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# THE SEDUCTIVE VOICE OF THE *AULOS* IN PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM*: FROM THE DISMISSAL OF THE *AULETRIS* TO ALCIBIADES' PRAISE OF SOCRATES-*AULETES*

**Abstract**. In the *Symposium,* Plato presents his readers with many different characterisations of the *aulos* and the performers of this instrument. At the very beginning of the drinking-party (*Symp.* 176e7) the *aulos*-girl is sent away: given that this instrument played a very significant role in the sympotic practices of Classical Athens, this exceptional choice calls for an explanation. In the light of the following developments of the dialogue, the dismissal of the αὐλητρίς becomes even more significant. In fact, on the one hand, this character reappears at a key moment of the dialogue, as Alcibiades' dramatic appearance on scene is announced and accompanied precisely by the sound of her "voice" (αὐλητρίδος φωνὴν ἀκούειν, 212c8; cf. 212d6). On the other hand, in his following discourse of praise, Alcibiades characterises Socrates as 'the most wonderful αὐλητής' and claims that this image not only epitomises the effect of Socrates' words on the souls of his listeners (cf. 215b-216d) but reveals no less than "the truth" about Socrates (τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἕνεκα, 215a9). But what do Socrates' words have in common with the seductive voice of the *aulos*? In this paper, I will show how these apparently conflicting images can help us understand Plato's complex and nuanced attitude towards the alluring voice of the *aulos* and its psychological effects. More specifically, I will contend that Alcibiades' characterisation of Socrates as the 'most wonderful aulete' reveals how the power of Socrates' seductive words can be truly likened to a 'good use' of auletic music. Just as Marsyas' and Olympus' divine music is capable of revealing who needs to participate in mystic rites, so also Socrates' *aulemata* are capable of achieving an effect that goes much deeper than mere rational persuasion and exposes the true ethical needs of his interlocutors. Differently from what is often maintained, then, I will argue that Plato is not at all concerned with the capacity of the *aulos* to provoke deep and powerful emotions; on the contrary, far from rejecting entirely the intense and even ecstatic effects of music, Plato's aim is to highlight the importance of using these powerful forces correctly. If oriented correctly, both musical and rhetorical *aulemata* become crucial educational "tools" to give shape to the soul and its inner hierarchy of desires. If oriented in the wrong ethical direction, both the power of persuasive speech and that of music lead to the exact opposite result: psychological (and therefore political) strife.

As attested by rich iconographic and textual evidence, the *aulos* played a central role in Athenian symposia.[1] Acoustically marking the entrance to a cultural space devoted to the shared enjoyment of many kinds of pleasures,[2] the seductive notes of this instrument, together with the inebriating effects of wine and perfumes, fostered emotional and physical intimacy between the guests, reinforcing individual affective bonds as well as the collective identity of the group.[3] This ideal vision of a symposium, however, must not be mistaken for a comprehensive or historically accurate depiction of this cultural institution: it seems more like "a dream, even hallucination of perfection".[4] In actual fact, much more disquieting and conflictual elements lurked behind this inebriating atmosphere of intimacy: as Theognis' penetrating observations reveal, symposia offered unique opportunities to secretly uncover the ethical "fibre" of the other guests,[5] observing their response to physical and intellectual pleasures in an ostensibly open and relaxed context. This aspect of the psychology of sympotic gatherings is highlighted by Plato himself at the end of Book 1 of the *Laws*, where we are told that the apparently playful "test of

1 See Peter Wilson, *The aulos in Athens*, in Simon Goldhill, and Robin Osborne, eds, *Performance culture and Athenian democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ewen L. Bowie, "Early Greek elegy, symposium and public festival", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106 (1986), 13–35, esp. p. 27 and 35; Ezio Pellizer, "Outlines of a morphology of sympotic entertainment", in *Sympotica – A symposium on the symposion*, ed. by Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 177–184.

2 *Aulos* music accompanied Classical symposia from start to finish. A special type of aulos music, the so-called "Libations" (*spondeia*), marked the transition from the meal that took place in the first part of the evening to the *symposion* proper: see Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 712f–713a. In addition, the *aulos* accompanied many of the musical performances that took place in the course of the evening: see e.g. Theogn. 531–534, 791 and 943–944 in Martin L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati*, vols. 1–2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) (hereafter *IEG*). Classical sources often comment explicitly on the ethical importance of this institution; see for instance Xenophanes 1.19–20 *IEG*: "praising the man who presents noble ideas while drinking, so that there may be recollection and striving after excellence".

3 On the relationship between song, *aulos* music and self-representation in Classical symposia, see e.g. Theogn. 237–525 *IEG*.

4 Stephen Halliwell, *Greek laughter – A study of cultural psychology from Homer to early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 117, with the illuminating discussion at pages 109–127.

5 Theogn. 309–312 *IEG*, where the poet exhorts a young man (probably Cyrnus) not to reveal his real thoughts while attending a symposium; he should rather take advantage of this occasion to observe the nature of his companions, acquiring knowledge that could become useful in everyday life. See also Theogn. 477–496 *IEG*, a wonderfully effective, if idealised, depiction of this tension between the enjoyment of pleasure and self-control. For a stimulating discussion of sympotic ideology, see Fiona Hobden, *The symposium in ancient Greek society and thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. 22–65.

wine" (ἡ ἐν οἴνῳ βάσανος) may turn into a very useful "tool" in the hands of an experienced and careful symposiarch: according to the main character of the dialogue, this harmless test allows one to observe directly nothing less that "the character of the soul" of the guests (ἦθος ψυχῆς θεάσασθαι).[6]
The interplay of these sharply different points of view presents us with a complex image of the symposium as a space of conflict between different psychological needs: on the one hand, the determination to perform well in the lighthearted – but nonetheless partly serious – contests held between the fellow drinkers, on the other the desire to lose control and indulge in the pleasures of music, wine and love.[7] This tension, together with many other aspects of the multifaceted tradition we have glimpsed at, is embodied in the sophisticated literary representation of a drinking party offered in Plato's *Symposium*, which reframes and reinterprets the features of this fundamental cultural institution within the framework of his own agenda for the dialogue: celebrating the vital, but not unambiguous role of Eros in human life.

