment," he said, turning to Agathon, "give me some of these ribbons. I'd better make a wreath for him as well—look at that magnificent head! Otherwise, I know, he'll make a scene. He'll be grumbling that, though I crowned you for your first victory, I didn't honor him even though he has never lost an argument in his life."

So Alcibiades took the ribbons, arranged them on Socrates' head, and lay back on the couch. Immediately, however, he started up again:

"Friends, you look sober to me; we can't have that! Let's have a drink! Remember our agreement? We need a master of ceremonies; who should it be? . . . Well, at least till you are all too drunk to care, I elect . . . myself! Who else? Agathon, I want the largest cup around . . . No! Wait! You! Bring me that cooling jar over there!"

He'd seen the cooling jar, and he realized it could hold more than two quarts of wine. He had the slaves fill it to the brim, drained it, and ordered them to fill it up again for Socrates.

"Not that the trick will have any effect on *him*," he told the group. "Socrates will drink whatever you put in front of him, but no one yet has seen him drunk."

The slave filled the jar and, while Socrates was drinking, Eryximachus said to Alcibiades:

"This is certainly most improper. We cannot simply pour the wine down our throats in silence: we must have some conversation, or at least a song. What we are doing now is hardly civilized."

What Alcibiades said to him was this:

"O Eryximachus, best possible son to the best possible, the most temperate father: Hi!"

"Greetings to you, too," Eryximachus replied. "Now what do you suggest we do?"

"Whatever you say. Ours to obey you, 'For a medical mind is worth a million others.'[97] Please prescribe what you think fit."

"Listen to me," Eryximachus said. "Earlier this evening we decided to use this occasion to offer a series of encomia of Love.

97. *Iliad* xi.514.

We all took our turn—in good order, from left to right—and gave our speeches, each according to his ability. You are the only one not to have spoken yet, though, if I may say so, you have certainly drunk your share. It's only proper, therefore, that you take your turn now. After you have spoken, you can decide on a topic for Socrates on your right; he can then do the same for the man to his right, and we can go around the table once again."

"Well said, O Eryximachus," Alcibiades replied. "But do you really think it's fair to put my drunken ramblings next to your sober orations? And anyway, my dear fellow, I hope you didn't
214D believe a single word Socrates said: the truth is just the opposite! He's the one who will most surely beat me up if I dare praise anyone else in his presence—even a god!"

"Hold your tongue!" Socrates said.[98]

"By god, don't you dare deny it!" Alcibiades shouted. "I would never—*never*—praise anyone else with you around."

"Well, why not just do that, if you want?" Eryximachus sug-
214E gested. "Why don't you offer an encomium to Socrates?"

"What do you mean?" asked Alcibiades. "Do you really think so, Eryximachus? Should I unleash myself upon him? Should I give him his punishment in front of all of you?"

"Now, wait a minute," Socrates said. "What do you have in mind? Are you going to praise me only in order to mock me? Is that it?"

"I'll only tell the truth—please, let me!"

"I would certainly like to hear the truth from you. By all means, go ahead," Socrates replied.

"Nothing can stop me now," said Alcibiades. "But here's what you can do: if I say anything that's not true, you can just interrupt, if you want, and correct me; at worst, there'll be mistakes in
215A my speech, not lies. But you can't hold it against me if I don't get everything in the right order—I'll say things as they come to mind. And even a sober and unclouded mind would find it hard to come to terms with your bizarreness!"

98. If Socrates truly put himself above the gods in this way he would be guilty of the grossest impiety; it is this suggestion that Socrates here tries to silence.

THE SPEECH OF ALCIBIADES[99]

I'LL TRY TO PRAISE SOCRATES, my friends, but I'll have to use an image. And though he may think I'm trying to make fun of him, I assure you my image is no joke: it aims at the truth. Look at him! Isn't he just like a statue of Silenus? You 215
know the kind of statue I mean; you'll find them in any shop in town. It's a Silenus sitting, his flute[100] or his pipes in his hands, and it's hollow. It's split right down the middle, and inside it's full of tiny statues of the gods. Now look at him again! Isn't he also just like the satyr Marsyas?[101]

99. Alcibiades (c 450–404 B.C.) was a wealthy aristocrat of Athens, famous for his good looks. Orphaned at an early age, he was brought up as a ward of Pericles. He was the most celebrated of the young men who studied with Socrates and one whose subsequent career seemed to support the charge that Socrates had corrupted the youth (so Xenophon in the *Memorabilia* I.ii.12–16; see *Apology* 33AB and *Republic* VI 494B ff). The attachment of Socrates and Alcibiades was well known and is played upon at the opening of the *Protagoras*, 309A. Alcibiades had a meteoric career in politics. A brilliant politician and general, he led the Athenians into the Sicilian expedition of 415 B.C. but was barred from taking part in it owing to the charge that he had mutilated religious statues. Afterwards he aided the Spartans in their war against Athens. On his career, see especially Thucydides, V–VIII.

