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FIGURING THE ICONOCLAST: THE EROS OF WINE IN TWO POEMS
BY ABŪ NUWĀS AND THE *SYMPOSIUM* OF PLATO

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Ph.D., Emory University, 2010

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Abstract

FIGURING THE ICONOCLAST: THE EROS OF WINE IN TWO POEMS BY ABŪ NUWĀS AND THE *SYMPOSIUM* OF PLATO
By Christine N. Kalleeny

My dissertation is a new comparative study that examines the vital relationships among erotic desire, wine, intoxication, poetry and philosophy in the wine song of the medieval Arab poet Abū Nuwās and the *Symposium* of Plato. Through a close textual analysis of the figure of wine (*khamr*) in two of Abū Nuwās's major wine poems, I show that the wine song of Abū Nūwās can be read both as a reflection on and performance of the erotic, seductive and intoxicating experience of poetic language. More precisely, I show how wine is an 'excessive' and therefore iconoclastic 'figure' in that it violates the ideative and semantic strictures imposed by language and in so doing, eludes 'meaning.' Ultimately, I argue that Abū Nuwās's poetry indicates that intoxication is a commensurate topic of poetry since poetic language, unlike the positivistic language of philosophy, does not presume to 'satisfy' humanity's desire to know, envision, or comprehend 'truth' in its totality.' Rather, poetry celebrates the unknowable.

I then introduce the *Symposium* as a 'philosophical' lens for considering the 'anti-philosophical' strains of Abū Nuwās's wine song. Reading Plato alongside Abū Nuwās is insightful insofar as the traditions of Greek and Islamic epistemology renounce poetry and drunkenness as marginal modes of experience. Through an examination of key episodes of the dialogue, I show that the *Symposium* is an erotic dialogue whose language is like wine in that it exceeds the 'confines' of a positively philosophical vision. More precisely, I read the *Symposium* as a *literary* and *erotic* dialogue that subversively consorts with the very forms of desire—intoxication and poetry—that pose as a menace to its famous 'philosophical' paradigm. Ultimately, in staging a 'dialectic' between the apogee of a 'modern' medieval school of poetry and the fifth-century patriarch of Western metaphysics, my dissertation challenges the premise of the age-old 'quarrel' between the tradition of metaphysics, common to both Greek and Islamic epistemology, and the poetic tradition.

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Introduction

That which I took from, took from me—
By God, what wines can do!
—al-Mutanabbī[1]

The infamous libertine poet Abū Nuwās (*d.c.*814) is invariably counted, by his contemporaries and modern scholars alike, as a genius of the medieval Arab poetic tradition. His mordant wit and effervescent bravado as well as his unabashed love for wine, pederasty and all things forbidden have not only lent to his notoriety as a court poet but have made him a legendary figure in the Arab imagination. Although the vast range of his poetic repertoire reflects a verve, versatility and deftness virtually unmatched by his predecessors, Abū Nuwās is especially celebrated for his mastery of the wine poem. Trained in the Iraqi cities of Basra and Kūfa, where licentious poetry enjoyed the greatest popularity, Abū Nuwās saw the height of his career in the 'Abbāsid capital of Baghdad where he composed some of his most exquisite masterpieces of wine praise. Most scholars agree that the praise of wine,[2] which by the eighth century develops into an independent genre, reaches the height of its literary sophistication between the late eighth century and early ninth century with the emergence of the wine poem or *khamrīya* of Abū Nuwās. Considered by medieval and modern scholars to be an apogee of the 'modern' (*muḥdath*) or urbane aesthetic which privileged the highly sophisticated use of rhetorical figures known as *badī'* ('innovative') and which dismissed the *topoi* of the classical ode as archaic, Abū Nuwās's unique contribution to the wine poem consists primarily in his highly astute crafting of a rhetorical game whereby the values of religious and poetic

[1] Th. Emil Homerin, "'Tangled Words': Toward a Stylistics of Arabic Mystical Verse" in *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed., Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana U. Press, 1994), 195.

[2] The praise of wine comprised the 'boast' section of the pre-Islamic or 'classical' polythematic ode (qaṣīda) and also existed as independent fragments.

systems of thought are antagonized, violated and subverted in such a way as to sublimate and sanctify forbidden desire, often using the very religious discourse which would prohibit it.

Literary Review

My dissertation focuses on Abū Nuwās's unique poetic contribution to the wine song. More precisely, I show that Abū Nuwās's wine song can be read as a reflection on poetry itself. My dissertation opens with the following questions: Is the wine of Abū Nuwās a symbol or figure? Is it also a figure for poetry itself and, more specifically, for the intoxicating experience of poetry? These are the overarching questions that guide my close reading of the following two poems by Abū Nuwās: *Censure Me Not* (*Da' 'anka Lawmī*) and *You with the Magic Gaze* (*Yā Sāḥir al-Ṭarf*).[3]

The following studies are invaluable to an appreciation for Abū Nuwās's illustrious relationship to the ancient and sophisticated poetic tradition and thus serve as a point of departure for my reading of Abū Nuwās's wine song. In an engaging chapter of his famous book *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*[4] entitled "Ghazal and Khamrīya: the Poet as Ritual Clown," Hamori discusses the rhetorical impetus for the concomitant emergence of the love poem (the *'Udhrī ghazal*) and wine song (*khamrīya*) with the advent of Islam and the centralization of its authority. In his view, these two poetic genres convey the marginal status that the poet occupies vis à vis the religious institutions that supplanted the heroic paradigm of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda. The poet-hero

[3] All the translations of Abū Nuwās's poems cited in this dissertation are by Philip F. Kennedy *The Wine Song in Classical Arab Poetry: Abu Nuwas and the Literary Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[4] Hamori, Andras. *On The Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1974.

of the pre-Islamic model had been the image of the tribal community and the organizer of human thought and experience, so that heroism—or voluntary reckless action in face of death—, satisfied a social need for the community and provided a certain coherence to human mortality. Islam, in institutionalizing the notion of an afterlife, trivialized the values of heroism so that poetry was ravished of its 'point of orientation.' Consequently, poetic discourse became fixated on what Hamori calls "obsession" (desiring without fulfillment) that constantly tempts death; poetry thus became less action-oriented (productive) and more emotive (playful). In particular and taking Abū Nuwās's *khamrīya* as the paradigm of the genre, Hamori reads the wine song—"a permanent Saturnalia in which addiction has supplanted devotion"—as epitomizing the animosity of obsession and religion. The poet, bearing the religious stigma of a suspicious outcast as much for his vocation as for his love of wine, adopts the anti-heroic posture of a "ritual clown" overseeing an "inchoate rival religion" in which the values of "rebellion"—the desire to bargain eternal salvation for an instant of indulgence—are the new point of 'orientation'. Hamori thus sees the Nuwasian poem as "a genre of contradictions" that expresses a "constant feverish agitation" inherent to a poetics that celebrates the incoherence of non-fulfillment.

The most recent comprehensive critical study of Abū Nuwās's wine poem, Philip F. Kennedy's *The Wine Song in Classical Arab Poetry*, reads Abū Nuwās as a masterful poet whose unique contribution to the literary canon was made possible both by his keen sense of the intertextuality of the poetic tradition and the genius of his creative spirit. In this work, Kennedy details the development of the *khamrīya* genre and the distinctive thematic and structural elements that it draws from the pre-Islamic classical polythematic

ode (qaṣīda) in addition to tracing its development as an independent poem. The work aims to situate a reading of Abū Nuwās's most celebrated wine poems within a pluralistic cultural framework. The first chapter traces the wine song's manipulation of the *topoi* of the classical ode's amatory prelude (*nasīb)* and the licentious-chaste erotic registers of the love poem or *ghazal*. The subsequent chapters explore the development of the *khamrīya* in light of the predominant thematic registers of the poetic canon—*al-dahr* (time or fate), *ḥikma* (knowledge of man's ephemerality), the boastful (*fakhr*) competitive spirit of the invective (*hijā'*), and repentance (*tawba)*—which long predate its emergence and which inform the capricious and irreverent mood of wine praise. Kennedy's rigorous and refreshing analysis of Abū Nuwās's wine song reveals it to be the product of a highly-conscious intertextual craft which, through its notoriously irreverent exploitation of the structural logic and contrary thematic registers of the poetic canon, elevates the *khamrīya* to the level of a formal poetic genre.

These invaluable critical studies are principally concerned with the following: the historical conditions that have fostered the emergence of the infamous Nuwasian wine song, the poet's dexterous and innovative manipulation of the themes and generic structures of pre-existing poetic registers, and the subversive or transgressive rhetorical modes and postures with which the poet 'rejects' the poetic, religious and social values of his day. In essence, what these studies expose is the indelible fascination that Abū Nuwās's captivating genius for subversive or transgressive modes of discourse holds for students of the poetic tradition. In considering that his most studied poems are the *khamrīyāt,* one cannot help but ask: what about wine as a topic of poetry and an object of praise that lends itself to a spirit of transgression? Although the appropriateness of the

topic of wine to the spirit of rebellion can be explained by the simple fact that wine in Islam is a *kabīra* or sin punishable by eternal damnation—a topic which Abū Nuwās humorously exploits in his wine song, there is still the question of why drinking wine is a menacing action in the first place. Perhaps the marginal status of drinking wine can be explained by the following: its intoxicating and disinhibiting effect gratifies the *instant* and *instinct* of our insatiable or playful impulses; as such drunkenness constitutes at once a pleasurable detour from and an auto-destructive violation of the 'fulfillment' or 'wholeness' which the self-edifying work of metaphysics seeks to ensure.

Hamori's reading of 'Udhrī *ghazal* as a poetics of obsession (desire as non-fulfillment) indicates that even chaste erotic poetry is not exempt from the spirit of transgression. In fact, Kennedy's scholarship supports Hamori's assertion that the wine poem hijacks and radicalizes the 'obsession' latent in the 'Udhrī ghazal. In *The Wine Song in Classical Arab Poetry*, Kennedy emphasizes the "fusion" of the amatory prelude (*nasīb*) of the classical ode and the independent love poem (*ghazal*) "into single poems of a composite but cohesive texture."[5] Further on he asserts: "Seduction is one clear feature of the wine poems of Abū Nuwās. The originality of the Basran in this respect can be gleaned by observing that seduction in bipartite or even chiastic poems is not a common feature amongst the poets that preceded him, nor even among his contemporaries." [6] In counting 'seduction' or an erotic 'leading astray' as a trademark of Abū Nuwās's wine song, Kennedy affirms the critical relationship of erotics to wine. Moreover, Kennedy affirms that, contrary to the poetry of his predecessors in which the topics of wine and

[5] Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 19.

[6] Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 81.

love are merely 'juxtaposed,'[7] Abū Nuwās's poetry constitutes a fine interlacing of the Bacchic and the erotic in which "seduction" forms the "a narrative focal point." Thus scholarship on Abū Nuwās appears to affirm the following concerning the relationship between erotics and wine: first, that the themes and *topoi* of amatory poetry, in particular the chaste and licentious ghazal of the 8th Arab century tradition, form the very structure and logic of the wine poem of Abū Nuwās and second, that the metaphorical 'intoxication' of 'obsessive' love finds its proper expression in the love of wine.

Theoretical Framework

Within this critical context, but in contrast to the principal approaches of contemporary scholarship, I pay particular attention to this virtually seamless interlacing of the Bacchic and the erotic (tradition) in Abū Nuwās's poems; in fact, more than an interlacing, it is a question of identification. What I argue is first, that the erotic experience is not distinct from the experience of wine and second, that the relation to wine is itself an erotic relation. The erotic relation to wine stages a specific erotic impulse or movement. To appreciate this form of eroticism, one must pay attention to wine's particular qualities: its effervescence and its intoxicating properties.

The most apparent and elementary way in which desire and wine are linked in the wine song is the *poet's relationship to wine*. As the poet exuberantly tells us, wine is his greatest desire. As an 'object' of desire, wine seems to offer a rather reassuring representation of itself. Wine is a 'drink.' The whole reason for its 'invention' is so that it may be 'consumed.' Its age, the sole reason for which it is sealed in the vat, exists for the 'moment' of its consumption. Like wine, the 'object' of desire would merely be a

[7] "Typical of al-Walīd and even later contemporaries of Abū Nuwās is the mere juxtaposition of love and wine (…)." Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 26.

thing that the 'subject' can possess or consume. But in fact, wine in Abū Nuwās's poetry offers a far less reassuring representation. As already suggested, wine figures as the object of desire, as that which precisely can never be consumed or possessed.

To begin and as the poet indicates, one never consumes wine itself but only wine mixed with water: "A white wine forging bubbles when mixed—pearls set in gold"[8]; "So I spent the night amongst his taverns like a groom with two virgins: one water, the other wine"[9] and so on. The fact that wine has to be mixed with water is a testimony to its undrinkable *potency*. As the etymology of 'potency' indicates, the undrinkable quality of wine lies precisely in the *potentiality* of its experience; which is to say, wine promises to impart to its drinker a 'much more than' or a potential for unrestricted experience. If 'experience' denotes the kind of knowledge that is strange or unfamiliar, then *wine is in essence experience.*

Second, wine has a peculiar effervescent quality found in its bubbling. The experience of this 'drink' is effervescent. In the many poems in which the poet offers a vivid descriptive tableau of the instant in which it violently foams with bubbles as water is being poured into it, the marvelous and excessive 'dynamism' of the drink eclipses its 'drinkability,' so that what is suggested is in fact the impossibility of its being consumed or 'possessed' with any permanence since it can barely be 'contained' in the vessel. In one poem, when wine is mixed with water, it foams and erupts, causing the drinkers to sneeze. Wine is thus a strange 'object' since it appears, in the first place, not as an object

[8] From "Yā Sāḥir al-Ṭarf " ("You with the Magic Gaze"); Kennedy, *Wine Song* 263 in "Appendix B. Texts and Translations. English Translations."

[9] From "Tu'ātibu-nī 'alā Šurbi Šṭibāḥī" ("She Berates me for Taking a Morning Drink"). Ibid., 262.

but as an ebullience (its dynamism and potentiality) which can in and of itself neither be contained nor grasped.

Third and most importantly, this effervescence of wine is not only literal but also rhetorical. In the poems of Abū Nuwās, wine is a 'bubbling' figure that can no more be contained by the poem than it can be in the vessel. Like the dynamic and untamable activity of its bubbles, wine takes on a profusion of contrary figures yet no single figure seems to be able to contain or represent wine. Wine is now a virgin bride to be deflowered by her groom, now a coy gazelle with enchanting eyes. She is now an ancient spinster whose antiquity predates Adam, now the breast of the grape vine to which the poet crawls, a hungry babe to be suckled. At once, she is the light of morning and the night stars of heaven. Wine implies an amalgam of contrary or irreconcilable modes of experience. Her attributes, equally munificent, range from the sensual to the ethereal: her aroma is that of crushed musk, she has the alchemist's power to impart joy to a stone, thereby moving the unmovable; like God and the Qur'an, she transcends any similarities or equals. When light is mixed into her, she becomes irradiant. To confine wine to a single image would be, in a sense, to delimit its potentiality. Hence, wine is neither 'the sun' (*al-shams*) nor 'maiden' (*bikr*) nor 'paradise' (*al-khuld*) to name but a few of the epithets common to both Abū Nuwās's wine praise as well as the Arab wine praise genre in general but rather a presence exceeding and therefore eluding any single representation or figuration, as the poet himself indicates when he says "it is the sun, though the sun burns, and our wine exceeds it in every beauty."[10]

[10] From "Wa-Lāḥin Laḥā-nī" ("A Censurer Censured Me"); Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 266.