## THE EXPULSION OF THE *AULOS*-GIRL AND ITS CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

So what part does the *aulos* play in Plato's complex literary and philosophical programme? Not a very relevant one, it would seem at first sight, given that the *aulos*-girl is swiftly dismissed at the very beginning of the party.
Nevertheless, this revealing detail foreshadows some important features of the atmosphere that will characterise the first part of this work, especially if we keep in mind the central role that not only the *aulos* itself but also this specific kind of performer played in Classical Greek symposia. In fact, as Eleonora Rocconi has pointed out from the mid-sixth century BC iconographical evidence shows that a very important part of sympotic entertainments was provided by *aulos*-girls (*auletrides*), female harpers (*psaltriai*) and dancers (*orchestrides*), women of humble origins who were hired not only for their musical performances but also for their erotic skills.[8] This picture is

6 Plato, *Leg.* 1.649e–650a, with Lucia Prauscello, *Performing citizenship in Plato's Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. 109–118. The idea of needing a "test" to verify the true character of a person, going beyond superficial appearances, occurs in many other Platonic passages: see e.g. *Resp.* 3.413c–d and 3.414a–b, where Socrates argues that the future Guardians of the ideal city will have to be exposed to fears and pleasures, in order to show whether they are able to keep their ethical dispositions and beliefs unaltered in the face of intense emotional experiences.

7 For a poetic depiction of this tension, see *Adesp. El.* 27 *IEG*.

8 Eleonora Rocconi, "Women players in ancient Greece: The context of *symposia* and the socio-cultural position of *psaltriai* and *aulētrides* in the classical world", in *Musikarchäologie*

widely confirmed by textual evidence: Aristophanes, for example, touches on this problem in the closing scene of the *Wasps,*[9] where Bdelucleon rightly accuses his father Philocleon of having stolen an *aulos*-girl from the symposium they had just attended in order to keep her sexual favours only for himself – a lively discussion which culminates in a physical fight between the characters.

But if the sexual character of the entertainment provided by female *aulos*-players was a natural target for humorous remarks, the question of their social influence, and especially their remuneration, was no laughing matter. For instance, in a passage of his *Constitution of the Athenians* (50.2), Aristotle tells us that the Athenians appointed special city officers (ἀστυνόμοι) to make sure that *aulos*-girls, as well as other female musicians like harpers and *kithara*-players, were not paid more than the maximum legal fee of two drachmas, solving any unsettled rivalries by casting lots[10] – a telling provision which suggests that violent disputes over *aulos*-girls could pose a significant threat to public safety. While this is not the place to discuss the details of these and other fascinating testimonies on the social role of these female musicians, one point is immediately evident and has very important implications for our current purposes: either as targets of salacious jokes or as objects of serious legislation, *aulos*-girls evoked very strong reactions in the cultural environment of Classical Athens, representing the long-awaited "democratization" of a traditional aristocratic institution or, on the contrary, becoming the clearest symbol of its cultural "degeneration" in the eyes of conservative critics.

With these notions in mind, let us now turn to Plato's *Symposium* and look more closely at the way in which Eryximachus introduces the unusual idea to expel the *aulos*-girl from the drinking party:

> Well then, said Eryximachus, since it has been established that each man will be allowed to drink as much as he wants and nobody will be forced to have more than that, next I propose this idea: the *aulos*-girl who has just come in should be dismissed and either go out and play to

*im Kontext = Music archaeology in contexts: archaeological semantics, historical implications, socio-cultural connotations,* ed. by Ellen Hickmann, Adje Both and Ricardo Eichmann (Rahden: Marie Leidorf, 2006), 335–344, here at page 336.

9 Ar. *Vesp*. 1364–1386.

10 Isocrates too repeatedly denounced the "corrupt" habits of the young men of his time, who enjoyed drinking large amounts of wine, gambling and spending time in the company of female *aulos*-players in their "training schools": Isocr. *Areopag*. 48.5 and *Antid*. 287.3, with James Davidson, *Courtesans and fishcakes: The consuming passions of classical Athens* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 82ff.; cf. Dem. 21.36. This problem is addressed also in a passage of Plato's *Protagoras*, 347c–348a, quoted and discussed below.

> herself or to the other women inside the house, if she wants, whereas today we shall entertain each other only with words and speeches.[11]

This choice is presented as an explicitly symbolic gesture, a cultural rejection that is all the stronger in comparison with the traditional background we have outlined at the beginning. After Phaedrus' already unusual request that the guests should not be forced to get intoxicated (*dia methes*) but should drink purely for pleasure (*pros hedonen*),[12] Eryximachus' unorthodox proposal to send the *aulos*-girl away suggests a consistent strategy: this gathering must be "purified" from external and mundane elements as much as possible, leaving them to lesser subjects such as slaves and women, while Agathon's distinguished guests will engage in nobler activities.

But this is not the first or only Platonic passage that depicts this "dream" of self-sufficiency. Indeed, the unusual rules endorsed by Phaedrus and Eryximachus at the beginning of the *Symposium* seem to reflect accurately the model of a virtuous drinking-party depicted by Socrates in the following passage of the *Protagoras*:

> Whenever the fellow-drinkers are refined and well-educated, you wouldn't see any *aulos*-girls, dancers or harpers, but the guests would be properly trained to entertain each other through their own voices, without resorting to these silly and childish means but talking and listening in turn and in orderly fashion, even though they may drink quite some wine. Therefore these kinds of gatherings, which bring together people such as most of us claim to be, do not need any alien voice, not even that of the poets, who can't be questioned about what they really meant to say […].[13]

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11 *Symp.* 176e4–9: Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν, φάναι τὸν Ἐρυξίμαχον, τοῦτο μὲν δέδοκται, πίνειν ὅσον ἂν ἕκαστος βούληται, ἐπάναγκες δὲ μηδὲν εἶναι, τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο εἰσηγοῦμαι τὴν μὲν ἄρτι εἰσελθοῦσαν αὐλητρίδα χαίρειν ἐᾶν, αὐλοῦσαν ἑαυτῇ ἢ ἂν βούληται ταῖς γυναιξὶ ταῖς ἔνδον, ἡμᾶς δὲ διὰ λόγων ἀλλήλοις συνεῖναι τὸ τήμερον.