100. Flute: *aulos*. This is the conventional translation of the word, but the *aulos* was in fact a reed instrument and not a flute. It was held by the ancients to be the instrument that most strongly arouses the emotions.

101. Satyrs had the sexual appetites and manners of wild beasts and were usually portrayed with large erections. Sometimes they had horses' tails or ears, sometimes the traits of goats. Classical tradition did not clearly distinguish between a satyr and a silenus. Marsyas, in myth, was a satyr who dared compete in music with Apollo and was skinned alive for his impudence. For Socrates' resemblance to a satyr, see Xenophon, *Symposium* iv.19.

Nobody, not even you, Socrates, can deny that you *look* like them. But the resemblance goes beyond appearance, as you're about to hear.

You are impudent, contemptuous, and vile![102] No? If you won't admit it, I'll bring witnesses. And you're quite a flute-player, aren't you? In fact, you're much more marvelous than
215C Marsyas, who needed instruments to cast his spells on people. And so does anyone who plays his tunes today—for even the tunes Olympos[103] played are Marsyas' work, since Olympos learned everything from him. Whether they are played by the greatest flautist or the meanest flute-girl, his melodies have in themselves the power to possess and so reveal those people who are ready for the god and his mysteries.[104] That's because his melodies are themselves divine. The only difference between you and Marsyas is that you need no instruments; you do exactly
215D what he does, but with words alone. You know, people hardly ever take a speaker seriously, even if he's the greatest orator; but let anyone—man, woman, or child—listen to you or even to a poor account of what you say—and we are all transported, completely possessed.

If I were to describe for you what an extraordinary effect his words have always had on me (I can feel it this moment even as
215E I'm speaking), you might actually suspect that I'm drunk! Still, I swear to you, the moment he starts to speak, I am beside myself: my heart starts leaping in my chest, the tears come streaming

102. "Vile": *hubristēs*. In sexual contexts the word would normally be used of one who sexually abuses another, but Alcibiades here accuses Socrates of a different sort of abuse, as at 222A, where the point is that Socrates has mocked at Alcibiades' beauty. Agathon used the same word in calling attention to the mockery implied by Socrates' outrageously inflated praise at 175E7: in our translation, "now you've gone too far."

103. Olympos was a legendary musician who was said to be loved by Marsyas (*Minos* 318B5) and to have made music that moved its listeners out of their senses and so brought about a *katharsis* (*Ion* 533B, *Laws* 677D, and Aristotle's *Politics* 1340A8–12.)

104. This passage has been imitated at *Minos* 318B.

down my face, even the frenzied Corybantes[105] *seem sane compared to me*—and, let me tell you, I am not alone. I have heard Pericles and many other great orators, and I have admired their speeches. But nothing like this ever happened to me: they never upset me so deeply that my very own soul started protesting that my life—*my* life!—was no better than the most miserable slave's. And yet that is exactly how this Marsyas here at my side makes me feel all the time: he makes it seem that my life isn't worth 216
living! You can't say that isn't true, Socrates. I know very well that you could make me feel that way this very moment if I gave you half a chance. He always traps me, you see, and he makes me admit that my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I most neglect: my personal shortcomings, which cry out for the closest attention. So I refuse to listen to him; I stop my ears and tear myself away from him, for, like the Sirens, he could make me stay by his side till I die. 216

Socrates is the only man in the world who has made me feel shame—ah, you didn't think I had it in me, did you? Yes, he makes me feel ashamed: I know perfectly well that I can't prove he's wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet, the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave in to my desire to please the crowd. My whole life has become one constant effort to escape from him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I'm doing nothing about my way of life, though I have already agreed with him that I should. Some- 216
times, believe me, I think I would be happier if he were dead. And yet I know that if he dies I'll be even more miserable. I can't live with him, and I can't live without him! What *can* I do about him?

