

**The Ismenodora of Plutarch's *Eroticus*.
(Has Western Culture “sexualized” –i. e. “masculinized”- Ethics?)¹**

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To Àngels Fumadó

On the occasion of the tenth Symposium of the International Association of Women Philosophers (IAPh) (October, 2002) and as read on its presentation page written by the Organization-Committee, we have gathered in Barcelona in order to debate on “The Passion for Freedom. Action, Passion and Politics”, and to reflect on concepts such as “equality” and “justice” with regard to “the relevant changes the world has seen in recent decades”. Consequently, a traditional *captatio benevolentiae* is particularly apposite, if one takes into account that my intention is to speak about a text, Plutarch's *Eroticus*, which is supposed to have been written at about the end of the first century or the beginning of the second one. Why this analysis now, then, when the XXIst century has just started, of a philosophical dialogue, a post-Aristotelian one and, therefore, written in a “scientific” way, which compares and contrasts ancient pederasty with marriage (*paiderastía kai gámos*)? I have always thought that a great deal of the distinctive features of Western misogyny during the centuries as well the misogyny unfortunately still with us day after day and in different fields, has a very ancient origin which is not always well recognized. Although it is both difficult and annoying to accept it, it must be recognized in its turn that misogyny in Western countries -and I am afraid that in many other regions of the world- has become a cultural feature, so that it is worth being aware of the fact that all of us have been predisposed –the term “culture” comes from the Latin verb *colo*, that is to say, we have been “cultivated”- in a specific way which conditions us and, therefore, often demands from us a strong reaction against it, even a true revolution, since it would be inexcusable not to remember that everything inherited by tradition –slavery, for instance, was a century-old tradition- is not always worth respect.

Indeed, in spite of our logical surprise, when Greeks began to reflect philosophically –or, in other words, to dialogue- on love and friendship (*éros kai philía*), they thought that both terms were the exclusive attributes of pederastic love, i. e. when a grown man loved a young boy (*paiderastía = país + erô*) taking care of him and guiding him towards virtue (*areté*), while marriage and conjugal love were only esteemed as a guarantee of reproduction³. It is well known

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³ On Greek homosexuality, see e.g.: Symonds, J. A. *A Problem in Greek Ethics*. New York: Hashell House, 1971 (first edition in England 1901); Marrou, H. I. *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1948; Flacelière, R. *L'amour en Grèce*. Paris: Hachette, 1971; Dover, K. J. *Greek Homosexuality*. London: Duckworth, 1978; Buffière, F. *Eros adolescent. La pédérastie dans la grèce Antique*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1980; Sergeant, B. *L'homosexualité dans la mythologie grecque*. Paris: Payot, 1984 and Halperin, D. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*. New York & London: Routledge, 1990.

that Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, as well as Xenophont's *Symposium*, are some of the essential texts to understand the phenomenon and, above all, to know all of the different shades of a relationship which, unlike what is often thought, was under a strict control⁴. At any rate, from this point of view, women, since they seek pleasure (*hedoné*) –and they give it in their turn– are sensual human beings who rouse men's desire and invite them to a crude sexuality rather than being true comrades and friends with whom men share noble interests and hopes. It is not surprising, then, that Plutarch, several centuries after Plato and in spite of being himself a Platonic thinker *comme il faut*, redeems women from their century-old sad, and base condition, so that he esteems finally their love and friendship to the extent of preferring marriage to pederasty.

It is quite clear, as a consequence, that debating on Plutarch's *Eroticus* means to debate on the fair demand for equality and justice against –if I may speak in contemporaneous terms– all sort of sexual discrimination, or, even more specifically, it means to debate thus women's right both to love and be loved to the extent of becoming the true comrades displacing the traditional comradeship among men. Nevertheless –and in order to be completely honest–, I should like to prove now that debating on Plutarch's *Eroticus* has something to do with our contemporaneous world and, in this respect, I hope that my analysis will be useful to open our eyes –and in some personal cases who knows if for the first time– to the fact that Western societies have “sexualized” Ethics all over the centuries up to the present day and, this is even worse, have “masculinized” it. If so, if both equality and justice –precisely the talking point of this symposium– were put into a strict practice, Ethics should be “feminized” in its turn, although I am firmly convinced that we would avoid –and in my opinion in accordance with common sense– the very “sexualization” of Ethics in order to attain simply an increasingly human one. In other words, if I have thought that my contribution does suit this symposium, it is because I do think that many misogynist prejudices are still with us in our contemporaneous Western societies. Moreover, the subsequent difficulties regarding a friendly, fluent and cooperative relationship between men and women, have, as I said before, an ancient origin –as ancient as our civilization–, and that Greek Philology might be on this occasion, as on many others, extremely useful and enlightening.