12 *Symp.* 176e1–3: ταῦτα δὴ ἀκούσαντας συγχωρεῖν πάντας μὴ διὰ μέθης ποιήσασθαι τὴν ἐν τῷ παρόντι συνουσίαν, ἀλλ' οὕτω πίνοντας πρὸς ἡδονήν. As noted by Kenneth Dover, ed., *Plato – Symposium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) *ad loc.*, this passage "carries the revealing implication that excessive drinking at a party could be more a social obligation than a pleasure". Moreover, Phaedrus' request draws attention to the unconventional fact that Agathon and his companions did not formally elect a symposiarch and, therefore, nobody would have the authority to force additional drinks on the guests: however, as we will see below, Alcibiades will hubristically appoint himself to this role as soon as he makes his appearance on scene. See also *Symp.* 223b–c: in this passage we are told that the party is taken over by a crowd of drunken revellers, who create a great uproar and upset the orderly atmosphere of the evening, forcing the guests to drink a vast amount of wine.

13 *Prot.* 347c–348a: ὅπου δὲ καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ συμπόται καὶ πεπαιδευμένοι εἰσίν, οὐκ ἂν ἴδοις οὔτ' αὐλητρίδας οὔτε ὀρχηστρίδας οὔτε ψαλτρίας, ἀλλὰ αὐτοὺς αὑτοῖς ἱκανοὺς ὄντας συνεῖναι

In a subsequent passage of the *Protagoras* this select kind of *symposium*, ideally separate from the human world and its cares, is starkly contrasted with the "degenerate" practices proper to "vulgar" drinking-parties. Differently from the elegant guests described above, the boorish members of this corrupt *symposium*[14] are forced to rely on the "the alien voice of the *auloi*" (ἀλλοτρίαν φωνὴν τὴν τῶν αὐλῶν) in order to fill the vacuum of their thoughts, specifically resorting to the expensive, if trivial, performances offered by *aulos*-girls:[15]

> For these men, being base and vulgar, are not able to entertain each other over drinks through their own means, with their own voices and discourses, because of their lack of education; so they place great value on *aulos*-girls, paying large sums to hire the alien voice of the *auloi*, and they get together and bond through the voice of those instruments.[16]

By contrast, the setting of Plato's *Symposium* matches perfectly the "ideal" model described in the *Protagoras*: after getting rid of the *aulos*-girl, the distinguished guests of Agathon's party spend the night delivering speeches and listening to each other in turn. And it is significant to notice that in the *Symposium* this activity is given precisely the same ethical significance that Socrates attributes to it in the culminating section of his speech in the *Protagoras*:

> Cultured men, by contrast, will do away with these kinds of parties and will bond through their own means, using their speeches to put each other to the test in turn. It is this kind of people that I think you and I should rather imitate […] we should produce our speeches for

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ἄνευ τῶν λήρων τε καὶ παιδιῶν τούτων διὰ τῆς αὐτῶν φωνῆς, λέγοντάς τε καὶ ἀκούοντας ἐν μέρει ἑαυτῶν κοσμίως, κἂν πάνυ πολὺν οἶνον πίωσιν. οὕτω δὲ καὶ αἱ τοιαίδε συνουσίαι, ἐὰν μὲν λάβωνται ἀνδρῶν οἱοίπερ ἡμῶν οἱ πολλοί φασιν εἶναι, οὐδὲν δέονται ἀλλοτρίας φωνῆς οὐδὲ ποιητῶν, οὓς οὔτε ἀνερέσθαι οἷόν τ' ἐστὶν περὶ ὧν λέγουσιν […].

14 *Prot*. 347c4–5: τοῖς συμποσίοις τοῖς τῶν φαύλων καὶ ἀγοραίων ἀνθρώπων […].

15 *Prot*. 347c–d. Cf. Alexandra Pappas, "More than meets the eye: The aesthetics of (non)sense in the ancient Greek Symposium", in Ineke Sluiter and Ralph Rose, eds, *Aesthetic value in classical antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 71–111, esp. 95, who analyses a red figure *kylix* decorated by the Brygos painter (British museum E71). The sympotic scene featured on this wine cup includes an *aulos*-girl, whose head is surrounded by nonsensical inscriptions, while an inscription reading *kalos* is set at the opposite edge of the scene. See also Leslie Kurke, "Inventing the *hetaira*: sex, politics, and discursive conflict in archaic Greece", *Classical Antiquity* 16/1 (1997), 106–150, and François Lissarrague, *The aesthetics of the Greek banquet: Images of wine and ritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

16 Plato *Prot*. 347c–d: καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι [*scil*. οἱ φαῦλοι καὶ ἀγοραῖοι ἄνθρωποι], διὰ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι ἀλλήλοις δι' ἑαυτῶν συνεῖναι ἐν τῷ πότῳ μηδὲ διὰ τῆς ἑαυτῶν φωνῆς καὶ τῶν λόγων τῶν ἑαυτῶν ὑπὸ ἀπαιδευσίας, τιμίας ποιοῦσι τὰς αὐλητρίδας, πολλοῦ μισθούμενοι ἀλλοτρίαν φωνὴν τὴν τῶν αὐλῶν, καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐκείνων φωνῆς ἀλλήλοις σύνεισιν.