In my study of Abū Nuwās's poetry, I pay particular attention to this "excessive" presence of wine. Wine is excessive insofar as it is a potent and dynamic experience that transgresses the confines of representation or figuration. As a 'drink' that exceeds its representation, wine eludes the grasp of language. This elusiveness of wine can be understood literally as the effervescence of the 'drink,' the escaping of air as tiny bubbles, and rhetorically. In one particular poem in which the erotic tension informing the narrative logic of the its opening lines leads the reader to infer that the erotically violent or dissonant 'outcome' of the story is a function of wine's transgressive agency, there is little more than a trace of wine's presence. Hence, even in those scenes in which wine is neither invoked nor described, the dynamism of wine's inebriating presence is undeniably at play. In fact, wine is ever more present in the very scene of its absence. Furthermore, the elusiveness of wine in Abū Nuwās's poetry points to the elusiveness of poetry itself, its own effervescence. If in poetry, wine functions as a 'bubbling,' a profusion of figures that elude a single representation, then poetry, an unrestricted profusion of signs that eludes the grasp of any conclusive reading or interpretation, functions the way wine functions in poetry. Therefore and as I argue through a close reading of two poems, poetry is as potent, as intoxicating and inebriating as wine is.

Wine, that excessive and elusive 'drink,' is indeed characterized by its intoxicating properties. In the world of Abū Nuwās's wine song, to love wine the 'drink' apart from the experience of its inebriating property is to miss the point; for the poet, to love wine is to love the potency, that is, its intoxicating potentiality. As Hamori rightly points out, "Getting drunk was no allegorical business for Abū Nuwās."[11] Thus, my reading of the

[11] Hamori, *On the Art*, 56

function of wine in the poetry of Abū Nuwās is premised upon the acknowledgment that his celebration of wine is first and foremost the celebration of his desire for a 'drink' that has inebriating properties. In particular, I pay close attention to the experience of inebriation as it problematizes the very possibility of consuming 'wine' the 'drink.' Presumably, the one who consumes wine becomes inebriated by it. But in Abū Nuwās's wine song, the poet does so not much consume wine as he is consumed by it. As the sacred 'object' of the poet's greatest desire, wine, at the moment at which it pervades the poet's body, ceases to be an 'object' (something possessed) and is elevated to the status of 'subject.' That is to say, wine, inducing altered states of consciousness, pervades and consumes the poet's mind and body so he is no longer 'himself' but a disintegrated or dissolute self: "I love the cup even though it strips [me] of the means of living and diminishes my abundance." Wine's potency indicates not only its inability to be consumed as 'drink' but also its predacious ability to consume the one who drinks it. Wine thus *exceeds* and *transgresses* its status as a potable 'drink' thereby violating the order of relational categories or dissolving the logic that irreducibly differentiates 'subject' from 'object.' It overcomes the poet inasmuch as it exceeds and therefore eludes his ability to possess or consume it. Hence intoxication is a kind of possession whereby the 'drinker' is dispossessed of his status as an integrated subject and therefore of his ability to master the very 'drink' that consumes and possesses him. Dispossessed of the very status of 'the one who consumes', the poet cannot be satisfied or fulfilled. Thus and inasmuch as the notion of 'fulfillment' presupposes the subject's mastery over the object he desires, intoxication—that moment in which the subject is violated and assimilated by the presumable object—is the consummate experience of *non-fulfillment*

or *radical desiring*. But what does it 'mean' to desire an 'object' that the subject knows to elude his grasp and in turn consume and diminish him?

Presumably, when one desires an 'object' and cannot 'fulfill' this desire by 'possessing' or mastering the object, one experiences an unpleasant sense of dissatisfaction. This is not the case for Abū Nuwās. Rather, his desire for wine is founded on an existential paradox: he desires *that he cannot consume or master the 'drink' that he presumably consumes'*: "I have become insane for a delicate virgin who is excessively violent in the glass, headstrong."[12] Moreover, he *desires to be consumed*, knowing that wine imparts the unrestricted experience that the cycle of its own making implies. The poet thus desires wine for its 'undrinkable' quality, its violent potency and potentiality, which in turn consumes him. Wine, in consuming the poet and dissolving his sense of mastery or subjectivity, unleashes desire so that 'transgressive' or profane behavior becomes not only permissible but sacred. The moment of intoxication is the hallowed moment in which desire, voraciously unleashed, knows no 'end' or satisfaction. This strange moment of radical desiring (intoxication) is, curiously enough, a source of joy and pleasure for the poet as he indicates when he rebuts the theologian's rebuke of his drinking in saying "Cure me rather with the cause of my ill."[13] Wine is the paradoxical site of fulfillment and non-fulfillment. The poet not only wishes to be consumed by this strange experience of ongoing insatiation, his poetry is a celebration of it: "'When I die bury me by a vine whose roots can slake the thirst of my bones'"[14]; the poet so wishes to

[12] Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 34.

[13] Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 267. See Chapter 2 of my dissertation for a close reading of this poem.

[14] Wa-Lāḥin Laḥā-nī ("A Censurer Censured Me"). Ibid., 266. See "Appendix B Texts and Translations. English Translations."

desire insatiably that even death, which signifies the end point of the drama of desiring or suffering and the threshold of eternal life (ongoing fulfillment), loses its teleological 'value.' The poet's desire for wine and intoxication is in this sense the desire to be liberated from the 'value,' 'purpose' or 'meaning' found in the 'work' of metaphysics. The poet thus celebrates wine insofar as its experience, contrary to religious experience, offers an unrestricted playground of possibilities.

In my dissertation, I focus on intoxication as an experience of erotic excess or *seduction.* Intoxication is excess. Excess exceeds that which would grasp or delimit it. Excess transgresses. In transgressing and dissolving categories, excess eludes grasp. Yet insofar as it eludes grasp, excess first elicits it. Excess is therefore a seduction. In the world of Abū Nuwās, to love wine is to love its seduction. So intoxicated is the poet by the seductive quality of wine that he in turn becomes an agent of seduction. In other words, the poet, consumed and inebriated by the experience of wine—its seduction—in turn *seduces*. The 'object' of the poet's seductive activity, ranges from an explicitly erotic (homoerotic) 'object' which he describes such as the Cup-bearer (*sāqī*) to an explicitly *rhetorical* 'object,' the reader of the poem. In a seduction poem entitled *You With the Magic Gaze*, the poet, a sexual predator posturing as a chaste lover martyred by the enchanting gazelle he loves, seduces his interlocutor/homoerotic 'object' by exploiting the tormented language of chaste erotic verse as well as the language of religious proscription in an attempt to get the boy drunk and gratify his appetite for sodomy. However, whereas the boy may be the explicit 'object' of this rhetorical masquerade, the poet in fact seduces the *reader* by eliciting his or her desire to participate in the deft *poetic violation* of rhetorical conventions. Curiously, the poet's seductive appeal to the

boy (and the reader) to drink wine (on the false pretense that drinking is a forgivable sin) itself functions as a *seductive* 'invocation to the 'Muse' whereby the poets tempts the voracious appetite of wine's effeminate and numinous 'presence,' a force that, inasmuch as it consumes the poet as well as the entire poem, enables him to 'satisfy' his appetite for seduction. The movement of wine praise that ensues is so effervescent and dynamic that it ravages the narrative framework of the poem, *leading* the reader *astray* from the playful arena of the poet's subjectivity while at the same time enticing him or her with the profusion of its poetic figures. The 'close' of the wine praise sees the radical 'opening' of the inchoate and dissolute scene of wine's *apparent* absence, a timeless and placeless place where "drunkards assault drunkards" and the poet, also drunk, brutally rapes his enchanting gazelle. My reading of Abū Nuwās's poems thus emphasizes the following: first, that the poet is seducing by being intoxicated and that this seduction in turn intoxicates the language of the poem, and second, that this 'seduction' that is the experience of wine exceeds the peripheries of a single nameable or figurable 'target.'

The particular poems that I have chosen as the focal point of my research are some of the most widely celebrated and closely studied of the wine songs of Abū Nuwās. Both poems reflect in a unique way the erotic experience that is wine and ultimately, poetry itself. While many of the thematic and rhetorical dimensions of these poems may be found in other wine poems of Abū Nuwās's Bacchic repertoire, I chose these particular poems for their rhetorical sophistication and thematic complexity which in turn underscores the varied playful and seductive impulse that is the experience of wine in poetry. Both of the poems begin on a note of frustrated desire characterized by a tension or playful antithesis, followed by a spirited movement of wine praise, and finally

'conclude' with an open-ended anticlimactic release that betrays the poet's desire for non-fulfillment. *You with the Magic Gaze* (*Yā Sāḥir al-Ṭarf*), a poem that has warranted the attention of many contemporary scholars, is a quintessential seduction poem that most aptly reflects the coalescence of the erotic and bacchic that is so distinctive of Abū Nuwās's poetic achievement.[15] *Censure Me Not* (*Da''anka Lawmī*), a 'polemical' address to a Muslim Theologian who rebukes him for drinking whose infamous opening line, "Censure me not for Censure but tempts me" is commonly known to native Arab speakers, stages its circular and anti-philosophical 'polemic' as a playful performance of the temptation that is the experience of wine and poetry.[16]

Through a close reading of the descriptive and structural elements of these poems, I hope to demonstrate that wine, the 'object,' 'medium' and 'agent' of desire, is a movement of erotic *excess* which cannot be 'confined' to or 'grasped' by a single poetic figure but pervades and consumes the entire body of the poem, unleashing a profusion of contrary signs and rhetorical postures. While the poet and theorist Adonis rightly observes that wine, like poetry, is an "unbreakable chain of signifiers" a "vast crucible of metamorphoses" and further "a symbol and an indicator"[17] insofar as it assimilates the properties of contrary and irreconcilable values and in so doing liberates language–particularly poetic language—from its subservience to the strictures of the Arab-Islamic

[15] Dīwān Abī Nuwās al-Hasan ibn Hānī', ed. Wagner, vol. 3, 323-5; English translation, based on the version contained in Wagner's edition, is by Philip F. Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 66. See also Dīwān, ed. al-Ghazālī, 126-7; however, line 9 is missing from this edition.

[16] Dīwān, ed. al-Ghazālī 6-7; Dīwān Abī Nuwās, ed. Wagner, 2-7. English translation provided by Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 267.

[17] Adonis. *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*. Austin: U of Texas Press, 1990. For his reading of Abū Nuwās's wine song see Ch. 3 "Poetics and Thought," 59-62.

epistemological tradition, my reading underscores the 'negative,' elusive or non-manifest experience of wine's intoxication of language, its *seduction*. On the level of structure, I show first how a game of seduction forms the organizational or narrative 'logic' of the poems and second, that this seduction, a function of the erotic excess that intoxication implies, does not have a single 'object' as its 'target.' Further and on the level of representation, I demonstrate that wine 'reveals' itself as a figure of seduction insofar as it cannot be sustained as a coherent figure or image. Wine is a self-combusting figure: for at the moment in which it appears as 'image' or metaphor, it vanishes, splits, dissolves or is itself the site of a sacrificial violence; *meaning* implicated in the visual, ideational or intellective function of language *eludes*. Wine and its experience are iconoclastic. This iconoclasm, constitutive of the experience of intoxication itself, occurs as an uninhibited and ever-metamorphosing movement of desire. Ultimately what Abū Nuwās's wine song indicates is that wine and intoxication are commensurate 'objects' of poetic language insofar as poetic language, unlike the language of metaphysics, does not presume to *know* its 'object.' Poetry is an intoxicated language that dissolves metaphysical and moral distinctions. Poetry commemorates *the lack of* sense and signification.

Thus, the first two chapters of the dissertation forming Part I provide new readings of Abū Nuwās's wine poetry by means of the two principal poems indicated above. In light of the centrality of desire in this poetry, Part II of my dissertation entails a broadening of focus that situates the new readings of his poems within the critical but largely overlooked context of Plato's *Symposium*. Reading Plato alongside a wine poet who engages in a subversive dialectic with his tradition is potentially productive insofar as both the fifth-century century Greek philosophical tradition and the Islamic

epistemological tradition renounce poetry and drunkenness as marginal modes of experience. Chapter 3 of Part II introduces two celebrated works by Plato, the *Republic* and the *Symposium* as 'philosophical' lenses for contextualizing the 'anti-philosophical' or radical strains of Abū Nuwās's wine song. Chapter 3 begins with an exposition of Socrates' negative view of wine, drunkenness and mimetic poetry (and the vital link among these) in the *Republic* before proceeding to a critical reading of his famous philosophic speech on *eros* in the *Symposium*. Through a critical examination of Socrates' philosophy of *eros*, I challenge the irreconcilable divide that the tradition of metaphysics, common to both the Greek and Arab epistemological systems, aims to draw between itself and the ancient poetic tradition. Finally, chapter 4 of Part II reads the *Symposium* primarily as a *literary* and *erotic* dialogue that subversively consorts with the very forms of desire—intoxication and poetry—that pose as a menace to Socrates' famous 'philosophical' paradigm.

The *Symposium* is traditionally celebrated as the quintessential philosophical work on the nature of love or desire (*eros*). Precisely as a *philosophical* dialogue, its primary objective is to determine the truth about its 'object', love. Socrates, the wisest man in Athens and the 'spokesperson' of philosophy itself, will deliver the most 'philosophical' of the speeches about love. According to this philosophical vision, *eros*, a word denoting love, sexual desire and which refers to the god of love, transcends its primordial sense. Ultimately what philosophy reveals is that the truth about *eros* is the *eros* of philosophy or metaphysics.