Leaving aside, then, any other further introduction, here is the essential plot of Plutarch's *Eroticus*: Plutarch's son, Autobulus, recalls those talks on Eros as they were had by his father and some of his friends on Helicon next to the shrine of the Muses. The talks were due to an unusual fact: a widow in Tespias, Ismenodora, who was thirty years old, wanted to marry a young man called Bacchon, who was only seventeen, the son of a friend of hers, and not on account of any personal caprice but, on the contrary, because she had really fallen in love with him. Indeed, she had intended for a long time to marry Bacchon to a young girl, but finally as the result of their frequent conversations and seeing furthermore that a great deal of pederasts “besieged” Bacchon, she decided to besiege him in her turn. Bacchon's young friends were against the wedding and mocked at him since, as said, he was much younger than Ismenodora. On the other hand, Pisia and Anthemion, who were attached to Bacchon, believe that it was much better to avoid exasperating each other and they join Plutarch's friends choosing them as arbiters of their dispute. Daphnaeus will be the Anthemion's advocate and Protogenes the Pisia's one. Plutarch and his friends begin to talk about Eros and, suddenly, they are informed that Ismenodora has kidnapped Bacchon in order to marry him immediately and it seems that he has not resisted her. And, when Plutarch is about to put an end to the explanation of his thesis, a messenger arrives claiming the presence of the talkers in the happy wedding.

⁴ Read for instance the chapters which correspond to Greek love in Foucault, M. *Histoire de la sexualité*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976-1984.

The defence of pederasty will correspond, then, to Protogenes, and Plutarch, from his feminist point of view, wants him to make a speech which will revise all of the aspects of this phenomenon, even the noblest ones, though he endows Protogenes' reasonings with such a brutality that, in spite of the explanation of subtle nuances, both the ethical condemnation and the intellectual opposition to pederastic love seem categorical from the very beginning: Let us listen to him:

‘Since it is necessary (marriage) for producing children, said Protogenes, there is no harm in legislators talking it up and singing its praises to the masses. But genuine Love has no connection whatsoever with the women’s quarters (τῆ γυναικωνίτιδι). I deny that it is love that you have felt for women and girls any more than flies feel love for milk or bees for honey or than caterers and cooks have tender emotions for the calves and fowls they fatten in the dark. In a normal state one’s desire for bread and meat is moderate, yet sufficient; but abnormal indulgence of this desire creates the vicious habit called gluttony and gormandizing. In just the same way there normally exists in men and women a need for the pleasure derived from each other; but when the impulse that derives us to this goal is so vigorous and powerful that it becomes torrential and almost out of control (πολλὴν καὶ δυσκάρηκτον), it is a mistake to give the name Love to it. Love, in fact, it is that attaches himself to a young and talented soul (εὐφυοῦς καὶ νέας) and through friendship (διὰ φιλίας) brings it to a state of virtue (ἀρετὴν); but the appetite (ἐπιθυμία) for women we are speaking of, however well it turns out, has for net gain only an accrual of pleasure in the enjoyment of a ripe physical beauty (ἀπόλαυσιν ὥρας καὶ σώματος) ... The object of desire is, in fact, pleasure and enjoyment (ἡδονὴ καὶ ἀπόλαυσις); while Love, if he loses the hope of inspiring friendship, has no wish to remain cultivating a deficient plant which has come to its prime, if the plant cannot yield the proper fruit of character to produce friendship and virtue (φιλίαν καὶ ἀρετὴν). If, however, such a passion (πάθος) must also be called Love, let it at least be qualified as an effeminate and bastard love (θηλιν καὶ νόθον), that takes its exercise in the women’s quarters as bastards do in the Cynosarges... there is only one genuine Love, the love of boys (παιδικός). It is not ‘flashing with desire’, as Anacreont says of the love of maidens, or ‘drenched with unguents, shining bright’. No, its aspects is simple and unspoiled (λιτὸν... καὶ ἄθροπτον). You will see it in schools of philosophy (ἐν σχολαῖς φιλοσόφοις), or perhaps in the gymnasia and palaestrae (γυμνάσια καὶ παλαίστρας), searching for young men whom it cheers on with a clear and noble cry to the pursuit of virtue when they are found worthy of its attention. But that other lax and housebound love (ὕγρον... καὶ οἰκουρόν), that spends its time in the bosoms and beds of women (ἐν κόλποις... καὶ κλινιδίαις), ever pursuing a soft life (τὰ μαλθακὰ), enervated amid pleasure devoid of manliness and friendship and inspiration (ἡδοναῖς ἀνάδρσι καὶ ἀφίλοις καὶ ἀνενοουσιάζστοις), it should be proscribed, as in fact Solon did proscribe it. He forbade slaves to make love to boys or to have a rubdown, but he did not restrict their intercourse with women. For friendship (φιλία) is a beautiful and courteous relationship (καλὸν καὶ ἀστεῖον), but mere pleasure (ἡδονή) is base and unworthy of a free man (κοινὸν καὶ ἀνελεύθερον). For this reason also it is not gentlemanly or urbane to make love to slave boys: such a love is mere copulation (συνουσία), like the love of women (ὁ τῶν γυναικῶν)’ (750C-751B)⁵.

⁵ Translated into English by W. C. Helmbold. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969 –idem regarding all the quotations of *The Eroticus*.