That's the effect of this satyr's music—on me and many others. But that's the least of it. He's like these creatures in all sorts of other ways; his powers are really extraordinary. Let me tell you about them, because, you can be sure of it, none of you really understands him. But, now I've started, I'm going to show 216
you what he really is.

105. Corybantes: legendary worshippers of Cybele, who brought about their own derangement through music and dance. See Plato's *Ion* 553E and *Laws* 790E.

⌜To begin with, he's crazy about beautiful boys; he constantly follows them around in a perpetual daze. Also, he likes to say he's ignorant and knows nothing. Isn't this just like Silenus? Of course it is! And all this is just on the surface, like the outsides of those statues of Silenus. I wonder, my fellow drinkers, if you have any idea what a sober and temperate man he proves to be once you have looked inside. Believe me, it couldn't matter less to him whether a boy is beautiful. You can't imagine how little he
216E cares whether a person is beautiful, or rich, or famous in any other way that most people admire. He considers all these possessions beneath contempt, and that's exactly how he considers all of us as well.[106] In public, I tell you, his whole life is one big game—a game of irony. I don't know if any of you have seen him when he's really serious. But I once caught him when he was open like Silenus' statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he
217A keeps hidden within: they were so godlike—so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing—that I no longer had a choice—I just had to do whatever he told me.⌟

What I thought at the time was that what he really wanted was *me*, and that seemed to me the luckiest coincidence: all I had to do was to let him have his way with me, and he would teach me everything he knew—believe me, I had a lot of confidence in my looks. Naturally, up to that time we'd never been alone together; one of my attendants had always been present. But with
217B this in mind, I sent the attendant away, and met Socrates alone. (You see, in this company I must tell the whole truth: so pay attention. And, Socrates, if I say anything untrue, I want you to correct me.)

So there I was, my friends, alone with him at last. My idea, naturally, was that he'd take advantage of the opportunity to tell me whatever it is that lovers say when they find themselves alone; I relished the moment. But no such luck! Nothing of the sort occurred. Socrates had his usual sort of conversation with
217C me, and at the end of the day he went off.

My next idea was to invite him to the gymnasium with me. We took exercise together, and I was sure that this would lead to

106. Probably Alcibiades intends his audience to understand "us beautiful boys" here.

something. He took exercise and wrestled with me many times when no one else was present. What can I tell you? I got nowhere. When I realized that my ploy had failed, I decided on a frontal attack. I refused to retreat from a battle I myself had begun, and I needed to know just where matters stood. So what I did was to invite him to dinner, as if *I* were his lover and he my young prey! To tell the truth, it took him quite a while to accept my invitation, but one day he finally arrived. That first time he 2
left right after dinner: I was too shy to try to stop him. But on my next attempt, I started some discussion just as we were finishing our meal and kept him talking late into the night. When he said he should be going, I used the lateness of the hour as an excuse and managed to persuade him to spend the night at my house. He had had his meal on the couch next to mine, so he just made himself comfortable and lay down on it. No one else was there. 2

Now you must admit that my story so far has been perfectly decent; I could have told it in any company. But you'd never have heard me tell the rest of it, as you're about to do, if it weren't that, as the saying goes, 'there's truth in wine when the slaves have left'—and when they're present, too.[107] Also, would it be fair to Socrates for me to praise him and yet to fail to reveal one of his proudest accomplishments? And, furthermore, you know what people say about snakebite—that you'll only talk about it with your fellow victims: only they will understand the pain and for- 21
give you for all the things it made you do. Well, something much more painful than a snake has bitten me in my most sensitive part—I mean my heart, or my soul, or whatever you want to call it, which has been struck and bitten by philosophy, whose grip on young and eager souls is much more vicious than a viper's and makes them do the most amazing things. Now, all you people here, Phaedrus, Agathon, Eryximachus, Pausanias, Aristode- 21
mus, Aristophanes—I need not mention Socrates himself—and

107. The Greek word for children, *paides*, also means slaves. The original proverb ran, "There's truth in wine and children"; Alcibiades plays on an apparently well-known pun on the proverb: "There's truth in wine without slaves" (that is, drinkers speak freely when slaves are absent). He then adds that, to a man in his drunken condition, the presence of slaves makes no difference. Slaves *are* present as he speaks (218B5). See Dover's note on the passage.

all the rest, have all shared in the madness, the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy. And that's why you will hear the rest of my story; you will understand and forgive both what I did then and what I say now. As for the house slaves and for anyone else who is not an initiate, my story's not for you: block your ears!