Socrates begins by asserting that *eros* is the love of something. It is the capacity of the desiring 'subject' to enter into relationship with 'objects.' More specifically, it is

the relation of the lover who lacks to the object that he believes will 'fill' him up permanently. Desire is a motive force that seeks ongoing fulfillment. As a teleological impulse, *eros* seeks to *possess* the object that it judges to be 'good' (also 'beautiful') for itself permanently. In essence, the true object or *telos* of every human desire is ongoing happiness and eternal fulfillment found in the permanent possession of the good or the beautiful. Desire is of immortality. Yet inasmuch as human experience is characterized by finitude or flux, so desire bespeaks the finitude of its resources. Desire is a problem of time. In other words, time, itself the logic of mortality, attests to the fact that desire will find no respite from its journey towards immortality, its true *object* and the *condition* for its *fulfillment.*

As the 'solution' to this problem, philosophy urges us to speak. Philosophy prescribes *logos* (language and thought), the pinnacle form of desire and the vehicle through which humans transcend their trivial pursuits and come into awareness of the proper orientation of their desire: the True, the Good and the Beautiful. Through speech, we become aware of the insufficiencies of the 'objects' of our desire and eventually—after passing through ascending stages of erotic activity—we arrive at the realization that the love of wisdom satisfies our desire insofar as it strives to give expression to an unchanging, eternal and irreducible 'object' or 'telos.' In a sense, desiring the perfect makes perfect. Philosophy is thus a purposeful, methodical, productive and ethical labor of love that prescribes itself as the cure to the ill (desire as lack) that is its very cause and incentive. Philosophy, contrary to poetry, assumes that its language will lead to a place of fulfillment. Yet even if it does, is this a permanent state? The highest stage of the philosophical ascent is the sublime revelation of this Form to which all things in

existence are related yet which itself is related to nothing. The revelation of the Beautiful as Such is therefore a quintessentially negative experience insofar as it exceeds the status of an 'object' that can be positively conceptualized, either in thought or in speech. We are told—curiously—that *if, in this moment, it were possible* to become as one of the gods (i.e., to become immortal), *one would*. The use of the conditional here is striking. We only ever approximate the beautiful because it cannot be apprehended, either materially or conceptually. This is precisely what makes it a mystery. Moreover in considering that *eros* is itself described as a homeless or placeless in-between oscillating between modes of living and dying, knowledge and ignorance, it strikes us that so long as we live, we hunger and thirst. To cease to desire is to no longer be human. Speaking and thinking cannot make us gods; we still need bread and water to live. This too is an essential component of philosophy's lesson about desire and the reason for which Socrates exposes the falsehood of its divine status in the first place. Perhaps this accounts for why it is that the solemn conclusion of Socrates' speech is raucously interrupted by the clamorous noise of drunken revelers followed by a drunken speech that bears witness to the experience of erotic insatiation.

Lastly, there is the question of how it is that philosophy 'knows' its 'object' to exist independently of the 'subject's imagination. In Book X of the *Republic*, Socrates banishes poets from the city because (as he claims) poetry knows only images of 'objects' in the world and not the objects themselves. Moreover, he accuses poets of participating in a corrupt 'game' of imitation; in casting poetry off as a 'game,' Socrates establishes an antithesis between the 'game' (waste or vanity) of poetry and the 'work' (productivity) of philosophy. Socrates goes on to condemn poetry for gratifying the

irrational part of the soul. Hence, whereas, philosophy is ethical (its objective is the edification of the soul), poetry *has no objective*. Poetry, like wine, is the celebration of humanity's tragic failure to know, envision, or comprehend 'truth' in its totality. Just as wine induces a state whereby the drinker's morally integrated self collapses, poetry commemorates the 'falling away' from a sense of 'fulfillment' presumably found in 'knowledge' or 'understanding'; it commemorates that terrifying but inevitable motion of collapse that threatens the 'order' and 'permanence' sought by metaphysics. Poetry is a dissolute drunken body.

The *erotic* dialogue of the *Symposium* (Part II Chapter 4 of this study) proves to be of immediate and vital relevance to the study of the *erotics* of wine praise in poetry insofar as it curiously foregrounds the 'sober' activity of philosophical desire in a less than sober atmosphere of play and seduction. Narrated by a Socrates 'groupie' who did not attend the infamous all-male dinner feast-turned-drinking-fest and who moreover learned of its details from yet another devout Socrates-lover and imitator who was too drunk to remember all that had occurred that night, the *Symposium* is an elaborate second-hand report on a series of speeches offered with the intention of praising the god of sexual love, *eros*. That the feast is held in celebration of Agathon's victory as a tragedian indicates that it is a Dionysian festivity, even while the speeches are held in honor of the god of sexual love *eros* and the wine god Dionysus is mentioned only in passing. The significance of this detail cannot be overlooked given the close affiliation that the two gods have to each other in Greek thought. The flute-girl is banished from the feast and the guests agree to speak in sequential order and drink in moderation; yet a bout of hiccups brought on by too much wine disturbs the order of the speakers. Each of the

speeches delivered at the symposium reveals an ideology that reflects the speaker's particular subjective experience of love. The fact that all but Socrates had been drunk the night before invites speculation as to whether various accounts of the nature of *eros* were not themselves the craft of varying degrees of insobriety. The 'pinnacle' speech of the dinner feast, delivered by Socrates, offers a philosophical interpretation of desire that radically challenges the accounts of the previous speakers and is commonly read as the 'Platonic' conception of love. This speech is delivered (partly) as the recollection of a probably fictional conversation he had with his mysterious female teacher, Diotima, who is moreover absent from the feast. Most critical to my reading of the dialogue is Diotima's weaving of a curious myth about Eros's origin according to which *eros is identified with wine*. Finally, the dialogue 'closes' on a Dionysian note of pandemonium as the drunken party-crasher Alcibiades, dressed as the wine god, delivers an impromptu speech of remarkable wit and poignancy in which he bears witness to the tormented experience of loving the quintessential lover of wisdom, Socrates, who in light of Diotima's speech, not only bears striking resemblance to *eros* but, in resembling *eros*, assumes the likeness of wine. The philosophical dialogue of the *Symposium* would thus 'close' with a wine song: the drunken praise of a philosophic bacchant. The final yet perturbing question that remains to be explored is as follows: what separates Dionysian drunkenness from philosophical bacchanalia?

Thus and as a literary body whose narrative framework and setting is crafted and pervaded by the contrary erotic impulses that motivate and determine speech and thought (logos), the *Symposium* is as much a playful rhetorical dramatization of the erotics of language as it is a deliberative philosophic inquiry on the nature of erotic love. More

importantly, speech or thought (logos) about desire (its thematization) and in turn the *desire to speak or produce logos* is staged and performed as the 'memory,' myth or imagination of wine and its inebriating experience.

My study is thus a work of comparative literature that draws from the fields of Middle or Near Eastern studies, philosophy, critical theory, and the classics. The organization of this thesis is in two parts. Part I entitled "The *Eros* of *Khamr*: Poetic Seduction" consists of two chapters that contain close textual analysis of two of Abū Nuwās's most celebrated wine poems: Chapter 1 entitled "The Game that Never Ends" introduces a reading of an intricate homoerotic seduction poem "You with the Magic Gaze"; Chapter 2 entitled "Tempting the Theologian: the 'Cure' of Wine's Seduction" introduces a renowned mock-polemical poem "Censure Me Not" which provides a meaningful transition to a comparative reading with Plato. Part II entitled "Erotic Knowledge: Wine, Philosophy and Poetry in the Symposium" resituates Abū Nuwās's wine song against the background of one of the most significant, but generally overlooked comparative contexts for understanding his work, Plato's erotic and philosophic dialogue the *Symposium*. Chapter 3, entitled "Metaphysical Eros" examines Socrates' negative view of tragic poetry (mimetic art) and its vital connection to the erotic experience of intoxication. Chapter 4 entitled "Bacchanalian Eros: A New Reading of the *Symposium*" reads the *Symposium* as an *erotic* dialogue whose logos is like wine in that it exceeds and eludes the 'confines' of a positively 'philosophical' vision. Finally, the reading of Plato is followed by a general conclusion integrating and evaluating both sides of the issue as presented in Parts I and II. The bibliography is divided into three principal sections each of which relates to a principal field of study: first, critical

scholarship on Abū Nuwās and the Arab Tradition, next critical scholarship on the Platonic and Greek Tradition[18], and finally studies that theorize on wine and wine-drinking, drunkenness and alternate forms of intoxication.

Note on Translations and Transliterations of Arabic Text.

All English translations of Abū Nuwās's poetry in Part I are by Philip F. Kennedy, except in those instances where a more literal translation of the text is required; in such cases, I signal to the reader that I am providing a literal rendering of the text. As for the transliteration of Arabic text, I provide these sparingly and only in two cases: first, in order to highlight a special point in my analysis of a line of poetry, such as a certain symmetry or repetition, and second, in order to point out the key terms, genres and topoi of the Arab poetic tradition that inform and shape the poetry of Abū Nuwās. In keeping with the American Library Association/ Library of Congress (ALA-LC) system of Romanization, I observe the following guidelines: long vowels are represented with supercritical marks (ā, i, ū); emphatic consonants are represented with subcritical marks (ṣ, ḍ, ḥ, ṭ, ẓ corresponding to the letters ص ,ض , ح, ط and ظ); the letters *'ayn* (ع) and *hamza* (ء) are represented by ' and ', respectively; an initial *hamza* is never represented in transliteration while the initial *'ayn* is always represented. The letters Ghayn (غ), Khā'(خ), Shīn (ش), Thā' (ث) and Dhāl (ذ) are represented by the Latin digraphs "gh," "kh," "sh," "th" and "dh," respectively. The remaining letters conform to the phonetics of the Latin alphabet b, t, d, r, z, s, k, q, n, m, l, f and h. The definite article prefix (*al-*, or ال) is always rendered in the lower case regardless of assimilation rules except at the beginning of a sentence. Nisba adjectives are represented as ī rather than īy. Arabic names of

[18] Given the enormous quantity of scholarship on Plato, I have chosen to include the most recent studies of Plato's *Symposium*.

people, places and things that have an established transliteration in English are rendered as such.

Part I: The *Eros* of *Khamr*: Poetic Seduction

Introduction to Part One

Part I of my dissertation is dedicated to the close reading of two celebrated wine poems by Abū Nuwās: Chapter 1 examines *You with the Magic Gaze* (*Yā Sāḥir al-Ṭarf*) and Chapter 2 examines *Censure Me Not* (*Da‘‘anka Lawmī*). Through a close reading of the descriptive and structural elements of these poems, I show how the poet's erotic relation to wine is the primary topic of the poem and how this erotic desire for wine signifies the desire to be seduced by an erotically excessive 'object' that can neither be consumed as a 'drink' nor apprehended as an 'image' or 'figure.' The poet's desire to be consumed by the intoxicating and seductive experience of wine unleashes a movement of erotic excess which pervades the entire space of the poem, unleashing a profusion of contrary moods and rhetorical postures. My reading of the poems thus emphasizes first, that the poet is so intoxicated by the love of wine that he acts as a seducer and second,

that this activity of 'seduction,' at once 'erotic' (homoerotic) and 'rhetorical,' is namely achieved through the magical 'craft' of wine the 'drink' and the 'figure.'

On the level of structure, I show how a game of seduction forms the organizational 'logic' of the poems and that this seduction, which is a function of the erotic excess that the experience of wine implies, does not have a single 'object' as its 'target' but rather, it occurs as a game that has no end. On the level of representation, I show that wine the 'drink' 'reveals' itself to be a *figure of seduction* insofar as it cannot be domesticated or circumscribed within the 'confines' of any particular semantic value. Precisely as a figure which violates its own apprehension in images, wine and its experience is *iconoclastic*.

Through close readings of these poems, I show that and how the wine of Abū Nuwās stands for the seductive, intoxicating experience of poetry. My study of Abū Nuwās's poetry approaches the 'poetic figure' of wine from the standpoint that poetic figures, namely metaphor, violate the quotidian yet sacred 'identification' between a word and its correlate in empirical reality and create new identifications whose 'meanings' are overflowing. Thus, and just as the 'undrinkable drink' that is wine violates the metaphysical distinction between 'drinker' and 'drink' such that presumably opposed values melt into one another, so does poetic language sacrifice and dissolve the metaphysical and moral distinctions that imbue 'action' and 'desire' with meaning and purpose. In this regard, the poet celebrates poetry as that which commemorates *the lack of* sense and signification, and along with this, the collapse of 'purpose' and orientation.

The poems which I will read share a basic tripartite structure whose development hinges on the poet's erotic relation to his beloved 'drink.' Both poems open

on a note of frustrated desire; there is always something standing in the way of the poet's desire, whether it is Fate or the dogmatic decrees of religion. The poems' shared thematic overture thus turns on the problem of *desire*. Wine is the quintessentially erotic 'antidote' by which the poet is able to either 'transcend' or 'reverse' an unfavorable situation. In urging his interlocutor to indulge in wine-drinking, the poet invokes a dramatic and quintessentially 'poetic' scene in which wine 'the drink' and 'the figure' *overcomes* the space of the poem and in which we the readers are called to partake, as if in some mystery that defies apprehension. Only by means of this central, exalted space in which wine the 'drink' and the 'figure' *ferments* with meaning (a space of pure excess) does their occur a kind of magic metamorphosis that cannot be accounted for rationally: 'wine' recedes from the picture, giving way to a dissolute scene in which erotic desire roams free, unfettered by the metaphysical imperatives of its arch-nemeses; irony, paradox, vicissitude or *seduction* is the 'order' of things. Most importantly, the concluding scene is not the inchoate outcome of the poet's 'craft,' but rather, of the purely irrational, dynamic, 'uncontainable' and quintessentially 'poetic' experience that is wine.

While both of the poems I have chosen share this general scheme, each poem reflects in its own unique way the erotic, seductive experience that is wine and ultimately, poetry itself. *You with the Magic Gaze* (*Yā Sāḥir al-Ṭarf*) is a highly rhetorical seduction poem which situates the love of wine within the forbidden framework of homoerotic desire. The narrative structure of the poem is hinged on a game of antithesis, one which begins with frustrated desire (the poet is victim of insatiable desire) and ends with vindicated desire (the poet is satisfying his desire); wine-drinking is the 'apparent' means

to a happily saturnalian 'ending.' In my reading, however, I show that homoerotic desire is no more than a tragic-comic ruse, one that is subsumed within the overarching scheme of a bacchic-poetic 'seduction drama' that is staged by the poet's love for the *feminine* figure of wine. I demonstrate how the poet's *erotic relation* to this 'drink'—his desire to consume and be consumed by 'her'—unleashes a volatile movement of seduction that is as much erotic as it is *rhetorical* and that has no single 'subject' or' target,' knows no 'end' and 'gets no satisfaction.' More precisely, I show that the poet, in desiring wine the 'drink,' desires to be *immolated* by an erotic, mercurial and above all seductive impetus which violates, exceeds and eludes relational categories and which in turn permits him to partake in an unstoppable drama of seduction, wherein he can mask and unmask himself, posturing now as languorous victim now as predator satyr. The poem is thus a remarkable example of the way in which the wine song functions as a volatile seduction game through which the desire for poetry is at once vindicated and celebrated.