As suggested before, the setting forth and the terms which have been used are as brutal as the subsequent logical consequences. As far as Protogenes is concerned, the only genuine love or *éros* –and we must not forget that *éros* means basically “desire”- is pederastic love, a kind of feeling which is peculiar to free citizens, considered as a hunting of talented boys with whom grown men initiate a strong friendship whose main goal is the attainment of virtue (*areté*). Consequently, the application of a minimum of Aristotelian Logic reveals to us that for Protogenes conjugal love, that is to say, the usual fact of loving a woman –which is essential since it is recognized that society needs to be reproduced in order not to be completely extinguished- is not a noble feeling –which is equivalent to say that it is *parà phýsin* (against Nature) and even it should be *parà nómon* (against law)-, or it is not so noble as pederastic friendship. And secondly, it seems that, concerning pederastic love, in spite of the adolescents’ beauty, the lover (*erastés*) esteems above all his beloved’s talent, since this is the *conditio sine qua non* to become himself a good master and educator –in other words, it is obviously in accordance with *nómos* and *phýsis*.

This is not the moment to examine the reasons why Greek women remain in the gynaeceum and take part neither in the analysis of all sort of political questions –i.e. civic questions- nor in the taking itself of political decisions. And, on the other hand, it would be completely impossible to explain the exact historical and anthropological “journey” at the end of which Greek society – and, afterwards, Western society- appears divided into two factions, men and women, the former assuming all of the tasks to be done using the intelligence or *noûs*⁶, the latter –and I beg your pardon for my simplification- becoming a reproduction-workshop and offering to the world their tempting bodies.

In fact, we already know now everything Protogenes wants us to know, but he still says many other things: loving a woman is something false, base, excessive and “hyperbolic”; it is a passion which becomes vehement and unrestrainable, slave of desire, somatic rather than spiritual, simple sexual contact. And this is not all, since Protogenes, who has been much interested in

⁶ It is worth remembering now, for instance, that Pausanias in Plato’s Symposium, 181 a-c, maintains that the followers of the Uranic Aphrodite are only interested in adolescents: ‘For every action it may be observed that as acted by itself it is neither noble or base (οὔτε καλή οὔτε αἰσχρά). For instance, in our conduct at this moment, whether we drink or sing or converse, none of these things is noble in itself; each only turns out to be such in the doing, as the manner of doing it may be (ὡς ἂν παραχθῆ). For when doing of it is noble and right, the thing itself becomes noble; when wrong, it becomes base. So also it is with loving, and Love is not every case noble or worthy of celebration, but only when he impels us to love in a noble manner. Now the Love that belongs to the Popular Aphrodite is in very truth popular and does his work at haphazard: this is the Love we see in the meaner sort of men; who, in the first place, love women as well as boys; secondly, where they love, they are set on the body more than the soul; and thirdly, they choose the most witless people they can find, since they look merely to the accomplishment and care not if the manner be noble or no. Hence they find themselves doing everything at haphazard, good or its opposite, without distinction: for this love proceeds from the goddess who is far the younger of the two, and who in her origin partakes of both female and male. But the other Love springs from the Heavenly goddess who, firstly, partakes not of the female but only of the male; and secondly, is the elder, untinged with wantonness: wherefore those who are inspired by this Love betake them to the male, in fondness for what has the robuster nature and a larger share of mind (τὸ ἐρρωμονέστερον καὶ νοῦν μᾶλλον ἔχον)... They love boys when they begin to acquire some mind (νοῦν) –a growth associated with that of down on their chins. For I conceive that those who begin to love them at this age (νεόν) are prepared to be always with them and share all with them as long as life shall last: they will not take advantage of a boy’s green thoughtlessness (ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ) to deceive him and make a mock of him by running straight off to another’ -translated by Lamb, W. R. M. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983.

recalling that the noble pederastic love takes place in noble areas as well: gymnasia⁷, palaestrae and schools of philosophy -and this is why it has to do with both a simple and unspoiled love, namely it does not get broken- should not be compared with another love which is effeminate and bastard, drenched with unguents, lax and housebound, spending its time in the bosoms and beds of women and, as a consequence, fond of a soft life -it gets broken, then-, pursuing pleasures devoid of manliness -they are somatic rather than noetic-, friendship -they do not create attachment but passionate addiction- and inspiration (*enthousiasmós* coming from *theós*) - it does not receive divine inspiration. In my opinion we should pay our attention mainly to these last remarks by Protogenes. He seems not to speak about Ethics, but he distinguishes the noble love from the base one, and according to him nobleness is firm -it does not get broken; let us bear it in mind once again- and lives in masculine areas where body-strength is cultivated: gymnasia and palaestrae, as well as mind-strength: schools of philosophy. Men's bodies and minds are strong -Protogenes *dicit*-, unlike women's bodies which are soft and smooth like a pillow -and concerning mind, in the case women have it, it has no use -*idem*. Therefore, the features of men's anatomy become the means by which the ethical nobleness is defined, just in the same way women's features, after having been capriciously stigmatized, become synonymous in their turn of ethical and moral softness, of effeminacy, as if the feminine condition itself were suspicious of indignity. One understands, therefore, that so many generations of men and women -but not only men- have been required for centuries to be "strong", "brave", "energetic", "audacious", even "intolerant" and "intransigent" -and now, moreover, "competitive" and "winners", etcetera-, while they have not been required -at least in the case of men- to be "tender", "sensitive", "delicate" and so on. To sum up: Western civilization has "sexualised" Ethics or, even worse, has "masculinized" it, so that women have had to be contented with the fact of remaining in the ethical shadows or, in search of a piece of lent dignity, forcing their nature in favour of an increasingly "masculinization" -when it is obvious that Ethics has no gender.