> each other out of what is really our own, making trial of the truth and of ourselves.[17]

The *Symposium,* therefore, provides a direct fulfilment of Socrates' exhortation to "emulate" (μιμεῖσθαι) the model of a "good" drinking party he had just outlined: through their own speeches and the emotional influence of wine, Agathon's guests will test each other, revealing the "truth" about their intellectual and ethical nature.[18] However another detail concerning the audience of Socrates' exhortation in the *Protagoras* poignantly shows that these two texts do not simply belong to the same problematic domain but should almost be regarded as two "acts" of the same dramatic play. In addition to high-calibre intellectuals such as Protagoras, Prodicus, Hippocrates and Hippias and politically influential personalities like Callias and Critias, there is one character among Socrates' distinguished addressees that casts a completely different light on his words: Alcibiades, the tragicomic figure who dominates the concluding section of the *Symposium,* to which we will now turn.[19]

## The Reappearance of the *Auletris* and Alcibiades' Arrival on Scene

From the very moment of his appearance on scene, Alcibiades is depicted as an outsider to the measured environment of the party. His arrival is explicitly signalled as an abrupt and unexpected "invasion" of reality into the ideal and,

17 Plato *Prot*. 347e–348a: ἀλλὰ τὰς μὲν τοιαύτας συνουσίας ἐῶσιν χαίρειν, αὐτοὶ δ' ἑαυτοῖς σύνεισιν δι' ἑαυτῶν, ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτῶν λόγοις πεῖραν ἀλλήλων λαμβάνοντες καὶ διδόντες. Τοὺς τοιούτους μοι δοκεῖ χρῆναι μᾶλλον μιμεῖσθαι ἐμέ τε καὶ σέ […] αὐτοὺς δι' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι, τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν πεῖραν λαμβάνοντας.

18 See esp. *Symp*. 214e6–215a, where Alcibiades repeatedly claims to reveal "the truth" about Socrates in his discourse of praise, especially by means of his musical *eikon*: see pp. 717–23 below.

19 The crucial role played by Alcibiades in this dialogue is underlined since the very beginning of the dialogue: in fact, at 172a7–b1, Apollodorus is asked specifically to talk about "the party of Agathon's with Socrates and Alcibiades' (τὴν Ἀγάθωνος συνουσίαν καὶ Σωκράτους καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδου) and relate "what they said in their speeches about love" (περὶ τῶν ἐρωτικῶν λόγων τίνες ἦσαν). Moreover, Plato seems to establish an additional intertextual link between these two dialogues by means of an inversion in the dramatic roles of Socrates and Alcibiades: in the *Protagoras*, Alcibiades is the first character to speak immediately after Socrates' exhortation and forces Protagoras to engage in a dialogue with Socrates, making him "feel ashamed" of his previous conduct (αἰσχυνθείς, *Prot*. 348c1); in the *Symposium,* by contrast, it is Alcibiades who claims to have undergone precisely the same emotional experience after talking with Socrates: Socrates is said to be the only man who could force him to see the pointlessness of his political ambition and his ethical shortcomings, making him feel ashamed of himself (see *Symp*. 216b1–2, quoted in note 42 below).

to some extent, artificial intellectual world created in Agathon's house: Socrates has just finished his complex and passionate discourse on Eros when, all of a sudden (ἐξαίφνης, 212c6),[20] the guests hear a group of drunken revellers approaching, emphatically announced by door-banging and by the sound of "the *voice* of an *aulos*-girl" (τὴν αὐλητρίδος φωνὴν ἀκούειν, 212c8).[21]

The "alien voice" of the *aulos*-girl and her instrument,[22] against which Socrates argued so strongly in the *Protagoras*, is employed here as a powerful symbol of the wildest aspects of contemporary symposia and significantly preludes to Alcibiades' own entry on scene. In fact, Plato describes his arrival through the very same expression and dramatic sequence he had previously employed in connection with the *aulos*-girl: long before seeing him, Agathon's guests hear the sound of Alcibiades' voice (Ἀλκιβιάδου τὴν φωνὴν ἀκούειν) as he starts shouting loudly from the forecourt of the house, completely drunk. This oblique connection is confirmed as soon as Alcibiades stumbles into the banqueting-hall: completely intoxicated and unable to walk on his own, Alcibiades is literally "brought in" and "supported" by the *aulos*-girl (212d6) – an effective image that momentarily merges the two characters into one item and, interestingly, presents Alcibiades as a passive follower of the *aulos*-girl and her lead.

In the following pages of the dialogue, Plato provides many sustained and vivid representations of Alcibiades' psychological imbalance, which reveal how deeply he embraced the model of intemperance epitomised by the *aulos*-girl. For instance, being already drunk and therefore more inclined to reveal the dominant traits of his nature,[23] Alcibiades hubristically appoints himself as the new symposiarch, a gesture whose symbolic and ethical value hardly needs flagging. But it is another, apparently minor, detail that reveals the full extent of Plato's cultural condemnation of Alcibiades' psychological and ethical attitude. With a subtle touch of literary artistry, Plato makes Alcibiades

20 This adverb occurs again at *Symp*. 223b2, when a group of drunken revellers takes over the party (cf. note 12 above). Interestingly, the same adverb is employed also at *Symp*. 210e4, where it depicts the sudden appearance of the nature of beauty and again at 213c1, where it qualifies Socrates' unexpected appearance in front of Alcibiades.

21 See also *Theaet*. 173d5: σὺν αὐλητρίσι κῶμοι, with Angus M. Bowie, "Thinking with drinking: Wine and the Symposium in Aristophanes", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 117 (1986), 1–21, esp. 9.

22 The term φωνή indicated both human voices and the "voices" of instruments: see e.g. Eur. *Tr*. 127, Plato *Prot*. 347c, Arist. *De anima* 420b7, [Arist.] *De Audib*. 802a, Mnesim. 4.56; see also Plato *Resp*. 3.397a: σαλπίγγων καὶ αὐλῶν καὶ συρίγγων καὶ πάντων ὀργάνων φωναί.