Censure Me Not (*Da' 'anka Lawmī*) introduces a different kind of framework for the celebration of wine, one that is at once metaphysical, ethical and dialectical and which allows for a meaningful transition into a discussion of Plato's philosophic work. The first line of the poem is the 'axis' upon which the entire structure of the poem is hinged: it takes the form of a circular, anti-polemical, and as such seductive retort to a theologian who rebukes the poet for wine-drinking. The poet defends his love for wine on the grounds that 'she' is much more than a 'drink' that can be merely consumed: as the poet explicitly indicates, wine is desirable insomuch as she is an erotically transgressive 'figure' whose meanings overflow binary values. In my reading, I show that the poet's erotic love for this figure of seduction allows him in turn to seduce the theologian by

‘unraveling’ the binary oppositions of religious proscription and defending wine by means of a circular, seductive rationale. The poet then goes on to ‘argue’ for wine’s desirability by turning his back on dialectic altogether and allowing the poetic experience of wine to ‘speak for itself’. Here I pay special attention to the strange, feminine figure of the Cup-bearer whose circular movements and erotically transgressive body together signify wine’s iconoclastic experience. The poem ‘concludes,’ once again, on a note of dissolution, as the poet mocks his censurer’s ‘so-called philosophical’ claim to knowledge. The poet’s seductive ‘defense’ of wine is thus crafted as the defense of poetic activity and ultimately of the way in which poetry ‘leads astray’ from the discursive or ‘productive’ function of language.

Chapter 1: The Game that Never Ends

1.1 Introduction

A singular poetic achievement from the point of view both of its seamless interlacing of bacchic (*khamr*) and erotic (*ghazal*) topoi and its amusing play of rhetorical devices—reflective of the highly rhetorical *badī‘ or* 'innovative' style of poetry, *Yā Sāḥir al-Ṭarf* is a sophisticated poem that has invited the fascination of many contemporary scholars.[19] The fascination lies in the juxtaposition and interplay of contrasting erotic postures and poetic moods which together form a vibrant and cohesive seduction narrative.[20] The poem may be divided into three episodes, the first and last of which form

[19] Ibid., 65-66. Regarding this poem's structure and style, Kennedy has noted the following: "This *khamriyya* exhibits the consummation of balanced form and structure in the fusion of *khamr* and *ghazal*; it is also one of the finest examples of the use of *badī‘* in Abū Nuwās—*badī‘* enhances the structure of the poem." For an original interpretation of *badī‘* poetics by means of a copious survey of the literary, theological and historical framework within which it flourishes see Chapter One entitled "A Reformulation of Badī'" of Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the 'Abbāsid Age,* vol. 13 of *Studies in Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1991).

[20] Ibid., 19. For this assertion, I am largely indebted to the astute observations made by Dr. Kennedy in the beginning of his chapter entitled "*Khamr*, *Nasīb*, and *Ghazal*," (within which he situates his reading of the poem at hand): "It is against this background that this chapter will demonstrate an important characteristic of Abū Nuwās in the celebration of wine: the fusion of elements of *nasīb* and *ghazal* into single poems of composite but cohesive texture. This itself breaks down into two features: (i) the contrast of emotions, and (ii) the narrative focal point of seduction. Both features impart to his poems a tighter structure than is discernable in either his predecessors or contemporaries. In the extent of his achievement he is unique, and can be seen to synthesize possibilities of pre-existing poetry."

a striking antithesis from the perspective both of theme and narrative logic. The narrative antithesis achieved on the level of the poem's structure is further underscored by a series of intra-linear antitheses in both the opening and concluding sections.

The first five lines draw upon the plaintive model of 'Udhrī or chaste unrequited love. The scene presents us with a tortured lover who sees himself as the enchanted victim of a beautiful, unattainable youth. Unable to win the heart of his murderous gazelle, the poet-lover seeks consolation in wine, inciting his beloved to drink with him. A long exuberant wine praise of mythic proportions follows, one in which no mention of the protagonists is made and which appears only loosely connected to the preceding lines.[21] Following the wine praise, the reader returns to the original narrative only to be met with a startling reversal: an erotic episode of the licentious variety (following the *mujūn* tradition) where the very same players—the poet and the youth—engage in debauched behavior under the surveillance of Satan (Iblīs).[22] This time, it is the poet who is in a position of mastery vis à vis his male love object (presumably he is raping him), signaling not only that a radical reversal of the opening erotic scenario has taken place, but that the opening erotic scene in which the poet appears as the victim is little more than an erotic ruse, one in which wine and its inebriating experience play a pivotal role. The drinking of wine thus appears to be the only plausible 'cause' for the narrative rift

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[21] "At first reading of the poem, one is struck simply by the dissonance between the eroticism of the beginning and end of the poem. The distinct clusters of lines are separated by a hyperbole of bacchic description in lines 7-17. Thus one can perceive three apparently unrelated sections, juxtaposed due to the conventional but loose compatibility of *ghazal* and *dhikr al khamr*." Kennedy, *Wine song*, 68. On this latter point and as Kennedy indicates, see also Andras Hamori, "Form and Logic in Some Medieval Poems," *Edebiyât,* 2 (1977).

[22] For an enlightening discussion on the literary dimension of *mujūn*, or erotic verse of the licentious variety, see Julie S. Meisami, "Arabic Mujūn Poetry: the Literary Dimension," *Verse & the Fair Sex; Studies in Arabic Poetry in the Representation of Women in Arabic Literature.*

separating the plaintive, idyllic overture and the ironic, licentious denouement: not only does drunkenness permit a reversal of erotic 'reality' but in so doing, it enacts the 'impossible reality' that is poetry. At the conclusion of the poem, the lover replies to his beloved's earnest tears with a playful retort that demands to be read also as the 'poet's' own boastful reply to the poetic and social conventions which he subverts.

Before introducing my reading of this poem, it is necessary to first consider the approaches of scholars to whom this reading is largely indebted**.** The light-hearted way in which the poet dexterously *plays* on the themes and genres of a long-standing tradition has been the focus of most scholarship. More specifically, the notable and also comic discrepancy between the opening and concluding verses has merited much commentary. In his discussion of the poem, Hamori remarks, "Always an ironist Abu Nuwas brings the ethereal and the coarse into relation. It is a comic relation…of wit, not cynicism sensitively brings to light the poet's playful wit and creativity."[23]

In her informative study on *mujūn* (licentious genre of erotic verse), Meisami shows this *khamrīya* to be a "well-constructed literary game" belonging to the *mujūn* genre, which she aptly describes as a "counter-genre which inverts the conventions of 'normative' *ghazal* and *waṣf al-khamr*." Meisami pays particular attention to the erotic dissonance between the idyllic opening and the burlesque conclusion, arguing that the poet is a "self-deprecating eiron" who "deliberately invokes 'reality' and opposes that (putative) reality to the idealism of much contemporary love poetry of both the courtly and 'Udhrī varieties."[24]

[23] Andras Hamori, "Form and Logic in Some Medieval Poems," *Edebiyât,* 2 (1977), 167.

[24] "The two segments are linked by the references to killing: in the idealized world of *ghazal* the beloved slays the lover with his/or amorous glances, so that he becomes love's sacrificial victim; in the "real world" of the tavern the drunken revelers slay each other, and the "beloved" – the gazelle with the limpid eyes – falls prey to the leaping lion." Meisami, "Arabic Mujūn Poetry," 17-19. It is the allusion to

Kennedy reads the poem as a sophisticated example of what he considers to be one of Abū Nuwās's most prominent literary achievements, the "*khamrīya* as seduction scene." Concerning the poem's outstanding poetic features, Kennedy makes the following assertion: "The *khamriyya* exhibits the consummation of balanced form and structure in the fusion of *khamr* and *ghazal*; it is also one of the finest examples of the use of *badī'* in Abū Nuwās—*badī'* enhances the structure of the poem."[25]Kennedy gives the most detailed and lengthy analysis of the poem's logic, topoi and use of 'innovative' (*badī')* rhetorical devices, paying particular attention to the integral use of *antithesis* (*ṭibāq*) and metaphor, two rhetorical features which underscore the erotic logic of the poem.

Expanding upon Meisami's "Ideal" vs. "Reality," Noorani reads the opening and concluding sections of the poem as enacting a tension between the "suffering of everyday life" (which he eloquently describes as a condition of "impotent enthrallment") and a transcendent reality (drunkenness) permitted only by the liberating experience of wine.[26] Noorani focuses most on the pivotal role that wine plays in this literary game of seduction: wine permits entry into a Dionysian world where the poet can become one with Fate, a world wholly liberated from the strictures of social and moral conventions. His reading suggests not only that wine is desirable insofar as it *permits* the reversal of erotic states (it allows him to satisfy a predatory appetite for a beautiful youth), but that wine is itself the site of erotic experience in all the range of its vicissitudes.

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killing which, in Meisami's view, links the idyllic overture (reflecting the courtly chaste tradition) to the concluding section (which reflects the burlesque style of the licentious tradition).

[25] Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 65-66.

[26] Yaseen Noorani, "Heterotopia and the Wine Poem in Early Islamic Culture," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36 (Aug. 2004): 345-366.

Drawing upon the above scholarship as well as Baudrillard's theory of seductive discourse[27] and Bataille's theory of sacrifice ritual[28], I propose to read this poem in terms of a sophisticated seduction 'game.' Like Noorani, my reading places special emphasis on the erotic experience that wine permits. Indeed, on the narrative plane, wine the 'drink' functions as a medium through which the thinly veiled predatory scheme (of the opening lines) is brought to fruition. Yet in my reading, I show that wine functions as much more than a 'medium' to an erotic end or a 'drink' that enables the seducer to achieve erotic satisfaction when inebriated by it; moreover, I show that wine functions as more than a thematic pretext for subverting literary conventions.

Through a close analysis of the rhetorical logic of the poem, I show, rather, that the primary *erotic* relation of this 'seduction' poem is not the relation between the plaintive poet-lover and his beloved but rather the relation between the poet-drinker and his beloved 'drink.' More specifically, I show that (and how) the poet acts as a seducer by means of *his* being seduced by wine's 'poetic' experience. At the heart of this 'seduction drama,' one finds the self-overflowing and iconoclastic 'rationale' of wine the 'drink' and the poetic 'figure.'

1.2 Erotic-Poetic Subtext: 'Udhrī love.

The poem opens with a supremely crafted homage to the *fantasy* of the poet-lover of the 'Udhrī ghazal (chaste love lyric). In order to appreciate the significance that this subtext holds for the overall seduction scheme of *Yā Sāhir al-Ṭarf*, it is necessary to consider briefly the erotic paradigm that it upholds. Contemporary scholars generally

[27] Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans., Brian Singer (New York: New World Perspectives, 1990).

[28] Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans., Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

agree that two schools of love poetry emerge out of the polythematic ode (*qaṣīda*) in the seventh century: the *'Udhrī* (chaste love lyric) and the Ibāḥī (literally "permissive," erotic or licentious verse). Kennedy has shown that the wine poetry of Abū Nuwās owes much to the legacy of these two schools: on the side of the 'Udhrī ghazal, Jamīl-Buthayna and on the side of the Ibāḥī school, 'Umar ibn Abi Rabī'a.[29]

In his famous chapter entitled "The Poet as Ritual Clown[30]," Hamori examines the rationale behind the concomitant emergence of the 'Udhrī *ghazal* and the Nuwasian *khamrīya* (wine poem) in the wake of Islam. According to Hamori, the spread of Islam gave way to the dissolution of tribal values and by extension, the pivotal role that tribal ethos allotted to the poet; this meant that the poet became a 'marginalized' figure rather than a tribal hero whose existential insights (via poetry) provided a balanced view of the world in face of the hardship of desert life. The tremendous changes in world view brought on by the institutionalization of Islam thus led to the emergence of a more subjective, emotive and imbalanced or 'obsessive' type of poetry.[31] In his study, Hamori pays particular attention to the 'Udhrī *ghazal* of Jamīl-Buthayna and the Nuwasian *khamriyya* as examples of this 'obsessive' or anti-heroic type of poetry as he considers both types to be symptomatic of the "incompatibility of obsession and religion"; however, he does suggest that the tension between these two is more pronounced, if not altogether flagrant, in Abū Nuwās's wine poem. The study is particularly helpful for the appreciation of the erotic logic that shapes the wine-seduction poem.

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[29] "The most significant development in *ghazal* in the Umayyad period are represented by 'Umar b. Abī Rabī 'a on the one hand and the 'Udhrī poets on the other." Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 22.

[30] Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arab Literature* [Princeton: Princeton University, 1974], 31-77.

[31] Ibid., 41.

The word ‘Udhrī refers to a Bedouin tribe by the name of Banū ‘Udhrā from the region of northern Hijāz.[32] The poet-lovers of this tribe are reputed to have suffered anguish, melancholy, madness, even death out of devotion to their unattainable beloveds. According to this convention of chaste erotic fixation, the poet-lover indulges and exalts the suffering of ongoing erotic non-fulfillment, such that he falls in love with this very condition of deprivation. Indeed, seldom does one come across a study of the ‘Udhrite poetry that does not emphasize the vital connection that it forges between desire and loss. According to Seyed-Gohrab, “Separation, suffering and death were indispensable parts of ‘Udhrite love, so that the tribe gained a great reputation as a ‘people who, when they love, die.’”[33] Badawi describes the poetry of ‘Udhrites as “composed in tremulous language of unusual transparency, revealing great emotional intensity” in which the lover ‘yearns’ for “a highly idealized woman placed far beyond his grasp, who inspires in him a love which may lead to madness or death.”[34] Hamori eloquently characterizes this love as “a poetry of faithful, chaste, and debilitating passion for unattainable objects.”[35] Of the ‘Udhrī poet-lover, he says, “There is no coyness or irony about the destructive power of love.”[36]

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[33] Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn. Love Madness and Mystic Longing in Nizāmī’s Epic Romance*, ed. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, vol. XXVII of *Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures* [Boston: Leiden, 2003], 66

[34] M. M. Badawi ‘Abbasid Poetry and its Antecedents,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: ‘Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, edited by Ashtiany, J., (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1990), 153.

[35] Hamori “Love Poetry (ghazal)” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: ‘Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, edited by Ashtiany, J., (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1990), 205.

[36] Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, 44.

The beloved of the ‘Udhrī is typically a virginal maiden who, for reasons of tribal honor codes, is prevented from marrying her lover; often forced into a marriage of noble status by her family, she manages to preserve her virginity out of fealty to her lover. Seyed-Gohrab explains that the virginal and honorable constitution of the beloved elevates her to “the level of transcendence” such that she “becomes the ideal of womanhood.”[37] The beloved may be described as passive, virginal, chaste, and always unattainable. Seldom described in terms of her physical attributes, she is venerated as the object of a spiritual desire, a motivation for and object of elevated longing. It is for reasons of the ethereal quality of this relationship that many studies have viewed ‘Udhrī love as exemplifying the Platonic conception of love. Poets and mystics of the Sufi tradition drew inspiration from this erotic relationship, regarding the ethereal Beloved as God and man as the Lover.

It is above all the beloved’s *unattainable* character, extolled by the lover as a spiritual ideal approximating the Divine, which is cause for the poet’s excessive love or madness. Seyed-Gohrab explains, “Paradoxically, as the poet-lover elevates the character of the beloved to a spiritual level, his yearning for her intensifies. As she is taken further from his grasp, partly due to the lover’s own idealism of her, the lover becomes madder.”[38] A well-known example of this is the legend of Majnūn and Laylā: Majnūn’s passion for the unattainable Laylā (married off to another man) is so debilitating that he becomes mad, wasting away in the wilderness and singing only of his love for Laylā in the form of verse, a fact which alienated him further from society.