At any rate, Daphnaeus, who is convinced that both vehemence and licentiousness live just on the other side, hastens to find the best reply to Protogenes' words:

'But to consort with males (whether without consent, in which case it involves violence and brigandage; or if with consent, there is still weakness and effeminacy on the part of those who, contrary to nature (*παρὰ φύσιν*), allow themselves in Plato's words 'to be covered and mounted like cattle') this is a completely ill-favoured favour, indecent, an unlovely affront to Aphrodite. Whence I conclude that those verses I quoted were written by Solon when he was still quite young and 'teeming', as Plato says, 'with abundant seed'. Here, however, is what he wrote when he had reached an advanced age: Dear to me now are the works of the Cyprus-born, of Dionysus and the Muses, works that make men merry, as though after the pelting storm of his love for boys he had brought his life into the peaceful sea of marriage and philosophy' (751D-E)⁸.

⁷ In fact, when Pisias gets to know that Bacchon has been kidnapped by Ismenodora, he emphasizes the "sacred nature" -so to speak- of the gymnasium and the Council Chamber on account of being masculine places: 'Good heavens! What end will there be to the licence that is subverting our town? Now already self-government is on the way to anarchy!... Did even Lemnos see the like? Let's be off!' he cried. 'Let's be off and hand over the gymnasium and the Council Chamber to the women since our city is by now completely emasculated!' (755B-C).

⁸ Plutarch will recognize afterwards that heterosexual love, at least when men and women fall in love, implies stormy weather as well: 'It is true that young people find it difficult to fuse and blend well with each other. Only after a long time do they abandon their stiffness and self-assertion. At the beginning they have stormy weather and struggle with their partners and still more so if Love is involved. Just as a high wind upsets a boat without a pilot, so Love makes stormy and chaotic a marriage of two people who

It might be thought now that conjugal love has been definitively redeemed, simply because, according to Daphnaeus, pederastic love has entered in its turn the ethically shady area of what is against nature (*parà phýsin*), but, on the other hand, the above mentioned suspicions are confirmed, since, as far as Daphnaeus is concerned, the indignity of pederastic love does not lie in the non-fulfilment of its own debts, but in the fact of being soft and effeminate, abandoning a masculine integrity which is seen as a permanent and unquestionable value. Consequently, it is quite clear that any sort of agreement between both factions must be disregarded, since Piasias will attack in his turn with his ally Protogenes' radicalism:

‘Good lord, what coarseness, what insolence! To think that human beings who acknowledge that they are locked like dogs by their sexual parts to the female should dare to transport the god from his home in the gymnasia and the parks with their wholesome fresh-air life in the sun and confine him in brothels with the vanity-cases and unguents and philters of disorderly females! Decent women (ταῖς γε σῶφροσιν) cannot, of course, without impropriety either receive (ἐρᾶσθαι) or bestow a passionate love (ἐρᾶν)’ (752B-C).

Given that women are not capable of being active or passive subjects of love, the doubtful ethical nature of any “shady area” such as a brothel becomes unquestionable. It is well known that Greek women remained most of the time at home, far away from the sunlight, living in a cave where they were imprisoned because, due to their low noetic level –*Graeci dicunt*- they could be useful with the help of their hands and body, and of course by procreating, while men with their intelligence attained full political status. Everything is, therefore, as brutal as before, but I am interested in emphasizing above all that, if we take into account what we have just read, it is much easier to understand why men have traditionally refused to accept domestic tasks, being afraid of becoming “soft and effeminate”, of becoming contaminated simply on account of trespassing on a genuine feminine area. Or it is also much easier to understand why men, real enemies of the gynaeceum, find their true comrades outdoors creating in fact an “homosociability” which, when sometimes and due to different circumstances becomes homosexuality, rouses great scandal precisely among those who provoke it since they -perhaps unconsciously- commit a serious outrage against equality and justice as well as against *gyné*.

Whatever the case is, Plutarch's Ismenodora was created to fight against this unfortunate social scheme. She is firmly convinced that she has the right to love and, above all, that she is worth being loved. She will play the role of a masculine lover or *erastés*⁹ who is much older than his beloved or *erómenos* and, taking the opportunity, she will kidnap Bacchon giving way to her passion, as if she were an earthly Zeus who kidnaps his personal Ganymedes¹⁰. It has to do, then,

cannot both command and will not either of them obey’ (754C-D). Nevertheless, this stormy weather or the “wave of affection” is really appreciated when Plutarch remembers the noblest aspects of pederastic love: ‘Roman Cato declared that the soul of the lover is ever present in that of the beloved... form, character, way of life, and every act. By these he is led to make a long journey with great swiftness; he has found, as the Cynics say, the passage to virtue ‘strenuous and short at the same time’. And in fact to friendship ... as it were borne along on the wave of affection with the help of a god’ (759 C-D).