23 Alcibiades admits this explicitly in a following passage of his speech: "you wouldn't hear me say what I am about to tell you, unless wine was there first and, as the saying goes, *there is truth in wine when the slaves have left* – but also when they haven't!" (τὸ δ' ἐντεῦθεν οὐκ ἄν μου ἠκούσατε λέγοντος, εἰ μὴ πρῶτον μέν, τὸ λεγόμενον, οἶνος ἄνευ τε παίδων καὶ μετὰ παίδων ἦν ἀληθής, *Symp*. 217e).

order a slave to fill up a ψυκτήρ, a large vase which, as the name says, was normally used as a wine cooler: turning this vase into his own personal cup, Alcibiades dramatically drains it dry, almost in one shot.

While this gesture could be simply regarded as a particularly memorable sign of Alcibiades' intemperance, his request for *that* specific container – a *hapax* in the Platonic corpus – subtly adds a supplementary charge, since the ψυκτήρ was used to store *pure* wine.[24] What action could be more emblematic of a disharmonic nature in a Greek symposium than disobeying the very basic *nomos* of mixing wine and water, embracing the "barbaric" custom of drinking large quantities of undiluted wine?[25] And here it is the self-proclaimed symposiarch who overthrows this rule, that is to say the person who normally would have reinforced it.[26] Through this revealing gesture, then, Alcibiades exposes fully the deranged emotional and ethical hierarchy established in his soul: in other words, he turns into a living, tragic paradigm of lawlessness (παρανομία).

## THE MOST WONDERFUL AULETES, OR THE "TRUTH" ABOUT SOCRATES

If our understanding of Plato's use of *aulos* imagery in the *Symposium* were to be based only on what we have seen so far, the verdict would have to be unanimously and unquestionably negative: the *aulos*-girl, a widely recognised icon of sympotic excesses, is consistently associated with ethically dubious attitudes and especially with the character of Alcibiades, Plato's supreme example of intemperance. However, the following pages of the dialogue pose a radical challenge to the network of symbols we have traced up to now: in fact, while repeatedly claiming to speak the truth,[27] Alcibiades centres his discourse of praise[28] on describing Socrates as the most excellent and wonderful

24 Robert J. Forbes, *Studies in ancient technology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966). vol. 6, 116–117; James Davidson, *Courtesans and fishcakes* (as note 10), 158–159.

25 Scythians, Persians and Thracians were often associated with this practice, which was regarded as a symbol of their alleged licentiousness: see e.g. Plato *Leg*. 1.637d5–e7, as well as the specific reference to the Persians at *Ach*. 73–78 and the parody of sympotic customs at Aristoph. *Eq*. 85–108, where pure wine and a large jug (*chous*) appear again as symbols of intemperance. Cf. Hobden, *The Symposium in ancient Greek society and thought* (as note 5), 66–116.

26 This is particularly relevant for our present purposes, since Plato often presents the regulating activity of the symposiarch as the distinguishing feature of well-ordered *symposia*: cf. e.g. *Leg*. 1.639–640.

27 See *Symp*. 214e6–10, especially 215a6: ἔσται δ' ἡ εἰκὼν τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἕνεκα.

28 Even though Alcibiades' speech does not address the prescribed topic, since it focuses on Socrates and not on Eros, the content of his discourse of praise shows that Socrates' words have a similar effect to the inspired *mania* caused by Eros: see Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Socrates'*

*aulos*-player (αὐλητής, 215b). So, how should we interpret this seemingly incongruous choice? If Plato simply regarded the *aulos* and its players as a symbol of the negative consequences of excessively indulgent ethical attitudes, why would he make one of his most powerful characters use this kind of imagery to describe nothing less than "the truth" about Socrates?

After commenting on the contrast between physical unattractiveness and the "inner treasures" that both Socrates and the statues of musical Silens hold in store for the people who are truly able to understand their value, Alcibiades moves on to the most important and explicitly musical resemblance between Socrates and these mythical *auletai*. More specifically, Alcibiades likens Socrates to the mythical archetype of all *aulos* players, the Phrygian satyr Marsyas:[29]

> Why, aren't you an *aulos*-player? And indeed you are much more wonderful than Marsyas. In fact he bewitches people by means of his instruments, thanks to the power of his mouth, and so does anyone who plays his compositions on the *auloi* even today – for I say that the pieces that Olympus played are actually by Marsyas, who taught him. Whether it is a good aulete who plays his tunes or a third-rate *aulos*-girl, they are the only pieces which can cast a spell over the listeners and overwhelm them, revealing who is in need of the gods and mystic rites, because they are themselves divine.[30]

The very first and most relevant aspect emphasised by Alcibiades is the intense emotional effect of Marsyas' music: with his seductive tunes, he bewitches (κηλεῖν)[31] the listeners and brings them to an entranced state (κατέχεσθαι),

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*daimonic art: Love for wisdom in four Platonic dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 110–196.

29 On Marsyas as the "first" aulos player, see esp. Ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 1132f, 1333d, 1333e (τὸν δὲ Μαρσύαν […] εἶναι δ' αὐτὸν Ὑάγνιδος υἱόν, τοῦ πρώτου εὑρόντος τὴν αὐλητικὴν τέχνην). As noted by Andrew Barker, *Greek musical writings 1 – The musician and his art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) *ad loc.*, the correlation between Marsyas and Phrygia concerns both the origin of this instrument and that of the Phrygian *harmonia*. For more "technical" characterisations of Marsyas as a skilled aulete, see e.g. Plut. *De cohib. ira* 456b, *Quaest. Conv.* 713d. On Marsyas and Olympus' paradigmatic role in Plato, see *Leg.* 3.677d, *Resp. 3*.399e and [Plato] *Min.* 318b–c, where Marsyas' and Olympus' αὐλήματα are described in very similar terms to those used in the *Symposium*: once again, they are said to be capable of revealing who is "in need of the gods" because they are themselves divine.