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[37] Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn,* 65.

[38] Ibid.

The ‘Udhrī poet-lover plaintively languishes for *want* of his beloved, who, in *her sovereign elusiveness*, is the very *figure* of erotic joy or plenitude. So renowned are the ‘Udhrī poets for their zealous devotion to their beloveds that their own names are conjoined to the names of their elusive feminine idols: Jamīl-Buthayna (he loved Buthayna), Kuthayyir-‘Azza (he loved ‘Azza) and Majnūn-Laylā (literally “Mad” for love of Laylā). The hyphenation of these names powerfully indicates that the poet’s identity is vitally intertwined with that of his beloved. Indeed, for the poet, the beloved is *life.* With regard to Majnūn and Laylā, Khairallah explains, “Love is life itself. This is a central point in the Dīwān as well as the tradition it represents. From this point of view, remoteness from the beloved becomes equivalent to separation from one’s own soul.”[39] Since the very ‘selfhood’ of the ‘Udhrī lover is predicated upon the beloved’s requital of his desire, the beloved is the site of incommensurable joy and suffering. Not unlike the figure of Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*, the lover finds himself oscillating between existential poles. As Khairallah states, “Mağnūn’s fortune in life is determined by his relation to Laylā. Depending upon their union or separation, he fluctuates between happiness and sadness, health and illness, reason and madness, life and death.”[40] If the beloved’s remoteness is cause for the lover’s ‘self’ to perish, her presence—whether in the form of body, voice, or script—is cause for his resuscitation. Majnūn’s existential dependence upon Laylā is evident in the following verses:[41]

When I touch her, my hand all but becomes dewy

[39] As‘ad E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Mağnūn legend*. (Beirut, 1980),73

[40] Ibid., 74.

[41] The verses I cite on this page are quoted both in Arabic and English by Khairallah.

and green leaves grow upon its tips. [42]

They blame me for (loving) Laylā, and yet if after its dessication,
my corpse were nursed by Laylā, it will be fresh again.[43]

The figure of the beloved thus occupies a site of existential paradox; her absence is a life-threatening disease (of the poet) for which her presence is the sole remedy:

For Laylā's love I treat myself with Laylā /for wine a drunkard
treats himself with wine. [44]

The excess or the zeal of the lover's desire in the face of his beloved's elusiveness is what lends to this poetry an erotic fatalism, one that betrays flagrant irreverence for the values of Islamic life. Rather than 'coping' with or 'mastering' erotic loss in heroic fashion[45], the 'Udhrī fixates on his loss, indulges it, becomes consumed by it, such that he is annihilated by his own desire. The poet-lover's attitude towards his own plight may thus be characterized as the tortured coupling of gloomy fatalism and fiery masochism. For Hamori, Jamīl's indulgence in the suffering of unrequited love is as much a function of destiny or fate as it is a matter of will: "In Jamīl's ghazals, the lover often complains about his destiny, but also embraces it, in an amor amoris."[46] Thus and according to Hamori, "obsession" (or what I refer to as the *desire for erotic non-fulfillment*) displaces the motif of death "as it constantly threatens to lead to death."[47]

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[42] Khairallah, *Love, Madness,*74.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 76.

[45] As a solution to his suffering over a lost love, the poet-hero of the traditional ode or qaṣīda would often cut the cords of his love before trekking into the wilderness.

[46] Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, 43.

[47] Hamori, *On the Art*, 44.

For Khairallah too, love and death are intimately tied; Majnūn's yearning for Laylā is the yearning for "self-annihilation": "chastity is just the beginning of a process which ends by a complete negation of physical existence…The more Laylā approximates an absolute spiritual presence, the more she becomes an utter physical absence."[48] The beloved's 'absence' in turn arouses in the poet a desire so reckless that he tempts his own mortality.

In the world of the 'Udhrī lover, there is no life—nor even *afterlife*—without love. But to love is also to *perish* at the threshold of the unattainable (the beloved). The lover, believing that he is *fated* to be *consumed* by his longing for the unattainable object, imagines that he is dispossessed of his very 'self.' This condition of death or absolute deprivation is then a condition of *otherness*, both in the sense that the lover is *possessed* by desire for the unattainable other (beloved) and in the sense that he is dispossessed of his 'self' and his 'life.' Hence life and love for the 'Udhrī lover takes the form of death (the quintessential 'other), death signifying authentic reality since martyrdom at the hands of his beloved is a condition which he believes to be *preordained* for him by Fate.

It is in this experience of death (signifying the lover's erotic lack) that the reflexive nature of the relation between the 'Udhrī lover and the beloved is discernable: for if the lover is *dying* for *want* of his beloved, or the one who would presumably fill his lack, it is because she *is herself absent, elusive, unattainable.* As Khairallah explains, "chastity is just the beginning of a process which ends by a complete negation of physical existence…The more Layla approximates an absolute spiritual presence, the

[48] Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry*, 77

more she becomes an utter physical absence."[49] The object of the lover's desire (or that which would fill the lover's lack) and yet continually beyond his reach, the beloved may be called a figure of loss, a figure of absence. In this sense, she functions as a mirror of the poet's own lack, his 'dying', his own physical and figurative 'absence' (madness). Rather than an erotic ideal, or that which would fill the poet's lack (bring him to life), the 'ideal' and 'perfect' beloved would then be no more than an *erotic imposture*; for in fact, her *absence* functions as the mere *reflection* of the poet's own desiring, *his erotic lack*. For this reason, we find that the poet's desire grows so ardent in the wake of the beloved's absence that he would rather experience this love or desire (his lack) than be united to her. One might even say that the lover's desire for the 'ideal' beloved is tantamount to *his desiring desire or lack*, since she is continually eluding his grasp. It is thus the lover's own erotic 'lack' or loss that is idealized and celebrated in this poetry.

A famous verse by Jamīl-Buthayna, considered by medieval scholars to be the consummate achievement of chaste erotic verse, summarizes the existential paradox of the 'Udhrite sensibility: "My ardour dies when we meet and revives when we part."[50] In a moment of poignant lucidity, the poet identifies his love for Buthayna to the experience of being separated from her; just as his love (desire) is ignited and intensified by the condition of separation, union (or consummation) with Buthayna signifies the death of this love. The poet's separation from the beloved, a fate for which he endures agony and despair, provides a paradoxical jouissance insofar as it permits and intensifies not only his desire for the beloved but the aesthetic awareness of this desire. In essence, the true

[49] Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry*, 77

[50] Hamori "Love Poetry (ghazal)" in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: 'Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, edited by Ashtiany, J., (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1990), 205.

'love' of Jamīl is his 'love'—a desire that burns with no respite and that can only ever be expressed as a poetic paradox, for only in poetry can loss find its redemption.

Khairallah argues that the "poetic daemon" was a "source" of Majnūn's love and that for him, love or madness served as "pretexts for poetry." As an example of this, he cites an anecdote about another famous 'Udhrī poet-lover Kuthayyir-'Azza: "In answer to a woman who denigrates him, saying: 'God has demeaned you since he made you known only by the name of a woman,' meaning 'Azza, Kuthayyir says: "God has not demeaned me. By her, my reputation has been enhanced, my life matters were enlightened, and my poetry became powerful.'"[51] Thus maddened, slain, martyred by his desire or lack, a *deficit* which he continually *projects* or *mirrors* as the ideal of the unattainable beloved, the 'Udhrī lover is a 'poet' to the degree that he is *eluded* and *seduced* by the object of his desires. Poetry is then for him the sublimation of his inexorable erotic suffering, his ongoing erotic non-fulfillment or seduction.

1.3 **The Reading: Yā Sāḥir al-Ṭarf**

The Immolating Gaze of Seduction

The plaintive amatory overture (the first five lines) of *Yā Sāhir al-Ṭarf* draws its inspiration from the topoi of the 'Udhrī *ghazal* and the courtly tradition that follows it; as such it is as much a supremely crafted homage to as it is a deft parody of the *fantasy* of the tradition of chaste erotic love. As I hope to show in this reading, the 'Udhrī fantasy —what has been called by Meisami the 'ideal'— will itself prove to be the site of a thinly veiled seduction scheme, a scheme that not only reflects the urbane trends of the mujūn (licentious) genre but one that is ultimately a function of the poet's erotic relation to

[51] Khairallah, *Love, Madness*, 66.

wine. More specifically, I will show that the chaste or 'ideal' erotic overture of this poem so pulsates with the seductive resonance of wine's intoxicating experience that more than a subversion of poetic convention, it may be considered as the poetic enactment of wine's playful, seductive activity.

Colored by a mood of languor and ethereality, the scene opens with a rapturous address to a youth whose gaze is so magic that it has the uncanny power to penetrate and divulge the secrets of the heart:

1. You with the magic gaze, eternally languid, secrets held close in the heart
   are drawn out by your eyes.
2. When you examine a hidden feeling of mine with your look, candour whispers
   the secret.
3. Your eyes stare and secrets come clean, as if you have power over fancies.

يا ساحرَ الطَرفِ أن الدهرَ وسنانُ سرُّ القلوبِ لدى عَينَيك إعلانُ
إذ امتنحتَ بطرف العَين مكتتَماً نجاك من طَرفهِ بِالسرِّ تِبيانُ
تبدو السرائرُ أن عيناك رنَّقتا كأنما لك في الاوهام سلطانُ

So penetrating, so violating is the 'eternally languid' charm of the beloved's eyes that the poet, divested of his power to guard his innermost desire and therefore his ability to master himself, imagines himself as an erotic victim of an unjust slaying:

4. Consider us both: You have rent me to pieces, though you yourself are bare
   of the garment that Fate has made me wear.

ما لي و ما لك قد جزَّأتَني شِيَعاً وَأنتَ مِمَّا كَساني الدَّهرُ عُريَانُ

More than an unjust slaying, the poet considers the violence committed against him as assuming the proportions of a religious sacrifice:

5. I see you work to kill me unavenged, as if to kill me is an offering to God.

أراكَ تَعمَلُ فِي قَتلِي بِلا تِرَةٍ كأنَّ قَتلِيَ عند الله قُربانُ

As in the ‘Udhrī ghazal both fate (*al-dahr*) and fatalism play a defining role in the relation between the lover and the beloved. In lines one and four, the poet-lover plays on the rich connotations of the word *al-dahr,* a word whose meanings range from “Fortune,” “Fate” and/or “calamity” to “Time”(in the sense of ages) and “Eternity; in so doing, the poet aligns the power of Fate/Fortune and Time with the otherworldly sovereignty that his beloved exerts over him.[52] In line four, the poet-lover describes his beloved’s eyes as “eternally languid,” thereby aligning the enchantment of his beloved with the transcendence of Time**.** Further, in line four, the poet-lover strongly suggests the complicity between the erotic agency of Fate (*al-dahru*) and his beloved:

> Consider us both: You have rent me to pieces, though you yourself are bare
> Of the garment that Fate has made me wear.[53]

Stripped of his self-mastery, his physical and moral integrity (he is being “rent to pieces”), the poet-lover imagines that he has been forced—by a cruel twist of *Fate* (“ad-dahru”)— to wear the ‘garment’ of a scapegoat, a ‘garment’ that the beloved is himself free from wearing. Since it is the poet-lover alone who is the victim of Fate, the poet and his beloved stand opposed to one another: the poet-lover, in stating, “ما لي و ما لك” (literally: “What I have and/versus what you have”) calls attention to the stark contrast between himself and his beloved. In the first hemistich of the same verse, he suggests the opposition between his ‘passive’ role and the ‘active’ role of the enchanting youth: in “You have rent me to pieces” (جزأتني شيعا), it is the beloved who is the subject of the verb ‘rending’ and the poet who is the one being rent (signified by the object pronoun

[52] Edward W. Lane. *An Arabic-English Lexicon* Part 3 (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), ‘dahr.’

[53] The word ‘garment’ is implied by the verb to ‘dress,’ as in ‘Fate dresses him (in a garment).’

(ني). In the second hemistich, Fate is the subject of the transitive verb كساني while the poet's passive role is once again indicated by the object pronoun ني. Thus both Fate and the youth play an 'active' role vis à vis the poet, indicating that the youth's powers of enchantment are intimately linked to Fate's power to deprive the poet of erotic fulfillment. The 'active' role shared by Fate and the beloved youth is underscored by the fact that both the youth (signified by "You") and Fate (signified by *al-dahru*) take the nominative case: وانت مما كساني الدهر عريان while the poet's self is indicated in terms of the accusative; that is to say, he is no more than the passive recipient of the youth's act of violence.

The 'garment' of Fate in line 4 is emblematic of the polarity or antithesis that summarizes the erotic relation between the poet and his beloved and ultimately accounts for the poet's suffering. On the one hand, there is the beloved youth (the homoerotic object) who presumably stands for all that which would presumably 'fill' the poet's lack. "Bare" of the garment that signifies the agonizing condition of desiring endlessly, the youth is the very figure of erotic plenitude, thus occupying a position of transcendence. On the other hand, the poet, wearing the garment that Fate (and by extension the boy) has condemned him to wear, is the quintessential body of death. So elusive is the object of his desire that the poet, utterly consumed by this condition of lack that he is helpless to change, imagines the youth's erotic plenitude as a violent menace not only to his happiness as a desiring being, but to the continuance of *life* itself. Neither able to master his desire nor secure his own fulfillment, the poet, in the manner of the 'Udhrī martyr of love, *imagines* that he is being sacrificed, stripped to non-existence: "You have rent me to pieces" and "I see you work to kill me unavenged."

Presumably the erotic tension or antithesis between the poet and his love-object would be reconciled through consummate union. Yet the poet here capitalizes on a well-established motif of what I refer to as the desire for non-fulfillment (chaste erotic 'obsession' as Hamori calls it), according to which the union between the erotically 'deficient' lover and his 'munificent' beloved signifies the extinction of (the poet-lover's) love or desire. Hence we find that in these opening lines, the poet-lover so desires the unattainable or transcendent character of the beloved (in lines 1-3 he invokes the 'gaze' as something at once pervasive and elusive) that in fact he *desires* the debilitating condition of unsatisfied longing, a *condition of erotic antithesis* which, in the words of Hamori "constantly threatens to lead to death." The poet-lover's 'death' at the hands of the perfect beloved is then a *desirable* condition, though he complains of it, blaming the beloved's cruelty: "I see you work to kill me unavenged, as if to kill me is an offering to God." The relation between the poet-lover and his beloved can thus be described in terms of the very erotic paradox that informs the 'Udhrī paradigm: the poet-lover *desires* the condition of erotic antithesis, or *the condition of being seduced*, that is cause for his own moral and physical undoing.