⁹ And Plutarch indicates the advantages of such a fact: ‘The nurse rules the infant, the teacher the boy, the gymnasiarch the youth, his admirer the young man who, when he comes of age, is ruled by law and his commanding general. No one is his own master, no one is unrestricted. Since this is so, what is there dreadful about a sensible older woman piloting the life of a young man? She will be useful because of her superior intelligence; she will be sweet and affectionate because she loves him’ (754D).

¹⁰ Anthemion, for instance, thinks that she is a woman in love and courageous: ‘It is Love that is is ‘hard to combat’, not ‘anger’, as Heraclitus has it: ‘whatever he wants, it buys even at the cost of one’s life’ and

with a rigorous intellectual exercise, since what Plutarch makes Protogenes say, shows that, regarding such an extraordinary woman, that ancient Greek society could not be certainly kind; on the contrary:

‘Yes’, you say, ‘for she is in love with him, she is all on fire’. Who, then, prevents her from making revel-rout to his house, from singing the complaint before the closed door, from putting nosegays on his portraits, from entering the ring with her rivals? These are the actions of true lovers. Let her lower her brow, renounce her easy life, and put on the dress of those who are in the service of passion. But if she is really modest and orderly, let her sit decently at home awaiting suitors, men with serious designs. For if a woman makes a declaration of love, a man could only take to his heels in utter disgust, let alone accepting and founding a marriage on such intemperance’ (753B).

If “action, passion and politics” and the “passion for freedom” are the talking point of this symposium, and they are understood moreover as the constant and necessary men’s and women’s claim to be allowed to build a world in which it is worth living, it is quite evident that this daring Ismenodora with her action, passion and political will –that is to say, a real citizen–wins an important battle concerning the century-old fight to attain full political freedom. Leaving aside a stupid role-assignment, she proves that both men and women love and are loved in the same way because of the dignity they do share, and she proves as well that, at any rate, men are often those who, as if they were true adolescents, must be taken out of the prison they have built themselves with the help of their erratic *noûs*¹¹.

Plutarch, who maintains that Eros is “a witness, guardian, guide, accomplice of our desire for a wife and affection, and a real guarantee of concord and true union” (757D), is going to explain now his much pondered thesis. He knows much better than anyone else that Protogenes relies, as many other lovers do, upon the Platonic justification of pederasty and, therefore, a frontal Plutarch’s attack against Plato’s thesis might seem both logical and necessary. Nevertheless, Plutarch is often deeply Platonic and does not think that he has to attack the Platonic pederasty but, at any rate, to correct it by means of a simple exercise of Aristotelian Logic. Indeed, he also thinks that “Eros does not approach our souls in isolation by themselves, but through the body” (765). Uranic Eros shows us reflected images, like those on a mirror, of Ideal Beauty. “These are, however, merely mortal reflections of the divine, corruptible of the incorruptible, sensible of the intelligible. By showing us these in the form and hue and aspect of young men radiant in the prime of their beauty, Love gently excites our memory, which is first kindled by this means”

money and reputation, too. Where do you find better behaviour in the city than was Ismenodora’s? When did any ugly story ever enter her house or any hint of evil-doing ever leave a stain on it? Yes, it is only too plain that some divine impulse, overpowering her common sense, has really taken possession of the poor mortal creature’ (755D-E).

¹¹ In fact, Bacchon gains freedom thanks to Ismenodora, but Pisiias’ words prove that that ancient society was not prepared to accept this fact: ‘Well then’, said Pisiias, ‘after fair warning to all women that as far as I am concerned, love doesn’t exist, I must say that the young man must beware of the lady’s wealth. If we were to plunge him into such pomp and high estate, we might unwittingly make him disappear, as tin disappears when mixed with copper. It would be something to brag of if a boy of his age were to marry a simple, unassuming woman and yet keep his quality unchanged in the union, like wine mixed with water. But as for this woman, we can see her determination to command and to dominate. Otherwise, she would hardly have rejected so many eminent, noble, and wealthy suitors and be wooing a stripling who has not yet discarded his school uniform, who still needs a tutor. So it comes about that men of sense throw away their wives’ excessive fortunes and clip their wings, as it were. For such wealth makes women frivolous, haughty, inconstant, and vain; often it elates them so much that they fly away. Even if they stay, it is better to be fettered’ with the golden chains of Ethiopia’ than by a wife’s wealth’ (752E-F).

(765B). Plutarch acknowledges, then, the benefits of the *anámnēsis* but, for the time being, seems to continue to associate it with the impact caused by boys' beauty. Eros:

'Opens the way to acquiescence and affection. Nor is it long before lovers learn to disregard the body of the beloved; they move inward instead and attach themselves to his character. The veil is stripped from their eyes and they see clearly and have intercourse – now through reasoned discourse, for the most part, but through moral behaviour as well – to discover whether the beloved may have in his thoughts an image that is cut to the pattern of ideal beauty. If he does not, they have no more to do with him and turn to others... But wherever they catch a trace of the divine, some emanation or beguiling resemblance, they are intoxicated with joy and wonder and pay court to it, basking in the memory of ideal beauty and renewing their radiance in the presence of that genuine object of love, blessed as it is and beloved of all and worthy of all affection' (765C-D)¹².