218C To get back to the story. The lights were out; the slaves had left; the time was right, I thought, to come to the point and tell him freely what I had in mind. So I shook him and whispered:

"Socrates, are you asleep?"

"No, no, not at all," he replied.

"You know what I've been thinking?"

"Well, no, not really."

"I think," I said, "you're the only worthy lover I have ever had—and yet, look how shy you are with me! Well, here's how I look at it. It would be really stupid not to give you anything you
218D want: you can have me, my belongings, anything my friends might have.[108] Nothing is more important to me than becoming the best man I can be, and no one can help me more than you to reach that aim. With a man like you, in fact, I'd be much more ashamed of what wise people would say if I did *not* take you as my lover, than I would of what all the others, in their foolishness, would say if I did."

He heard me out, and then he said in that absolutely inimitable ironic manner of his:

"Dear Alcibiades, if you are right in what you say about me,
218E you are already more accomplished than you think. If I really have in me the power to make you a better man, then you can see in me a beauty that is really beyond description and makes your own remarkable good looks pale in comparison. But, then, is this a fair exchange that you propose? You seem to me to want more than your proper share: you offer me the merest appearance of beauty, and in return you want the thing itself, 'gold
219A in exchange for bronze.'[109]

108. For a sense of how much it was appropriate for a lover to give up for his love, see 183A4–B2. For a description of a young man's eagerness to acquire wisdom from a Sophist, see *Protagoras* 310C ff.

109. *Iliad* vi.232–36 tells the famous story of the exchange by Glaucus of golden armor for bronze. Socrates is saying that he will not be so easily fooled as to trade real moral beauty for the illusory physical beauty of Alcibiades.

"Still, my dear boy, you should think twice, because you could be wrong, and I may be of no use to you. The mind's sight becomes sharp only when the body's eyes go past their prime—and you are still a good long time away from that."

When I heard this I replied:

"I really have nothing more to say. I've told you exactly what I think. Now it's your turn to consider what you think best for you and me."

"You're right about that," he answered. "In the future, let's consider things together. We'll always do what seems the best to the two of us."

His words made me think that my own had finally hit their mark, that he was smitten by my arrows. I didn't give him a chance to say another word. I stood up immediately and placed my mantle over the light cloak which, though it was the middle of winter, was his only clothing. I slipped underneath the cloak and put my arms around this man—this utterly unnatural, this truly extraordinary man—and spent the whole night next to him. Socrates, you can't deny a word of it. But in spite of all my efforts, this hopelessly arrogant, this unbelievably insolent man—he turned me down! He spurned my beauty, of which I was so proud, members of the jury—for this is really what you are: you're here to sit in judgment of Socrates' amazing arrogance and pride. Be sure of it, I swear to you by all the gods and goddesses together, my night with Socrates went no further than if I had spent it with my own father or older brother!

How do you think I felt after that? Of course, I was deeply humiliated, but also I couldn't help admiring his natural character, his moderation, his fortitude—here was a man whose strength and wisdom went beyond my wildest dreams! How could I bring myself to hate him? I couldn't bear to lose his friendship. But how could I possibly win him over? I knew very well that money meant much less to him than enemy weapons ever meant to Ajax,[110] and the only trap by means of which I had thought I might capture him had already proved a dismal failure. I had no idea what to do, no purpose in life; ah, no one else has ever known the real meaning of slavery!

110. Ajax, a hero of the Greek army at Troy, carried an enormous shield and so was virtually invulnerable to enemy weapons.

All this had already occurred when Athens invaded Potidaea,[111] where we served together and shared the same mess. Now, first, he took the hardships of the campaign much better than I ever did—much better, in fact, than anyone in the whole army. When we were cut off from our supplies, as often happens
220A in the field, no one else stood up to hunger as well as he did. And yet he was the one man who could really enjoy a feast; and though he didn't much want to drink, when he had to, he could drink the best of us under the table. Still, and most amazingly, no one ever saw him drunk (as we'll straightaway put to the test).