Furthermore and as discussed in the introduction to this reading, there is latent within this fantasy of erotic *antithesis* (the fantasy of the desire for seduction or amor amoris) a *relation of reflexivity*. Regarding the 'Udhrī paradigm, I have previously asserted the 'munificence' or 'transcendence' of the beloved functions as a veil or mask for her 'elusivity,' 'absence' or 'lack'; that is to say, insomuch as the beloved is continually beyond reach, absent, unattainable, she is as much a *figure of lack* as the lover who is dying for want of her. As such, the beloved, rather than a figure of erotic plenitude,

would be the mere reflection of the poet's own deficiency, of his *desiring*. The beloved would thus function as the lover's idealization of his own desire or lack, his *amor amoris*.

In *Yā Sāhir al-Ṭarf*, the reflexive quality of the erotic relation between the 'Udhrī poet-lover and his beloved is made visible in the sacrificing gaze of the seductive youth. This reflexive function of the gaze can be first gleaned in the opening apostrophe in which the poet states that "secrets of the heart" (سرُّ القلوب) are made manifest (إعلانُ) by the beloved's magic gaze. In the third verse, the poet claims that the boy's stare reveals his secrets (أن عيناك رتَّقتا تبدو السرائر), as if he had "power over fancies"(كأنما لك في الاوهامِ سلطانُ). In line four ("Consider us both: You have rent me to pieces, though you yourself are bare of the garment that Fate has made me wear"), the boy's searching, immolating gaze is one that transgresses the categorical boundaries of subjectivity while itself remaining transcendent, impassible or indecipherable (he is 'bare' or untouched by Fate); as such, the gaze reflects the poet's own failure to either satisfy or transcend his self-consuming desire, and consequently, [reflects] his sense that his 'self' has been "rent to pieces" or destroyed. The otherworldly power of the beloved youth thus lies in his ability to draw out the poet's inner desires with his eyes, *reflecting* what should be hidden or interior as apparent and exterior; it resides in the *power of his gaze* to divulge the poet's most profound desire, thereby revealing the poet's *lack*. As Noorani observes:

> The initial idealization of the beloved is brought on by the constraint and suffering of everyday life, the state of separation. The beautiful youth signifies everything the poet wants to have and to be *but cannot*. The youth's form is the *image of desire*—his eyes expose the 'secret of hearts,' the taboo interiority imprisoned within the self.[54]

[54] Noorani, "Heterotopia and the Wine Poem," 357.

Here Noorani asserts that the poet-lover's idealization of the beloved is conditioned by the everyday condition of erotic non-fulfillment. Moreover he asserts that the youth's form is the very "image of desire" insofar as "his eyes expose" the interiority of the poet's self. What Noorani here suggests, albeit implicitly, is that the youth, insomuch as his *eyes* expose the poet's desire (or his lack), becomes himself the *image* of this erotic *lack.* The hyper-violating gaze that 'rends' the poet's very being to 'pieces' thus functions as a *mirror* of the poet's lack (desire) or condition of erotic non-fulfillment. For this reason I would like to emphasize that it is the *gaze* of the boy that is the very site of the poet's deprivation or torment and that operates as the very "image" or *icon* of erotic non-fulfillment.

Herein lies the paradox inherent in this metaphor of 'seeing': presumably, the gaze, which here presides over the erotic tableau, implies the ability of an autonomous subject to 'see' and ultimately apprehend or possess an object in empirical reality. In so doing, the subject would be the master not only of that which he desires but of his 'self,' since it is by the transcendence of his will and action that he would apprehend the object. That is to say, the object, subordinated to him, would become assimilated to him, thereby 'fulfilling' him or filling his 'lack'. Yet, in this poem, the gaze functions as precisely the opposite: it functions as a dividing principle, a principle of tension and *antithesis***;** inasmuch as it exposes or 'reveals'(سرُّ القلوبِ لدى عَينَيك إعلانُ) the poet's erotic lack, the gaze corresponds to the gulf that separates the poet-lover from the 'object (the youth) that would 'fulfill' him. Paradoxically, it is insomuch as it dangerously dissolves the boundaries of the desiring subject's 'self' that the gaze is an icon of antithesis; the

youth's gaze transgresses the boundary separating the poet from his object such that the poet loses mastery over his desire (his 'secret') and subjecthood (his mastery as a desiring subject) is destroyed ('rent to pieces').The tyranny of the youth's 'magic' gaze thus summarizes the reality of the human condition, a reality in which 'lack' is never filled, in which the object of our most profound desires is always tenuously reached or just beyond our reach.

It is thus that *Yā Sāḥir al-Ṭarf* opens with the 'Udhrī idealization of erotic deprivation according to which the poet-lover imagines his own fateful destruction at the hands of his unattainable gazelle. In indulging in the fantasy of his own destruction (that is, his erotic deprivation), the poet exalts the condition of *being seduced*. As I intend to demonstrate, it is within this metaphysical framework of chaste erotic *seduction* that the poet reveals himself to be a predatory seducer.

In line 5, the poet capitalizes on a conventional 'Udhrī topos according to which the plaintive lover's state of erotic deprivation is elevated to the status of a religious martyrdom:

I see you work to kill me unavenged, as if to kill me was a sacrifice to God.

أراكَ تَعمَلُ فِي قَتلِي بِلا تِرَةٍ كأنَّ قَتلَيَ عند الله قُربانُ

Imagining himself ("*I see* you…") as the scapegoat (*qurbān*) of a ruthless seduction, the poet accuses the youth of making a mockery out of his erotic torment. Not only does the boy deny him his love, he does so with a *will* to destroy him—and without the slightest regard for the implications of his crime: "I see you work to kill me unavenged." As if the relentless slaying of his lover was not criminal in its own right, the poet complains that his beloved does so *as if* this *gratuitous* violence were a religious sacrifice, a

prescribed violence hallowed with religious significance: *as if to kill me was a sacrifice to God.*

Underpinning this analogy is the tension between Fate (*al-dahr*), the agent of the condition of erotic antithesis, and God (*Allāh*) who is the site of self-completion and fulfillment. To better appreciate this opposition, one must return to line 4 ("Though you yourself are bare of the garment that Fate has made me wear"); here the poet makes it explicit that the youth is an accomplice of Fate since he alone is exempt from the cruel condition of longing. Hence, it is insomuch as he is the agent of Fate that the boy 'works' to 'kill' the poet or to deny him the experience of fulfillment. Taking the logic of this analogy further, if the youth is the accomplice of Fate, he is also in opposition to God, who is the quintessence of erotic plenitude. Thus what the logic of the sacrifice analogy of line 5 indicates is that the youth is guilty on account of denying the poet an experience of erotic fulfillment found only in God. What the sacrifice analogy further suggests is that the coy beloved, in 'sacrificing' his lover, makes of 'sacred violence' little more than an erotic game. According to this erotic game, the youth *gratuitously* slays the lover (that is, he *deprives* the poet of fulfillment) in a criminal or profane gesture *cloaked* in *sacred* significance: "…you work to kill me…*as if* to *kill* me was a *sacrifice* to God"; that is, according to the poet, the youth commits a criminal action (denying him fulfillment) all the while *appearing* to perform a religiously sanctioned act, an act according to which violence has a transcendent function. By the terms of this analogy, the youth would be the high priest of a slaying which would reconcile him to God (thereby rendering him as blameless) while the poet-lover would be a "qurbān," or that figure of death which bears the burden of the sacrificer's iniquity, thereby bringing the sacrificer and God to

proximity. In comparing the youth's merciless glance (which slays the poet) to an act of religious sacrifice, the poet calls attention to the outright irreverence of the youth's erotic cruelty while eliciting pity for his own victimization.

Yet a closer examination of the logic of sacrifice ritual helps to uncover something sinister and subversive at play in the poet's simile. If the boy's criminal killing can be compared to a spiritually transcendent gesture (a religious or sacred act), then the victim must too be a *sacred* vehicle for this transcendence; for the ritual of sacrifice—whether pagan or monotheistic—depends precisely on the *interdependence* (and identification) of the one performing the sacrifice and the 'sacred' offering. As Girard asserts in his important sociological study on sacred violence, *Violence and the Sacred*: "Because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him—but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed."[55] According to Girard, just as the sanctity of the scapegoat is dependent upon the criminal nature of the killing (and by extension, the criminality of the one who performs the sacrifice), the criminality of the killing is dependent upon the sacred character of the scapegoat. Here Girard brings to light the *counter-logic* of the sacrifice paradigm by highlighting the *interdependent* or *reflexive* quality of the relation between the one performing the sacrifice and the scapegoat, a relation which might appear to represent an *antithesis*. According to this counter-logical relation, the one who kills, while appearing to be in a position of power or transcendence (he is destroying the other), is in fact wholly subservient to the object of his killing since it is the victim's life that sanctifies the act of slaying it; by the same logic, the victim is sacred insofar as he is being sacrificed**.** Returning to the poem: if the beloved is an

[55] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 1.

erotically 'transcendent' being (hence 'ideal') because he is able to destroy the poet-lover, this is because the poet-lover, the one presumably destroyed (he is the 'qurbān'), makes this transcendence possible.

The sacrifice simile is significant insofar as it affirms the erotic *interdependence* and therefore *identification* between the sacrificed lover and his cruel beloved. More specifically, it indicates that the dividing principle separating the immolating seducer (the erotically ideal) beloved from the immolated seduced (the poet-lover who lacks) is an *erotic imposture.* For rather than constituting a relation of erotic antithesis (the lover who lacks vs. the beloved who lacks in nothing), the immolator-scapegoat/seducer-seduced relation constitutes a chiasm, a mirror which lays bare the flux or caprice of erotic subjectivity. The poet-lover is as erotically powerful as the beloved who presumably seduces him since *it is by virtue* of the lover's status as erotic victim (*qurbān*) that the beloved can be called a seducer. By the same logic, if the beloved's rending eyes function as a mirror of the poet's erotic deprivation, they betray the *imposture* of the beloved's own erotic plenitude (an attribute that enables him to 'seduce' the poet) since he can do no more than 'reflect' the poet's desiring: "secrets held close in the heart are drawn out by your eyes."

The poet-lover affirms his status as a seducer in the first hemistich of the sacrifice simile: "I *see* you work to kill me unavenged, as if to kill me was an offering to God." In claiming to 'see' the youth killing him (أراكَ) or sacrificing him to God, the poet counterbalances the sacrificing 'gaze' of the seductive youth with an erotic voyeurism that undermines his status as a victim. Rather than the victim or object of the boy's violent agency, he is an erotic *subject* who takes pleasure in crafting the image of his

own destruction. Thus it is in imagining or "seeing" himself as the sacrifice offering ("I *see* you work to kill me..") of the youth with the 'magic gaze"—that is, imagining himself as the one seduced by the other—that the poet-lover indicates his own status as *seducer*. For ultimately, it is in 'seeing' or imagining himself as the *poetic figure* of the *qurbān* that the lover, *immolated* at the hands of the youth, in turn *immolates* the youth's (and Fate's) erotic supremacy, and in so doing *vindicates* his own erotic power or his power to seduce**.** This is true both in the context of the poem's chaste amatory overture and for the wine poem as a whole, since it is by means of the sacrificial violence induced by wine the 'drink' and the 'figure' that a 'reversal' of the poet's unfavorable erotic fate is effectuated.

The sacrifice simile not only enacts an erotic seduction on the narrative plane, it enacts the predatory seduction of *poetic* activity as a whole. In drawing attention to the erotic interdependence between the seducer/sacrificer and the seduced/sacrifice, the poet-lover underscores his *rhetorical authority* as one through whose 'magic' craft erotic reality can be reversed or transmuted. As one who sacrifices his very 'self' to the seductive power of poetic *figures* (i.e. the poet makes of his 'self' the figure of sacrifice), the poet indicates the power of poetry to 'sacrifice' conventional notions of 'reality' and in so doing, craft alternate spaces wherein the impossible is rendered possible and the transgressive is rendered permissible. Thus the new 'reality' achieved by poetic figures is one which comes *at the cost* of the epistemological distinctions that form the basis for 'understanding' or giving 'meaning' or 'sense' to everyday existence. Moreover, the simile functions so as to 'sacrifice' the metaphysical divide between the sacred and the profane and in so doing, 'sacrifice' the transcendent function of religious activity. In line

4, the near-chiastic pattern involving the word "qatlī" (قَتلِي or "killing me") suggests an identification between the illicit killing ("to kill me unavenged") of the youth and the sanctioned killing of religious sacrifice ("to kill me was an offering to God"):

أراكَ تَعمَلُ فِي قَتلِي بِلا تِرَةٍ كأنَّ قَتلِي عند الله قُربانُ

I see you work *to kill* me [*qatlī*] unavenged, as if to *kill me* [*qatlī*] was an offering to God

By this logic, the *capricious* activity of Fate —a function of the boy's seduction— is *identified* with the prescribed activity of religious sacrifice, for which violence has the *transcendent function* of liberating the self from the hold of desire and death. In conflating erotic 'game' or seduction with the positivist or ethical 'work' of religion, the simile reduces religious sacrifice to a gratuitous expenditure of violence, an erotic game, an *activity with no claims to moral transcendence*. In essence, the simile *preys upon* the 'logic' of religious sacrifice so as to liberate the reflexive 'game' inhering in its ritual from its metaphysical framework**.** It is thus that the simile points not only to the flux and capricious quality of erotic subjectivity, it points to the menace that poetic activity as a whole poses to the ontological distinctions that form the basis for metaphysical principles.

As I will show, this simile bears critical weight for this poem insofar as its 'seductive rationale' simulates the 'rationale' of wine's intoxicating experience, a counter-logic which demands the expiation of sense, the immolation of categories, the sacrifice of oppositions, distinctions, and therefore the claim to knowledge as a whole. In short, 'wine's seduction' is the site of an erotic and rhetorical sacrifice. Significantly, the simile immediately precedes the climactic moment in which the poet will conjure the 'self'-consuming experience of wine as the very means of seducing or leading his love

interest astray from any possible oneness with 'God.' Here the poet abuses his role as a 'qurbān' in that he aims to separate the boy from God by persuading him to drink wine on false pretenses. To appreciate the significance that the figure of the *qurbān* holds for wine's intoxicating experience, one must pay special attention to the transgressive, sinister, violent, self-immolating and therefore self-affirming 'rationale' of seduction.

The Erotic and Poetic Vendetta: Wine's Indomitable Seduction.

A fixed destiny weighs on seduction. For religion seduction was a strategy of the devil, whether in the guise of witchcraft or love. It is always the seduction of evil – or of the world. It is the very artifice of the world. Its malediction has been unchanged in ethics and philosophy, and today it is maintained in psychoanalysis as the 'liberation of desire.'— Jean Baudrillard.[56]

Line 6 sees a climactic transition between the erotic narrative overture and the wine praise proper that is to occupy the veritable heart of the poem.

غادِ المُدامَ و إن كانتْ محرَّمةً فالكبائر عند الله غُفْرانُ

6. [So] drink the wine though it is forbidden for God forgives even grave sins.

As a 'solution' to his inability to attain the object of his desire, the poet shall command the boy to drink wine on false pretenses: wine is not a grave sin punishable by eternal damnation; rather it is a sin forgivable by God, who forgives all sins.[57] The poet's critical

[56] Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 1.