30 *Symp.* 215c: ἀλλ' οὐκ αὐλητής; πολύ γε θαυμασιώτερος ἐκείνου. ὁ μέν γε δι' ὀργάνων ἐκήλει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τῇ ἀπὸ τοῦ στόματος δυνάμει, καὶ ἔτι νυνὶ ὅς ἂν τὰ ἐκείνου αὐλῇ – ἃ γὰρ Ὄλυμπος ηὔλει, Μαρσύου λέγω, τούτου διδάξαντος – τὰ οὖν ἐκείνου ἐάντε ἀγαθὸς αὐλητὴς αὐλῇ ἐάντε φαύλη αὐλητρίς, μόνα κατέχεσθαι ποιεῖ καὶ δηλοῖ τοὺς τῶν θεῶν τε καὶ τελετῶν δεομένους διὰ τὸ θεῖα εἶναι.

31 This verb seems to be specifically related to the power of fascination exerted by music, both

revealing which souls are troubled and need to partake in mystic initiation rites (τελεταί).[32] According to Alcibiades this extraordinary effect, which is often associated with the *aulos*-music employed in Corybantic rites,[33] is so intimately related to the nature of these compositions that it can be achieved independently from the ability of the performers, a point that is significantly illustrated by juxtaposing the performance of a mediocre *aulos*-girl to that of a skilled male aulete.[34]

So what kind of music was Alcibiades thinking of here? In specifying that these tunes could be still heard at his own time, Alcibiades brings the figure of Olympus into the picture, characterising him as Marsyas' pupil; but if Marsyas and his music belong entirely to the mythical realm, the connection established with Olympus gives us some hints as to the contexts in which the type of aulos music described by Alcibiades could be heard in Classical Athens. In fact if technical texts associate Olympus to the solemn spondaic mode,[35] which accompanied for instance the libations that marked the transition from the end of the dinner to the beginning of a proper *symposion*, all the extant Classical sources – including Aristophanes, Aristotle and Euripides[36]

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in Plato and in other classical writers. For Plato, cf. e.g. *Resp*. 3.411b, *Leg*. 8.840c, *Lys*. 206b, *Prot*. 315b (and 328d, perhaps metaphorically).

32 See Ivan M. Linforth, "Telestic madness in Plato, *Phaedrus* 244de", *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 13/6 (1946), 163–172.

33 See Ivan M. Linforth, I. "The Corybantic rites in Plato", *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 13/5 (1946), 121–162; Eric R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 77–80; Yulia Ustinova, "Corybantism: The nature and role of an. Ecstatic Cult in the Greek Polis", *Horos* 10–12 (1992–1998), 503–520. These rites are also associated with the pyrrhic dances in armour of the Corybantes and Curetes (e.g. Strabo 10.3.7–18) which were characterised by short notes, very fast steps and passionate motions: see Arist. Quint. *De Mus*. 82.10–22, Dion. Halic. *De Comp*. 17.15–18. At *Leg*. 7.816a–b, the Athenian stranger includes *pyrrhiche* in the category of "beautiful dances" that should be practised in Magnesia; see Paola Ceccarelli, "Naming the weapon-dance: Contexts and Aetiologies of the *Pyrrhiche*", in *Praktika IA' diethnous Sunedriou klassikon spoudon* (Athens: Parnassos Literary Society, 2002), vol. 2, 197–215.

34 As we have seen above, *aulos*-girls did not enjoy a very high social standing, as opposed to their male counterparts, on which see Martin L. West, *Ancient Greek music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 35 and 366; see also the interesting interpretative approach proposed by Andrew Barker, "The music of Olympus", *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 99/3 (2011), 43–57, esp. p. 56, who associates the Platonic idea of a *phaule auletris* in the context of ecstatic ceremonies with female-only initiation rites that took place at the *Thesmophoria*.

35 E.g. Ps.-Plut. *De Mus*. 1134e-1135f and 1137a-e.

36 See e.g. Aristoph. *Eq*. 9, Eur. *Iph. Aul*. 576ff., Arist. *Pol*. 8.1339b–1140a, Telestes fr. 806 Page (Denys Page, ed., *Poetae Melici Graeci*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), as well as the aforementioned Platonic passages. For a detailed discussion of the various types of music associated with Olympus, see Barker, "The music of Olympus" (as note 34).

– focus instead on Olympus' Phrygian compositions such as the *Metroia*.[37] Performed in honour of the Mother Goddess in the context of ecstatic rites, these performances involved intense dancing accompanied by the sharp sound of the *auloi* and energetic rhythms, musical features which led the initiates to experience "divine possession" (*enthousiasmos*), as Aristotle tells us explicitly in the *Politics*.[38]

Keeping these musical features in mind, let us examine the rest of Alcibiades discourse, where he completes his musical *eikon* by explaining how Socrates' words resemble the *aulos* music played by the Phrygian Satyr. Once again, Alcibiades starts by describing in great detail the nature of the emotional reactions triggered by the "wonderful aulete" Socrates: similarly to the ecstatic music of Dionysiac rites, Socrates' words are able to generate passionate feelings and desires in his audience, casting a sort of spell which brings them to an entranced state (ἐκπεπληγμένοι ἐσμὲν καὶ κατεχόμεθα, 215d). Narrowing momentarily the focus on his own personal response, Alcibiades continues by portraying his own physical and emotional reactions to the discourses of this "philosophical Marsyas":

> And if it weren't for the fact that I would seem to be completely wasted, gentlemen, I would swear to you that this is exactly what I felt and still feel myself when I am under the influence of his words. Whenever I listen to him, my heart races much more than that of the people who are filled with Corybantic frenzy: his discourses make tears flow down my cheeks, and I see that many other people undergo the same feelings. When listening to Pericles or other good orators, I used to think that they spoke well but I didn't experience anything remotely

37 Cf. Ps.-Plut. *De Mus*. 1141b. An interesting depiction of the strict correlation between Olympus, the Phrygian cult of the Great Mother and the Corybantes is symbolically expressed at Diod. Sic. 5.49.3, where Olympus is said to be Cybele's lover and Cybele's son Corybas, fathered by Iasion, is described as the original founder of Corybantic rites.