However, Plutarch aims at being “scientific”, so that, when he explains analogically the phenomenon of the *anámnēsis*, he begins in a coherent way to attribute to women, as Justice demands, their role as human beings who do rouse consciousness:

'What happens to our vision when we see a rainbow is, of course, refraction, which occurs whenever the sight encounters a slightly moist, but smooth and moderately thick cloud and has contact with the sun by refraction. Seeing the radiance in this way produces in us the illusion that the thing we see is in the cloud. Now the devices and ruses of Love's operations on noble souls who love beauty are of the very same kind: he refracts their memories from the phenomena of this world, which are called beautiful, to the marvellous Beauty of that other world, that divine and blessed entity which is the real object of love. Yet most men, since they pursue in boys and women merely the mirrored image of Beauty, can attain by their groping nothing more solid than a pleasure mixed with pain... But the noble and self-controlled lover has a different bent. His regard is refracted to the other world, to Beauty divine and intelligible' (765F-766).

Consequently, we should notice that, in spite of the unskilfulness of a great deal of men who are often incapable of discovering the image of the ideal Beauty reflected on human beings, This

¹² But there are many occasions throughout *The Eroticus* on which the benefits of pederastic love are praised: 'On the other hand, of all the throngs of lovers past and present, do you know of a single one who sold the favours of his beloved even to gain the honours of Zeus himself? I think not. How could this happen, when even tyrants, whom no one dares to contradict, whose policies no one dares to oppose have had many rivals in love, many competitors for the friendship of handsome young lads? You know the tales of Aristogeiton of Athens and Antileon of Metapontum and Melanippus of Agrigentum: they had at first no quarrel with their tyrants, though they saw that these were acting like drunkards and disfiguring the state; but when the tyrants tried to seduce their beloved, they spared not even their own lives in defending their loves, holy, as it were, and inviolable shrines' (760B-C). However, Plutarch's *Eroticus* praises much more conjugal love, so that Plutarch also presents a great deal of usual “attacks” against pederastic love: 'You are well aware, I take it, how often men condemn and make jests about the inconstancy of boy-lovers. They say that such friendships are parted by a hair as eggs are; that these lovers are like nomads who pass the spring of the year in regions that are lush and blooming and then decamp as though from a hostile country. Even more vulgarly the sophist Bion used to call the beards of beautiful boys Harmodius and Aristogeiton because, as the hair grows, it frees their lovers from a beautiful tyranny! It is, however, unjust to bring these charges against true and genuine lovers... There are very few examples of a durable relationship among boy lovers, but countless numbers of successful unions with women may be enumerated, distinguished from beginning to end by every sort of fidelity and zealous loyalty' (770B-C).

One does reflect on boys and “women” as well, and, regarding talented lovers, the reverse should obviously be the case. Notwithstanding, Plutarch’s speech has not ended yet; on the contrary, he must denounce from a philosophical point of view the lack of logical coherence concerning the century-old discrimination against women which has been peculiar to pederasty-theoreticians:

‘Furthermore, the causes that they give for the generation of love are peculiar to neither sex and common to both. For is it really the case that visual shapes emanating from boys can, but the same from women cannot, enter into the body of the lover where, coursing through him, they stimulate and tickle the whole mass and, by gliding along with to other configurations of atoms, produce seed? And those beautiful and sacred passions which we call recollections of the divine, the true, the Olympian beauty of the other world, by which the soul is made winged –why should they not spring from maidens and women, as well as from boys and striplings, whenever a pure and disciplined character shines through from within a beautiful and charming outward shape... or whenever the clear-cut traces of a shining soul stored up in beautiful forms and pure bodies are perceived undistorted, without a flaw, by those capable of such perceptions. In the play, the pleasure-lover is asked whether *To women more than men is he inclined?* And he answers *Where there is beauty, he is ambidexterous*. If he is to be given credit for an answer well suited to lust, it is no less true that the noble lover of beauty engages in love wherever he sees excellence and splendid natural endowment without regard for any difference in physiological detail’ (766E-767).

As suggested before, as far as Plutarch is concerned and in spite of his deep Platonic temperament, a simple but rigorous application of Aristotelian Logic has been enough for him to refute Protogenes’ brutal initial exposition. Eros belongs to women as well and, therefore, they are capable of loving and they are worth being loved in their turn. The call to raise our souls in the palinode of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, that is to say the call to endow them with wings in order to attain the intelligible region by means of a constant “philosophizing”, must not commit any sexual discrimination, since, if lovers who are passionate and addicted to pleasure accept it wherever it is regardless of the gender of those who offer it, it is even more logical that noble and talented lovers also accept nobleness and talent wherever they are in search of a comradeship which is based upon a share in interests and goals. If the grace and youth of the bodies show an inner nobleness, it is its very presence or luck, but not the gender of those who have it, which conditions this process of Platonic perception or *anámnēsis*. There can still be, of course, some radical misogynists –and probably there are- who continue to refuse to accept the equation “woman = nobleness”, but in this case Plutarch’s intention is to shame them with the help of another simple application of Logic and with a great deal of stories created to prove women’s virtue:

‘So it is ridiculous to maintain that women have no participation in virtue. What need is there to discuss their prudence and intelligence, or their loyalty and justice, when many women have exhibited a daring and great-hearted courage which is truly masculine? And to declare that their nature is noble in all other relationships and then to censure it as being unsuitable for friendship alone –that is surely a strange procedure. They are, in fact, fond of their children and their husbands; their affections are like a rich soil ready to receive the germ of friendship; and beneath it all is a layer of seductive grace. Just as poetry adds to the prose meaning the delights of song and metre and rhythm, making its educational power more forceful and its capacity for doing harm more irresistible; just so nature has endowed women with a charming face, a persuasive voice, a seductive physical beauty’ (769C-D).

Leaving aside the more or less sexist nature of Plutarch's last comments concerning women's beauty, he has continued to insist on his thesis all the time: vice and virtue "live" –If I may use the term- in men as well as in women, which means that these men and women, if they go ahead towards virtue by means of love and friendship and with the help of their inner nobleness, they will find out in each other real traces of a high real Beauty and Goodness. Many centuries of Platonic tradition have been preserved, then, but at the same time many centuries of misogynist have also been refuted with regard to so many absurdities said about women. And, bearing in mind that I have intended to show from the very beginning that what the pederasts of Plutarch's *Eroticus* maintain has connections with some prejudices of our contemporaneous world, I take the opportunity to say that this time this kind of comparison benefits our world. In my opinion, the contemporary gay movements' policy has been admirable since they have fought –being often attacked by powerful lobbies- so that gay people can be and live in accordance with their feelings and personal identity. But it is quite evident that, in order to defend men's right to love other men, gay men would never speak about a men's intellectual and ethical superiority which, on the other hand, should be compared to a subsequent women's intellectual and ethical inferiority. It is simply unimaginable. But for the same reason it is hardly comprehensible that, sometimes the very gay movements or qualified researchers on gay phenomenon –mainly on masculine ones- continue to vindicate the Greek model, as if it were the lost paradise where there was a high level of permission –and this thesis needs to be explored in all its complexity-, and above all continue to ignore or, what would be even worse, hide the misogynist features of ancient pederasty. It is true that Plutarch's *Eroticus*, save in the case of Classical Philologists, is not a well-known text, while there are many translations for instance of Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* or Xenophont's *Symposium*, etc.; however, I think that a simple objective analysis of these last ancient texts should bring the readers to an understanding of Plutarch's logical reasonings and conclusions.

And I would dare to go further. Homosexuality is a phenomenon as ancient as the very human civilization which has had and has a world-wide reach, since, whatever the cause may be, there have always been and there will ever be women and men who feel sexual attraction and, as consequence, love other persons of their same gender. Sometimes they are seen as persons who have suffered a defective emotional development, but I should dare to say that Logic demands from everybody to consider them full persons, grown and mature, "positively" become homosexuals, though they are a minority.

Nevertheless, Plutarch's *Eroticus* warned the ancient readers and continues to warn the contemporaneous ones of an undeniable fact: Western society –and other societies, I am afraid-, which is misogynist in so many respects, have dangerously separated men from women or vice versa to the extent of building a high wall between them which is difficult to pull down. Men and women have become strange to each other or, even worse, they have become enemies since men have attributed to women a physical and ethical inferiority along the centuries which is as false as obtuse is the mind which imagined it. Between men and women there have been many interposed obstacles so that they have been not capable either of being good friends or loving each other sincerely. And the truth is that it is not always easy to notice the very same existence of the obstacles when they –that is to say all kind of prejudices- have already deep roots in men's –and also women's- mind. Many contemporaneous men and women keep on looking for –often anxiously- the reasons why their living together is very difficult and even impossible. Psychologists, all sort of consultants, fathers confessors, etcetera they try to find a true remedy, while Plutarch in his turn, who does think that Philosophy is only a good means to govern our

lives, writes beautiful stories in which men and women leave ancient taboos behind¹³. Indeed, Ismenodora, beautiful and mature, will marry the young Bacchon, because she is as worthy as any other of Bacchon's masculine lovers and admirers. And, above all, Plutarch writes exemplary stories in which men and women create a true comradeship and in which women are extraordinary because of their passionate love, fidelity and courage in facing -as true free citizens- a misogynist society. Consequently, in a symposium like this which is devoted precisely to "the passion for freedom; action, passion and politics", I should like to put an end to my contribution by presenting one of these exemplary stories about outstanding women, and by asking you to bear in mind at the same time that Plutarch knows perfectly well -we have already confirmed it- how to combine this beautiful exercise of literary creation with a smart and brilliant philosophical -i. e. logical- analysis of an old-century phenomenon¹⁴:

'Civilis, who stirred up the revolt in Gaul, had naturally many associates. Among them was Sabinus, a young man of good family, whose wealth and reputation were second to none of the Gauls. When their great enterprise collapsed, in the expectation of reprisal some killed themselves and some tried to escape, but were caught. Sabinus' affairs were not such as to prevent him from getting away and making good his escape to a foreign country, except that he had married a most remarkable wife. Her Gaulish name was Empona, which may be translated into Greek as 'Heroine'. He could not abandon her nor take her with him. Now he had in the country underground caves for the storing of his

¹³ Although sometimes and from a contemporary point of view, the marriage-revolution imagined by Plutarch rouses all sort of suspicions: 'The men these worthless females exploited became their prey unwittingly through their own weakness and softness; yet other men, though poor and obscure, have married rich and noble women and have not been destroyed or lost one particle of dignity; they have enjoyed honour and exercised benevolent authority to the end of their life together (754). "On the other hand, in the case of lawful wives, physical union is the beginning of friendship, a sharing, as it were, in great mysteries. Pleasure is short; but the respect and kindness and mutual affection and loyalty that daily spring from it convicts neither the Delphians of raving when they call Aphrodite Harmony nor Homer when he designates such a union as friendship. It also proves that Solon was a very experienced legislator of marriage laws. He prescribed that a man should consort with his wife not less than three times a month not for pleasure surely, but as cities renew their mutual agreements from time to time, just so he must have wished this to be a renewal of marriage and with such an act of tenderness to wipe out the complaints that accumulate from everyday living' (769).

¹⁴ Plutarch quotes as well Alcestis (761E-F), Sapho (762F), Laïs (767F) and above all Camma: 'Although there is an abundance of examples of this -at least to you who are fellow countrymen and initiates of the god- yet I hardly think it right to pass over the story of Camma of Galatia. She was a very beautiful woman married to Sinatus the tetrarch. Sinorix, the most powerful of the Galatians, fell in love with her and killed Sinatus, since he was unable to obtain the lady's consent either by force or persuasion while her husband was alive. Now Camma had a refuge and a consolation for her tragedy in serving as hereditary priestess of Artemis. She spent the greater part of her time in the goddess' temple and received no one, though many kings and potentates came to woo her. Yet when Sinorix dared to propose marriage, she did not shun his overtures or reproach him for past deeds, as if an act inspired by his kind regards and love for her could have nothing wicked about it. So he trusted in this and came to the temple and asked her to marry him. She met him, gave him her hand, led him to the altar of the goddess, and poured as a libation a phial of hydromel which was, it seems, mixed with poison. Thereupon she drank off half of it herself as though it were a toast and gave the rest to the Galatian. When she saw that he had swallowed it, she shouted loud and clear in triumph and uttered the dead man's name. 'It was', she cried, 'dearest husband, because I was awaiting this day that I have endured my tortured life without you. Now rejoice and take me. I have avenged you on the vilest of creatures, sharing death with him as gladly as I did my life with you'. So Sinorix was carried out in a litter and died shortly after. Camma lived through that day and the following night and is said to have expired with the greatest courage and good cheer' (767B-768D).

treasures and these caves were known only to two of his freedmen. He dismissed all the other slaves, saying that he was going to poison himself, and took his two trusted servants down into the caves with him. To his wife he sent one of the freedmen, Martial, to tell her that he had poisoned himself and that his body had been consumed in the burning of his country house, for he wished to make use of his wife's genuine grief to gain credit for the report of his death. And so it turned out. Empona threw herself, just as she was, on the ground and remained there without any nourishment for three days and three nights, in lamentation and tears. When Sabinus heard this, being afraid that she would make away with herself completely, he ordered Martial to report to her secretly that he was alive and in hiding, and begged her to continue in her mourning a little while longer and to neglect nothing that would make her simulation convincing. She, then, played the role of grief to tragic perfection in outward show; but she so longed to see him that she visited him at night and returned again by night. Hereafter for more than seven continuous months, unknown to anyone, she all but lived in the underworld with her husband. Meanwhile she disguised Sabinus completely by refashioning his clothes, by clipping up his hair and took him with her to Rome, since there was some hope of pardon. But she accomplished nothing and returned home again, now spending the greater part of her life with him underground, yet from time to time going to town to show herself to her friends and relatives. And what is most incredible of all, she succeeded in keeping the knowledge of her pregnancy from these ladies, even though she bathed with them. There is an ointment which women rub on their hair to make it gold or red; it contains grease which fills or puffs out the flesh and produces a sort of dilation or swelling. She spread this ointment in profusion on all other parts for her body except the abdomen and thus concealed its size as it swelled and filled out. She endured her birth pangs completely alone, like a lioness in a den, descending into the earth to rejoin her husband; she brought up secretly the male cubs that were born. There were two of them: one son was killed in Egypt, but the other visited us recently in Delphi. His name is Sabinus. Though Caesar put her to death, yet he paid the penalty for his murder when his family was totally extinguished in a short time. No act of his principate was more grim and no other gave the gods and the spirits such good reason to avert their faces. Yet the audacity and pride of her words abolished pity in the spectators and roused Vespasian to a high pitch of fury: she renounced all hope of survival and challenged him to exchange his life with hers, declaring that she had lived more happily in the underground darkness than he had on this throne' (7790D-771E).