[57] While the legal tradition of Islam strictly prohibits wine-drinking on the grounds that it is an unforgivable sin (*kabīra*), it is important to note that the Qur'ān itself treats the drinking of wine (*khamr*) with greater ambivalence. According to Kueny's illuminating study on the role of wine in early Islam, "the Qur'an condemns wine only when consumption takes place in contexts deemed unsuitable or inappropriate; the prohibition is hardly unconditional or absolute." Kathryn Kueny,*The Rhetoric of Sobriety: Wine in Early Islam,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 1. Kueny observes that only one passage in the Qur'ān (Sūra 5:90-91) unequivocally condemns wine-drinking as a *rijs* or "abomination"; a more ambivalent position is found in Sūra 2:219-220 where wine and gambling are declared to cause more harm than benefit (indicating that neither is completely evil). In Sūra 4:43, the experience of drunkenness, along with the activities of sexual intercourse, urinating and defecating, are considered as a defilement only when they interfere with the activity of prayer. Other prominent images of wine occur within the context of apocalyptal signs and the abundant rewards of the after-life; regarding the latter, paradise overflows with

imperative to drink, the very means by which he will 'satisfy' his desire and 'reverse' Fate, is thus premised upon a subversion of the logic of the religious prohibition. It is here that the poet unequivocally reveals himself to be the seducer or the one who will lead the boy as well as the reader astray from the metaphysical paradigm that foregrounds the erotic 'sacrifice' of the opening lines. Contrary to the logic of religious prohibition, the logic of wine-drinking sees the 'sin' or transgressive activity of wine-drinking as restoring the self to an originary state of being, a condition preceding, exceeding or surpassing that of everyday existence. This is indicated first by the total absence of the rhetorical device of antithesis from the wine praise section of the poem and second by the placeless and timeless (mythic) character of wine. It is thus that the wine-drinking framework dangerously supplants the religious framework (God as the ultimate Good) introduced in the opening lines of the poem.

Drawing upon Baudrillard's theory on the 'discourse' of the seducer, I will show that (and how) the erotic-poetic 'presence' of wine enacts a volatile and violent seduction which, although conjured by the poet-lover (by means of his imperative to drink wine), far surpasses the limits of his intention or 'craft.' In a chapter entitled "The Ironic Strategy of the Seducer," Baudrillard reads Kierkegaard's *Diary of the Seducer* as a paradigm for the chiastic-erotic 'dialectic' that occurs between the masculine seducer and the feminine 'seduced.' He begins by making the assertion that the source of any seductive activity is to be found in the innocent and natural allure of the feminine love interest: "The seducer by himself is nothing; the seduction originates entirely with the

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rivers of wine (Sūra 47:15 Muhammad) and Muslims may drink to their heart's delight (Sūra 76:14-21 al-Insān), as the wine of paradise does not induce intoxicating effects (see Sūra 56:18-19 al-Wāqi 'a and Sūra 37:45-47 al-Sāffāt).

girl."[58] In *Yā Sāḥir al-Ṭarf*, the innate seductiveness of the poet's effeminate and *homoerotic* love interest is not only responsible for igniting the desire of the seducer, it is responsible for his demise as an autonomously desiring being. Unable to master his own desire, the poet conflates the cruel agency of Fate with the languid enchantment that this unassuming creature perhaps unconsciously wields over him with his 'candid' or earnest look.

Further Baudrillard asserts that the calculated artifice of the seducer is the *mirror* of the natural charms of the one being seduced: "The calculated seduction mirrors the natural seduction…"[59] As I've discussed earlier, this chiastic symmetry can be gleaned first in the simile of line 4 which subtly points to the poet's own status as a seducer and further in line 5, in which the poet unabashedly takes the initiative to seduce and ultimately slay the boy through the mediation of drunkenness. Furthermore, this mirroring activity that describes the calculated seduction of the poet is itself a parody of the boy's seduction: "The calculated seduction mirrors the natural seduction, *drawing from the latter as from its source*, but all the better to eliminate it."[60] An example of this parodying is in line 4 where the magic gaze of the boy (the site of his seduction) is mirrored or counterbalanced by the 'seeing' of the poet-lover ("I *see* you work to kill me unavenged…), who himself assumes the role of seducer in claiming to be an erotic victim. Thus the chiastic, mercurial and therefore volatile 'logic' of seduction which Baudrillard describes demands that the presumable victim (the man taken by the innate charm of his feminine seducer) vindicate his erotic mastery by means of a calculated

[58] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 99.

[59] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 99.

[60] Ibid., emphasis added.

ruse. In this poem, the poet-seducer will do so by devising an *artificial* vendetta that subverts the *natural* seduction of the boy. In commanding him to drink wine on false pretenses and in so doing, lead him astray from the very religious framework that would justify his chaste impenetrability, the poet assumes the role of a libertine seducer whose cunning *rhetorical seduction* is the calculated parody of the boy's languid physical allure.

In the following passage, Baudrillard introduces two overarching yet intertwined oppositions that call for a more critical examination of the erotic scheme of the poem.

> The seducer's calling is the extermination of the girl's natural power by an artificial power of his own. He will deliberately undertake to equal or surpass the natural power to which, in spite of all that makes him appear as the seducer, he has succumbed since the beginning. His strategy, his intention, and *destination* are a response to the young girl's grace and seductiveness, to a *predestination* that is all the more powerful because unconscious, and that must, as a result, be exorcized. [61]

On the one hand, one finds the antithesis between the natural, innate charms of seduction (unconscious, unaware, innocent) and the artificial, strategic scheme of the seducer and on the other hand, there is the antithesis between Fate (nature, 'predestination' in Baudrillard's terms) and the 'artificial' 'Destination' of Seducer. The seducer (the poet) who claims that he is being 'rent to pieces' by the candid, almost ineffably natural enchantment of his love-object, devises an artificial scheme through which he will reclaim his erotic mastery. How he does this is critical to an appreciation of the way in which the erotic and bacchic scheme is seamlessly identified: he not only devises an artificial construct in which he postures as languorous chaste lover *('Udhrī*), but in the spirit of Dionysian appetite, he resorts to the seductive agency of wine as a means of

[61] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 99.

reversing the power distribution. Wine is thus the erotic and rhetorical antidote to the supreme power that nature exerts upon the desiring self.

For Baudrillard, nature (and by extension, Fate) cannot have the final say over the seducer; a reversal of power achieved through erotic sacrifice must be in order**:**

> The final word cannot be left to nature: this, fundamentally, is what is at issue. Her exceptional, innate grace (which, like the accursed share, is immoral) must be sacrificed by the seducer, who will seek with all his skill to lead her to the point of erotic abandon, the point at which she will cease to be a seductive, that is, dangerous power.[62]

Thus the strategy of the seducer is to exorcise himself from the fate exerted over him by the charms of the boy. In the case of this poem, the poet vindicates his authority through the mediation of the intoxicating experience of wine. By the end of the poem, it is clear that the drinking of wine has 'sacrificed' the initial chaste erotic scheme, making a reversal possible: just as he had been 'rent to pieces' by his enchanting gazelle, it is now the poet who is rending the very physical and moral being of his 'seducer' in what appears to be an act of brutish homoerotic rape.

Hence, the logic of the sacrifice analogy in line 4, which sees the killing of the innocent as the sacred medium through which desire is made whole, is inverted in this moment of theological seduction: *now wine is the profane medium, the "qurbān," through which erotic gratification and therefore reversal is achieved*. The poet can do nothing without the medium and experience of wine since it is in persuading the boy to drink wine, and by the same gesture, invoking wine's effervescent presence (both as drink and rhetoric), that the poet is able to satisfy his desires.

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[62] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 99. Parenthetical Added.

In view of this, the imperative to drink may be compared to a kind of occult conjuration, a "black magic" through which the feminine, malleable, capricious force of wine is invoked: "It (Seduction) awaits the destruction of every godly order, including those of production and desire. Seduction continues to appear to all orthodoxies a malefice and artifice, a black magic for the deviation of all truths, an exaltation of the malicious use of signs, a conspiracy of signs."[63] For Baudrillard, the feminine is the very site of seduction's reversal and flux: "This is where seduction and femininity are confounded, indeed, confused. Masculinity has always been haunted by this sudden reversibility within the feminine."[64] More than this, it maybe regarded as an invocation to the muse of poetry itself. For it is upon urging his 'beloved' to drink on false pretenses that the poet effectively conjures the effervescent movement of poetic activity that, although constituting a radical interruption of the narrative logic of the poem, permits the very reversal of that logic. Baudrillard's use of the word "conjuration" with respect to the rhetorical activity of seduction is particularly evocative in this context for it expresses the 'magical' and subversive authority with which the poet reverses his erotic 'reality': for it is by the very counter-logic of seduction—in this case, persuasion on false pretenses —that the poet conjures or renders present the seductive cosmology of wine. That is, in tempting the boy with wine, the poet effectively performs the magical and seductive power of wine's inexhaustible and unstoppable profusion of signs and figures. The movement of wine praise he invokes is itself the 'drowning' out, the deluge that drowns out the 'logic' of the narrative framework.

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[63] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 2.

[64] Ibid.

Nevertheless, if it is true that our wine poet has the power to 'conjure' and 'tempt' the Muse that is wine as a way of bringing his artificial seduction ruse to fruition (i.e. immolate or deflower the innately charming seducer), it is also true that he is himself subject to the 'tragic' immolating powers of his own carefully crafted mise-en-scène; that is to say, the artifice of the seducer, who in the context of this poem conjures wine as the means of sacrificing his enchanting love interest, is in turn foiled and *exceeded* by the sacrificial and seductive strategy (wine) he invokes; for this reason, Baudrillard explains that "…the seducer cannot claim to be the hero of an erotic master plan; he is only the agent of a process that goes far beyond him."[65] What Baudrillard's reading implies is that insomuch as seduction constitutes erotic expenditure—a 'game' of desiring that has no 'end' (i.e. purpose) and that moreover 'exceeds' the 'will' or intent of its players such that the players become 'victims' of the game—seduction can be called 'anti-heroic' or 'tragic'; at the same time, the seducer *desires* to be destroyed by the 'tragedy' of his own invention: "Doesn't the seducer end up losing himself in his strategy, as in an emotional labyrinth? Doesn't he invent that strategy in order to lose himself in it? And he who believes himself the games' master isn't he the first victim of strategy's tragic myth?"[66] Yet and as we shall see, it is precisely this 'anti-heroic' spirit—this desire to be consumed or destroyed by a force greater than one's will —that is the single most striking feature of the Nuwasian wine-seduction poem. The wine poet *is anti-heroic* by virtue of his *desire to be consumed or 'sacrificed' by the 'drink'* he praises. This 'reckless' will to 'die' or

[65] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 100.

[66] Ibid., 98.

this fixation on self-debilitating objects is a trait common to the 'anti-heroic' traditions of the 'Udhrī *ghazal* and the *khamrīya.* [67]

Thus both partisans of the seduction game—the poet and the boy—are prey to the indomitable powers of the erotic play they participate in: "Though completely 'rational,' they [the lovers] are still only the instruments of a larger fate, of which they are as much the victims as the directors."[68] Never does Baudrillard's reading seem more apparent than in this poem; for if line five reveals the poet, now immolated by his presumable seducer, to be as much the seducer as the boy (for he is in fact a mirror of the boy's seduction), by the close of the poem, the reverse is true: the charming languid gaze of the boy, endowed with an innate seduction, will be immolated by the sexual appetite of the now-seducer. Even more intriguing and as the ensuing wine praise movement reveals, both the poet and his erotic 'victim' will be together immolated by the inebriating potency of wine; that is to say, the protagonists of this seduction drama effectively disappear from the space of the wine poem, as if literally 'consumed' by wine.

Seduction thus takes on the mythic proportions of a ritual sacrifice: explicitly linking seduction with sacrifice, Baudrillard states, "Seduction now changes its meaning. Instead of being an immoral and libertine exercise, a cynical deception for sexual ends (and thus without great interest), it becomes *mythical* and acquires *the dimensions of a sacrifice.*"[69] In the context of this poem, the ritual and therefore gratuitous violence of the seduction game is one and the same as the sacrifice of intoxication, a fact which is

[67] Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, 40.

[68] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 98.

[69] Ibid., 99, emphasis added.

confirmed and performed by the overall structure of the poem. In drinking wine to get drunk, the participants of the seduction game—the poet and the boy— sacrifice their self-mastery and also their narrative subjectivity to the liberating powers of this 'excessive' and therefore 'undrinkable' (indigestible) drink which in turn permits the reversal of erotic states. As I hope to show in the ensuing section of this reading, the experience of intoxication occurs as a quintessentially *rhetorical* or *poetic* movement (the wine praise proper**)** which interrupts and therefore 'sacrifices' the narrative premise of the poem; in so doing, the wine praise movement 'expiates' the metaphysical framework (which says that wine and homoerotic desire are sins) that foregrounds the erotic antithesis presented in the opening lines.

The Journey of Wine's Excess: Poetry in Motion.

Movement is the figure of love, incapable of stopping at a particular being, and rapidly passing from one to another.— Georges Bataille.[70]

The exuberant movement of wine praise that ensues, occupying the very crux of the erotic 'narrative,' constitutes a sudden radical break from the opening narrative framework, a kind of *ekstasis*. The uncontainable or 'undrinkable' quality of wine is indicated in the very first line of wine praise:

صفراءُ تبنى الحَباب كُلَّما مُزجت كأنَّه لُؤلُؤٌ يتلوه عِقْيانُ

7. A white wine forging bubbles when mixed—pearls set in gold.

[70] Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939.* Vol. 14 of *Theory and History of Literature* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press], 1985, 7.

The bubbling of wine is a hallmark of wine's elusivity, its 'undrinkability.' That its bubbling is compared to pearls, the conventional figure for the poetic sign in Arab and Persian tradition, is particularly significant since it indicates that wine's effervescence is above all rhetorical in nature.