38 Arist. *Pol*. 8.1340a8–11: "but it is clear that we are affected by many types of music and not least by the tunes of Olympus: for these admittedly make our souls enthusiastic" (ἀλλὰ μὴν ὅτι γιγνόμεθα ποιοί τινες, φανερὸν διὰ πολλῶν μὲν καὶ ἑτέρων, οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ καὶ διὰ τῶν Ὀλύμπου μελῶν· ταῦτα γὰρ ὁμολογουμένως ποιεῖ τὰς ψυχὰς ἐνθουσιαστικάς). See also Dion. Halic. *De Demosth*. 22.1–18, where the author mentions precisely the two musical genres associated with Olympus in order to exemplify the two most different types of music: on the one hand, there are serious spondaic tunes that bring about a calm and solemn *ethos* (ἐν ἤθει σπουδαῖος γίνομαι καὶ πολὺ τὸ εὐσταθὲς ἔχω τῆς γνώμης, ὥσπερ οἱ τῶν σπονδείων αὐλημάτων ἢ τῶν Δωρίων τε κἀναρμονίων μελῶν ἀκροώμενοι), on the other the ecstatic music of the *Metroia* and the Corybantes (ἐνθουσιῶ τε καὶ δεῦρο κἀκεῖσε ἄγομαι, πάθος ἕτερον ἐξ ἑτέρου μεταλαμβάνων [...] διαφέρειν τε οὐδὲν ἐμαυτῷ δοκῶ τῶν τὰ μητρῷα καὶ τὰ κορυβαντικὰ καὶ ὅσα τούτοις παραπλήσιά ἐστι, τελουμένων).

> like this: my soul was not thrown into turmoil nor was it irritated because of my servile attitude. But often this Marsyas here has made me feel this way, to the point that I thought my life was not worth living in my present state. And you, Socrates, can't say that these things are not true.[39]

Alcibiades' behaviour resembles and even exceeds that of people who partake in mystic rites: both his body and his soul are completely overwhelmed by the experience of listening to Socrates' enchanting voice. However, the "philosophical mania"[40] caused by Socrates' *aulemata* unveils a kind of psychological disharmony that differs from that revealed by Olympus' music: Socrates brings his Corybantes to feel dissatisfied with their own actions and ethical attitude, instilling a cognitive dissonance within their minds that leads them to reject their own choices and lifestyle, ultimately urging them to change their ways. Just as the Corybantes respond exclusively to one specific type of music,[41] this deep psychological reaction can be triggered only by Socrates' words and not by the words uttered by any random, if skilled, rhetorician: as Alcibiades confesses, Socrates is the only person who could force him to admit that his ethical conduct is neither correct nor serves his real psychological needs, compelling him to see for a moment the pointlessness of his ambition and making him feel ashamed of himself.[42]

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39 *Symp.* 215d6–216a2: ἐγὼ γοῦν, ὦ ἄνδρες, εἰ μὴ ἔμελλον κομιδῇ δόξειν μεθύειν, εἶπον ὁμόσας ἂν ὑμῖν οἷα δὴ πέπονθα αὐτὸς ὑπὸ τῶν τούτου λόγων καὶ πάσχω ἔτι καὶ νυνί. ὅταν γὰρ ἀκούω, πολύ μοι μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν κορυβαντιώντων ἥ τε καρδία πηδᾷ καὶ δάκρυα ἐκχεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων τῶν τούτου, ὁρῶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλους παμπόλλους τὰ αὐτὰ πάσχοντας· Περικλέους δὲ ἀκούων καὶ ἄλλων ἀγαθῶν ῥητόρων εὖ μὲν ἡγούμην λέγειν, τοιοῦτον δ' οὐδὲν ἔπασχον, οὐδ' ἐτεθορύβητό μου ἡ ψυχὴ οὐδ' ἠγανάκτει ὡς ἀνδραποδωδῶς διακειμένου, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τουτουῖ τοῦ Μαρσύου πολλάκις δὴ οὕτω διετέθην ὥστε μοι δόξαι μὴ βιωτὸν εἶναι ἔχοντι ὡς ἔχω. καὶ ταῦτα, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ ἐρεῖς ὡς οὐκ ἀληθῆ.

40 *Symp.* 218b3–4: "for you all took part in the philosophical mania and Bacchic frenzy [*scil.* caused by Socrates]" (πάντες γὰρ κεκοινωνήκατε τῆς φιλοσόφου μανίας τε καὶ βακχείας).

41 Plato *Ion* 536c: "just as the Corybantes perceive acutely only the particular tune that belongs to the god that they are possessed by, and have plenty of dance motions and words that go well with that specific melody […]" (ὥσπερ οἱ κορυβαντιῶντες ἐκείνου μόνου αἰσθάνονται τοῦ μέλους ὀξέως ὃ ἂν ᾖ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξ ὅτου ἂν κατέχωνται, καὶ εἰς ἐκεῖνο τὸ μέλος καὶ σχημάτων καὶ ῥημάτων εὐποροῦσι […]). A similar background is assumed by the events related in Menander *Theophor.* fr. 25. The image of the Corybantes, present in both of these passages, plays a central role also in other Platonic texts: see e.g. *Crito* 54d (on effect that the voice of the personified Laws has on Socrates), *Ion* 534a, *Euth.* 277d–e and *Laws* 7.790d, with Linforth, "The Corybantic rites in Plato" (as note 33), and Roslyn Weiss, "The Corybantic Cure", in *Socrates dissatisfied: An analysis of Plato's Crito* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 134–145.