⌜Add to this his amazing resistance to the cold—and, let me
220B tell you, the winter there is something awful. Once, I remember, it was frightfully cold; no one so much as stuck his nose outside. If we absolutely had to leave our tent, we wrapped ourselves in anything we could lay our hands on and tied extra pieces of felt or sheepskin over our boots. Well, Socrates went out in that weather wearing nothing but this same old light cloak, and even in bare feet he made better progress on the ice than the other soldiers did in their boots. You should have seen the looks they
220C gave him; they thought he was only doing it to spite them!⌟

So much for that! But you should hear what else he did during that same campaign,

The exploit our strong-hearted hero dared to do.[112]

⌜One day, at dawn, he started thinking about some problem or other; he just stood outside, trying to figure it out. He couldn't resolve it, but he wouldn't give up. He simply stood there, glued to the same spot. By midday, many soldiers had seen him, and, quite mystified, they told everyone that Socrates had been standing there all day, thinking about something. He was still there when evening came, and after dinner some Ionians moved their
220D bedding outside, where it was cooler and more comfortable (all

111. Potidaea, a city in Thrace allied to Athens, was induced by Corinth to revolt in 432 B.C. The city was besieged by the Athenians and eventually defeated in a bloody local war, 432–430 B.C.

112. Homer, *Odyssey* iv.242, 271.

this took place in the summer), but mainly in order to watch if Socrates was going to stay out there all night. And so he did; he stood on the very same spot until dawn! He only left next morning, when the sun came out, and he made his prayers to the new day.⌟

And if you would like to know what he was like in battle—this is a tribute he really deserves. You know that I was decorated for bravery during that campaign: well, during that very battle, Socrates single-handedly saved my life! He absolutely did! 22
He just refused to leave me behind when I was wounded, and he rescued not only me but my armor as well. For my part, Socrates, I told them right then that the decoration really belonged to you, and you can blame me neither for doing so then nor for saying so now. But the generals, who seemed much more concerned with my social position, insisted on giving the decoration to me, and, I must say, you were more eager than the generals themselves for me to have it.

You should also have seen him at our horrible retreat from Delium.[113] I was there with the cavalry, while Socrates was a foot 22
soldier. The army had already dispersed in all directions, and Socrates was retreating together with Laches. I happened to see them just by chance, and the moment I did I started shouting encouragements to them, telling them I was never going to leave their side, and so on. That day I had a better opportunity to watch Socrates than I ever had at Potidaea, for, being on horseback, I wasn't in very great danger. Well, it was easy to see that 2
he was remarkably more collected than Laches. But when I looked again I couldn't get your words, Aristophanes, out of my mind: in the midst of battle he was making his way exactly as he does around town,

. . . with swagg'ring gait and roving eye.[114]

113. At Delium, a town on the Boeotian coastline just north of Attica, a major Athenian expeditionary force was routed by a Boeotian army in 424 B.C. For another description of Socrates' action during the retreat, see *Laches* 181B.

114. Cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 362, where the chorus of clouds hails Socrates in similar terms. (. . . σοὶ δὲ / ὅτι βρενθύει τ'ἐν ταῖσιν ὁδοῖς καὶ τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ παραβάλλεις).

He was observing everything quite calmly, looking out for friendly troops and keeping an eye on the enemy. Even from a great distance it was obvious that this was a very brave man, who would put up a terrific fight if anyone approached him. This is what saved both of them. For, as a rule, you try to put as much distance as you can between yourself and such men in
221C battle; you go after the others, those who run away helter-skelter.

⌜You could say many other marvelous things in praise of Socrates. Perhaps he shares some of his specific accomplishments with others. But, as a whole, he is unique; he is like no one else in the past and no one in the present—this is by far the most amazing thing about him. For we might be able to form an idea of what Achilles was like by comparing him to Brasidas or some other great warrior, or we might compare Pericles with Nestor or
221D Antenor or one of the other great orators.[115] There is a parallel for everyone—everyone else, that is. But this man here is so bizarre, his ways and his ideas are so unusual, that, search as you might, you'll never find anyone else, alive or dead, who's even remotely like him. The best you can do is not to compare him to anything human, but to liken him, as I do, to Silenus and the satyrs, and the same goes for his ideas and arguments.⌟

⌜Come to think of it, I should have mentioned this much earlier: even his ideas and arguments are just like those hollow
221E statues of Silenus. If you were to listen to his arguments, at first they'd strike you as totally ridiculous; they're clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs. He's always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners; he's always making the same tired old points in the same tired old words. If you are foolish, or simply unfamiliar with
222A him, you'd find it impossible not to laugh at his arguments. But if