42 *Symp.* 216a4–7: "he forced me to admit that, even though I am severely flawed, I don't take care of myself but I get involved in Athenian politics. So I force myself to block my

In this sense Alcibiades, by portraying Socrates as a wonderful aulete, actually tells the truth about him: Socrates' *aulemata* are as divine as Marsyas' because they are able to reveal the unhealthy and troubled state of other people's souls and, at the same time, provide a cure for them. However, there is one reason why Socrates is an even more wonderful *aulos*-player than Marsyas: he is able to achieve these life-altering effects even without the aid of the seductive notes of the *aulos*, just with his bare words.[43]

## CONCLUSIONS

So how are we to interpret Plato's apparently contradictory attitude towards the *aulos*? Similarly to how the intense emotions related to sympotic practices are presented in a different light depending on the ethical approach that informs them, so also the evaluation of the effects of *aulos* music is not fixed and immutable because it is not the musical nature of the instrument *per se* or its ability to provoke powerful emotions that triggers Plato's worries: in fact, all these elements are presented in a positive light in connection with the figure of Socrates αὐλητής as well as in relation to Olympus' divine *aulemata*.

The reason why the *aulos*-girl, the symbolical representative of "bad" eroticism, was sent away at the beginning of the refined symposium hosted at Agathon's house is that she is not aware (or interested in taking care) of the wide-ranging psychological impact of the powerful emotions stirred by her music. In the absence of careful handling, these intense forces often end up having a negative effect on the souls of her listeners, making their soul more conflictual and disharmonic without providing an adequate and constructive release to this tension, as testified by the tragic figure of Alcibiades. But the very same psychological experiences have a completely different meaning in the case of the "Bacchic frenzy" caused by Socrates' *aulemata*: his music gives a precise direction to the emotional energy it liberates, turning it into a cen-

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ears and go away, as if I was escaping from the Sirens […]" (ἀναγκάζει γάρ με ὁμολογεῖν ὅτι πολλοῦ ἐνδεὴς ὢν αὐτὸς ἔτι ἐμαυτοῦ μὲν ἀμελῶ, τὰ δ' Ἀθηναίων πράττω. βίᾳ οὖν ὥσπερ ἀπὸ τῶν Σειρήνων ἐπισχόμενος τὰ ὦτα οἴχομαι φεύγων […]). This confession stands in sharp contrast with the centrality of the concept of ἐπιμέλεια σαυτοῦ in the *First Alcibiades*, e.g. *Alc*. 1 120d–124c. On the unique effect of Socrates' words, see *Symp*. 216b1–2: "And there is something I experienced only in the presence of this man, something nobody would believe I have in me: feeling shame before anyone whatsoever. Yet before him and him alone I feel ashamed" (πέπονθα δὲ πρὸς τοῦτον μόνον ἀνθρώπων, ὃ οὐκ ἄν τις οἴοιτο ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐνεῖναι, τὸ αἰσχύνεσθαι ὀντινοῦν· ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτον μόνον αἰσχύνομαι).

43 *Symp*. 215c6–8: "you differ from him (i.e. Marsyas) in one point only – that you produce the same effect without any instruments, only with your bare words" (σὺ δ' ἐκείνου τοσοῦτον μόνον διαφέρεις, ὅτι ἄνευ ὀργάνων ψιλοῖς λόγοις ταὐτὸν τοῦτο ποιεῖς).

tral tool to give the "right shape" to disharmonic souls. Significantly, this outcome is exactly the one that is envisaged in *Laws* 1 in relation to correctly organised symposia. In these metaphorical "gyms" for the soul, the guests can train themselves by means of intense emotions and pleasures, in order to learn how their psychological reactions work and how to handle them at best. This crucial psychological exercise (προσγυμνάζειν, 1.647c8) leads them to develop real mastery over pleasures: in other words, the guests of these select symposia, and the ideal citizens of Plato's constitutions, learn how to enjoy pleasures without being enslaved by them.[44]

In conclusion, this seems to be the substantial difference that informs all the Platonic evaluations of "good" and "bad" use of emotions, whether triggered by music, love or wine: given the deep effects that these forces have on the soul, it is crucial to orient them in a constructive direction that improves the human nature of each individual and his ethical quality, instead of damaging it. If oriented towards the wrong objects, the emotions elicited by these powerful experiences, while originally generating an "ecstatic" effect similar to well-oriented practices, end up achieving the opposite result:[45] the inner order of the soul is destroyed by the conflict created between its different parts, a psychological outcome which does not affect only the life of each individual, as Plato is well aware, but inevitably leads also to political strife (στάσις).

These potentially opposite outcomes are represented effectively by the conflictual feelings experienced by the character of Alcibiades. His gifted nature allows him to understand intellectually and feel emotionally "the truth" of Socrates' music; however, not having trained his soul to strive towards "correct" ethical goals, as soon as Socrates' seductive music is over, to use his own words, he falls again "a victim to the honour of the crowds" (216b6–7).

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44 See *Leg.* 1.647c: "And how about the opposite case, when we attempt with the aid of justice to make a man fearful? Is it not by pitting him against shamelessness and exercising him against it that we must make him victorious in the fight against his own pleasures?" (Τί δ' ὅταν ἐπιχειρῶμέν τινα φοβερὸν ποιεῖν μετὰ δίκης; ἆρ' οὐκ ἀναισχυντίᾳ συμβάλλοντας αὐτὸν καὶ προσγυμνάζοντας νικᾶν δεῖ ποιεῖν διαμαχόμενον αὐτοῦ ταῖς ἡδοναῖς;). See also *Leg.* 1.647d–1.649d and 2.673e–674c, where "good" symposia are characterised as "serious" institutions that teach the citizens how to use emotions correctly.

45 The same goes also for good vs. bad rhetoric: "bad" rhetoric triggers intense emotional reactions only to win the approval of the listeners and does not help them to improve themselves (cf. *Gorg.* 501a–504e, where this skill is significantly likened to the technical excesses of contemporary *aulos* players); good rhetoricians are equally capable to create such an intense emotional involvement but employ their skills with a precise ethical aim: improving the ethical nature of the citizens (see *Phaedr.* 268a–272c).