115. Brasidas, among the most effective Spartan generals during the Peloponnesian War, was mortally wounded while defeating the Athenians at Amphipolis in 422 B.C. (Thucydides IV.102–16). Antenor (for the Trojans) and Nestor (for the Greeks) were the legendary wise men of the Trojan War. Pericles was greater than either of these, as he was both a wise man and an effective leader of the Athenians at the height of their power. See above, 215E4, for a tribute to the power of his speech, and see Thucydides II.65 for a tribute to his leadership of Athens.

you see them when they open up like the statues, if you go behind their surface, you'll realize that no other arguments make any sense. They're truly worthy of a god, bursting with figures of virtue inside. They're of great—no, of the greatest—importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man.⌟

Well, this is my praise of Socrates, though I haven't spared him my reproach, either; I told you how horribly he treated 222
me—and not only me but also Charmides, Euthydemus, and many others. He has deceived us all: he presents himself as your lover, and, before you know it, you're in love with him yourself! I warn you, Agathon, don't let him fool you! Remember our torments; be on your guard: don't wait, like the fool in the proverb, to learn your lesson from your own misfortune.[116] 222

116. *Iliad* xvii.32.

FINAL DIALOGUE

ALCIBIADES' FRANKNESS provoked a lot of laughter, especially since it was obvious that he was still in love with Socrates, who immediately said to him:

"You're perfectly sober after all, Alcibiades. Otherwise you could never have concealed your motive so gracefully: how casually you let it drop, almost like an afterthought, at the very end of your speech! As if the real point of all this has not been simply to
222D make trouble between Agathon and me! You think that I should be in love with you and no one else, while you, and no one else, should be in love with Agathon—well, we were *not* deceived; we've seen through your little satyr play. Agathon, my friend, don't let him get away with it: let no one come between us!"

Agathon said to Socrates:

222E "I'm beginning to think you're right; isn't it proof of that that he literally came between us here on the couch? Why would he do this if he weren't set on separating us? But he won't get away with it; I'm coming right over to lie down next to you."

"Wonderful," Socrates said. "Come here, on my other side."

"My god!" cried Alcibiades. "How I suffer in his hands! He kicks me when I'm down; he never lets me go. Come, don't be selfish, Socrates; at least, let's compromise: let Agathon lie down between us."

"Why, that's impossible," Socrates said. "You have already delivered your praise of me, and now it's my turn to praise whoever's on my right. But if Agathon were next to you, he'd have to praise me all over again instead of having me speak in
223A his honor, as I very much want to do in any case. Don't be jealous; let me praise the boy."

"Oh, marvelous," Agathon cried. "Alcibiades, nothing can make me stay next to you now. I'm moving no matter what. I simply *must* hear what Socrates has to say about me."

"There we go again," said Alcibiades. "It's the same old story:

when Socrates is around, nobody else can even get close to a good-looking man. Look how smoothly and plausibly he found a reason for Agathon to lie down next to him!" 223

And then, all of a sudden, while Agathon was changing places, a large drunken group, finding the gates open because someone was just leaving, walked into the room and joined the party. There was noise everywhere, and everyone was made to start drinking again in no particular order.

At that point, Aristodemus said, Eryximachus, Phaedrus, and some others among the original guests made their excuses and left. He himself fell asleep and slept for a long time (it was 223
winter, and the nights were quite long). He woke up just as dawn was about to break; the roosters were crowing already. He saw that the others had either left or were asleep on their couches and that only Agathon, Aristophanes, and Socrates were still awake, drinking out of a large cup which they were passing around from left to right. Socrates was talking to them. 223
Aristodemus couldn't remember exactly what they were saying—he'd missed the first part of their discussion, and he was half-asleep anyway—but the main point was that Socrates was trying to prove to them that authors should be able to write both comedy and tragedy: the skillful tragic dramatist should also be a comic poet. He was about to clinch his argument, though, to tell the truth, sleepy as they were, they were hardly able to follow his reasoning. In fact, Aristophanes fell asleep in the middle of the discussion, and very soon thereafter, as day was breaking, Agathon also drifted off.

But after getting them off to sleep, Socrates got up and left, and Aristodemus followed him, as always. He said that Socrates went directly to the Lyceum, washed up, spent the rest of the day just as he always did, and only then, as evening was falling, went home to rest.

PLATO

SYMPOSIUM

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