From here the reader is transported by an impassioned 'hagiography' of wine: a numinous yet also sensuous cycle of experience that moves unstoppably through time and space:

كانتْ على عَهْدِ نوحٍ في سَفينَته ... من حُرّ شَحْنته والأرْضُ طوفانُ
روحٌ فجُثْمانُها دنٌّ ومِلْفَعها ... قارٌ ومِعْجَرُها ليفٌ وكتّانُ
فلم تزَلْ تعجُم الدُنْيا وتَعجمُها ... حتّى تحيَّرها للخِبْء دِهْقانُ
فصانها في مَغارِ الأرْضِ فأختلفتْ ... على الدفينة أزْمانٌ و أزْمانُ
ببَلْدَةٍ لم تَصلْ كَلْبٌ بها طُنُباً ... إلى خِباءٍ ولا عَبْسٌ وذُبْيانُ
ليست لذُهْلٍ ولا شَيْبانِها وَطَناً ... لكنّها لبَنى الأحْرار أوطانُ
أرْض تبَنّى بها كِسْرَى دساكِرَه ... فمَا بها من بَنى الرَعْناء إنسانُ
وما بها من مِشَمّ العُرْب عرْجَفةٌ ... ولا بها من غِذاءِ العُرْب خُطّبانُ
لكنْ بها جُلّنارٌ قد تفرّعها ... آسٌ وكلّله وَرْدٌ وسَوْسانُ
فإن تنسَّمت من أرواحها نَسَماً ... يَوْماً تنَسّم في الخَيْشُوم رَيْحانُ

8. She [the wine] was on the Ark in Noah's time—most noble of his shipment
   Whilst the Earth was awash.
9. A soul incarnate in the vat, cloaked in pitch, veiled in palm-fibres and linen.
10. Experienced of and by the world, until a noble Persian chose to hide her away,
11. Preserving her in the depths of a cave—age upon age visited her entombed.
12. In a land to which Kalb had not been, with their ropes and their tents, nor
    'Abs nor Dhubyān
13. Not a land of Dhuhl nor Šaybān, but a land of the Banū Aḥrār,
14. A place where Kisrā built his palaces, free from uncouth bedouins—
15. No thorny Arab foods there, no bitter acacia leaves!
16. Rather there was pomegranate blossom, streaked with myrtle, garlanded
    with roses and lilies.
17. If you breathe of its spirit, [the fragrance] of basil reaches into your nostrils.

That wine was on board Noah's ark in the age of the great deluge is a testament to its sanctity and nobility. The reference to the deluge is also striking in that it points to the rhetorical 'deluge' that is the wine praise movement itself. Just as the earth was awash by a deluge of water, so is narrative 'logic' intoxicated by wine's poetic seduction. A soul 'hidden' and 'enshrouded in palm fibers and linen' (line 9), wine is experienced—mysteriously—by the whole of civilization (line 10). As if pointing to the reflexivity and interdependence between numinous wine and the civilization that has cultivated it, we are told that this soul (the wine) *does not cease* (*lam tazal*) to experience and be experienced by the world (line 10). Wine is a microcosm of the vicissitude of human experience as a whole. Yet unlike human life, which deteriorates with the passage of time, the passage of age upon age is what lends to wine its supremely sacramental status; for only the passage of time permits nectar to ferment such that it is transformed into an intoxicating drink. For this reason, wine's experience of and by the world is an unstoppable motion of reflexivity: the world, desiring to consume it, is itself consumed by it. *Wine is the effervescence of experience*. Then a noble Persian hides her away in the depths of the earth where she is visited by the ages (line 11). Again, there is a sense in which the spirit of wine cannot be contained either in the vat or in the depths of the earth.

The next five lines describe the land where she is hidden, a kind of mythic paradise devoid of Bedouin traces and with a distinctly Persian quality. More specifically, wine's 'home' is a mythic land where the Zoroastrian ruler Kisrā or Chosroes (in the Greek), built his palaces and where the 'tribe' of noble men ("Banu Aḥrār") reside. The reference to the mythic ruler of the Zoroastrian *Avesta* underscores wine's mythic, sacred character, one that long predates and transcends the Islamic prohibition of its experience.

That it is a Persian noble and not an Arab Bedouin who is the 'guardian' of wine bespeaks wine's poetic nobility: it is a drink to be enjoyed by a certain class of aristocratic distinction, much in the same way that the craft of composing poetry was considered at this time as the privilege of the few. The 'Persian-ness' of wine is thus evocative of wine's ideal and elite character.[71]

In last two lines of the wine praise, the space of wine is described as a sensuous place reminiscent of a Persian garden; it has a 'spirit' that exudes the fragrance of basil. The effect that the wine praise has on the reader is such that he or she is taken out of his/her own personal range of experience into a paradisal timeless and placeless space which is not static in its own right but rather, moves through time and space with a momentum of its own. The poet, perhaps transported along with the reader out of himself, is manifestly 'absent' from or consumed by those exalted descriptive moments. The one who conjured the erotic and rhetorical 'magic' of wine, the presumable 'subject' of the poem, appears to have been consumed, sacrificed by the drink or 'object' he presumably consumes. The reader is left to imagine that the boy and the poet are getting drunk as the space of the poem is intoxicated with a deluge of figures: wine is an effervescent soul or spirit, a feminine 'being' that can barely be contained either as liquid in a vessel or as a 'body' enshrouded and hidden in the cave; she is a munificent presence that 'exceeds' the bounds of the space that would contain or delimit her; as if to enact the

[71] Much debate has stormed surrounded the question of the poet's *shu'ūbī* or anti-Arab sentiment; for an interesting survey of the positions taken by scholars as well as a challenge to the conventional assumption that the poet was a *shu'ūbī*, see Albert Arazi, "Abū Nuwās Fut-il Šu'ūbite?" *Arabica* 26 (1979). While it is not my purpose to discuss the poet's political views and the way in which it may or may not color the *waṣf al-khamr*, I do find the poet's propensity for everything Persian fascinating from a poetic-literary standpoint; rather than betraying Abū Nuwās's *shu' ūbī* or anti-Arab sentiment, it is plausible that the poet's mockery of the Arab way of life in favor of a culture (Sassanian) reputed for its exaltation of wine-drinking only signals his resistance to the Arab-Islamic prohibition of wine.

unstoppable cycle of erotic experience, she offers herself to the world just as the world partakes of her. She is a sensuous being with her own particular intoxicating fragrance; 'she' not only transcends specifities of time and place but assimilates and conjures mythical spaces, thereby affirming her status as a poetic presence proper. Wine is then not only the 'drink' which makes altered states in the body-mind possible but she is the 'poem' which can reverse or 'alter' the reality of a particular representation. Wine is in this sense the nemesis of the 'gaze' and also of Fate, both of which stand for the desiring self's failure to apprehend the desired object.

At once functioning as a narrative 'rift' (interruption) underscoring the stark disparity between the opening and closing scenes of the poem and a 'crux' through which the ill fate of erotic experience is reversed, wine signifies a passage—a quintessentially *poetic* space—capable of reversing the narrative logic of a particular episode without participating in that logic. Precisely as the *eruption* of figures that *interrupt* and *exceed* the confines of narrative 'logic,' the wine praise not only simulates the 'undrinkable,' effervescent quality of wine, it simulates the overflowing, violent, *iconoclastic* character of poetry itself. The wine praise moment is thus a critical moment in the poem, for it is here that the very nature and function of poetic activity is identified with the intoxicating experience of wine.

The Ultimate Iconoclastic Reply or 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being'… Drunk.

…there is no poetry without eros, without a healthy dose of paganism—without, as Blake put it, being of the devil's party.—Andrew Frisardi[72]

[72] Andrew Frisardi, trans., *Giuseppi Ungaretti: Selected Poems* [New York, 2002 Farrar, Straus and Giroux], xxi.

In stark contrast to the ceremonious wine praise immediately preceding it, the final five lines of the poem present the reader with a dissolute scene of erotic depravity and violence for which the intoxicating effects of wine appear to be responsible.

يا لَيْلَةً طلعتْ بالسَعْد أنْجُمُها فبات يقْتِك بالسكْران سكْرانُ
بِتْنا ندين لإبليسٍ بطاعته حتى نعَى اللَيْلَ بالناقوس رُهْبانُ
فقام يسحَب أذيالا منعَّمةً قد مسّها من يَدي ظُلْمٌ وعُدْوانُ
يقول يا أسَفى و الدَمْعُ يغلِبه هتكتَ منّي الذي قد كان يُصطانُ
فقُلْتُ لَيْتٌ رأى ظَبْياً فوثَبَها كذا صُروفُ لَيالى الدَهْر ألوان

18. O night when the stars rose with good omen, when the drunkard assaulted the drunkard,
19. We passed the time obedient to Iblīs, believing in him, until the monks Sounded the night's death knell (i.e. sounded the monastary bell at dawn)
20. And [a young adolescent] left, dragging his delightful robes which I had Touched with my iniquitous behaviour,
21. Saying, "O woe!" as tears overcame him, "You have torn away from [me the dignity] I had preserved."
22. I replied, "A lion saw a gazelle and lunged at it; such is the variety of Fate's vicissitudes!"

The reader may observe that a striking narrative reversal has taken place: the poet, who, in line five offers his unattainable beloved a drink of wine in the hopes of getting him drunk, now possesses the boy in the barbarous manner of a hunter killing his prey. The turn of events leaves little room for doubt that the murderous gaze of the coy gazelle, whose magic gaze enchanted the poet to the point of immolating him, has now been foiled by the rapacious powers of wine's inebriating experience.

The 'signs' of the initial seduction scene (lines 1-4) are abused or subverted. Rather than a realm of 'seeing' it is a realm of Night. The 'candid' gaze of the beloved is obscured by a night of auspicious stars ("Oh night when the stars rose with good omen); the stars in turn oversee the violent activity of men for whom the drinking of wine has beclouded consciousness ("the drunkard assaulted drunkard"). Apart from the casual

mention of the drunkards, no explicit reference to the wine is made. The scene is described as a kind of underworld presided over by Satan (*Iblīs*), the 'high priest' of an alternative erotic 'sacrifice.' The ritual sacrifice to God (line 4), a figment of the lover's poetic imagination, here occurs as an unmitigated act of homoerotic rape. The apparently haphazard mention of the monastary bell that resounds at dawn, so bringing the poet's hedonistic activity to a close, draws our attention to the sheer profanity of the erotic act while at the same time signaling a flagrant disregard for the order of Time.

As the 'young adolescent boy' drags his robes behind him in an effort to leave behind the scene of his shameful debauchery, the poet—in the spirit of *fakhr* ('boast' topos) boasts that he has touched these robes with his 'iniquitous behaviour.' When confronted with the earnest tears his gazelle sheds over the loss of his moral integrity, the predator cheekily retorts that Fate has worked in the favor of the hungry lion. The final lines of the poem that follow the central or pivotal elite 'journey' (رحلة) of wine praise thus form a libidinal and startlingly 'light' conclusion to the ethereal and plaintive paradigm of courtly love presented in the opening lines of the poem.

The final transparently brutal act of sodomy would then qualify as a final stop of the seductive journey: erotic consummation, and presumably, 'satisfaction.' Yet it is precisely this transparency that is so unnerving, so obscure. Meisami has discussed this poem in terms of the opposition between the real and the ideal: the initial amatory overture representing an erotic and poetic 'ideal' and the concluding licentious episode representing the 'real.'[73] I would like to argue that the poet's rape-seduction of the boy

[73] Meisami's understanding of 'real' conjures a realistic, urbane tavern scene where drunkards fight one another; by contrast I see the 'real' as a parody of 'reality' (i.e., a Saturnalian world—already excessive and therefore poetic); hence there is no moment in this poem that is devoid of poetic play and parody (for even the chaste paradigm of the opening lines is parodic).

and mirthful reply to the boy's tearful complaint is almost too brutal, too 'real' to constitute 'reality.' It would seem rather as a hyper-reality, a travesty not merely of the poetic reality of chaste love lyric but of the erotic 'reality' of the baser human instincts as well. For here the poet introduces an erotic framework that is still very foreign to human experience: the animal world, a world, which as Bataille argues in *Theory of Religion*, is "like water in water," a world of "immanence," a world devoid of metaphysical consciousness or awareness of ontology. Whereas man lives in the world with a consciousness of his ontological supremacy vis à vis the natural world, a world which he seeks to exploit as a 'tool' that would ensure his continuity, the animal has no awareness of the difference between 'itself' and the world it lives in. Man, who fears his own mortality, and wills to transcend it, sees himself as alien to the animal, who, moving in the world 'like water in water' has no consciousness (and thus no fear) of death. So alien is this animal world to the human consciousness, Bataille argues, that it appears *poetic*.[74]

Thus in alluding to a world where lions pounce on gazelles, where appetite has primacy over 'will' and 'action,' and where the wheel of fortune overturns the metaphysical consciousness, the poet indicates the imposture of metaphysical 'reality' or a reality that lays claim to ontological and moral transcendence. Rather and in the spirit

[74] "The immanence of the animal with respect to its milieu is given in a precise situation, the importance of which is fundamental. […]: *the situation is given when one animal eats another* […]There is nothing in animal life that introduces the relation of the master to the one he commands, nothing that might establish autonomy on one side and dependence on the other…That one animal eats another scarcely alters a fundamental situation: every animal is *in the world like water in water*." Bataille, *Theory of Religion,*17-19. Regarding what he calls the "poetic fallacy of animality," Bataille states, "Nothing…is more closed to us than this animal life from which we are descended…but animal life, halfway distant from *our* consciousness, presents us with a more disconcerting enigma. In picturing the universe without man, a universe in which only the animal's gaze would be opened to things, the animal being neither a thing nor a man, we can only call up a vision in which we see *nothing*…Or rather, the correct way to speak of it can *overtly* only be poetic, in that poetry describes nothing that does not slip toward the unknowable." Ibid., 20-21.

of Dionysian oneness, the poet affirms that the 'animal' consciousness is the authentic order of being.

Nevertheless insofar as the animal world is alien and in that sense 'poetic' vis à vis human consciousness (we do after all 'think' our being'), the concluding erotic episode is itself too 'opaque' or 'poetic' to constitute an 'end' to the poet's seduction. This opacity, this 'seduction' disguised as animality or 'reality' is further brought into relief by the obscurity of the narrative framework: it is Night, drunks are slaying drunks, and Satan is the insidious high priest of this gratuitous act of perfidy. Both the opening and the closing lines, therefore, prey upon a kind of reality, draw pleasure (*jouissance*) in exploiting its 'truth.'

From the point of view of narrative 'logic' and 'context,' the pornographic act that forms the ironic 'denouement' of the poem can be said to be wholly 'gratuitous' or 'arbitrary', much like the "vicissitudes of Fate" to which the poet cheekily alludes. For the 'conclusion' to the seduction story constitutes a defiance of the narrative dictates of the poem's logic as a whole and therefore of the notion of 'logic' as a whole. That is to say, the fact that the experience of drunkenness would be responsible for a fortuitous overturning of Fate, according to which lions turn into gazelles and gazelles turn into lions is itself a logical rift. This is summed up by the stark allusion to the animal world: a lion saw a gazelle and pounced on it; the 'vicissitudes' of Fate are such that things happen without apparent meaning and that action is not subject to 'purpose.' By his final retort, the poet is suggesting a pure liberation of human erotic desire from the moral and epistemological strictures and categories imposed by both religious and rhetorical (poetic) convention. Desire, here conflated with 'animal desire,' is its own principle,

accountable for nothing; desire must take its course, without thinking, without consciousness, like "water in water." Indiscriminately liberated from 'transcendence,' desire cannot be subject to a higher purpose. Desire is for desire's sake.

Thus we find in this poem the ultimate iconoclastic reply to the erotic sacrifice paradigm presented in the opening lines of the poem. The 'pornographic' sexual act-rape enacts a sacrifice according to which the 'dividing principle' of the gaze (a metaphor both for the boy and the poet's desire for the boy) is immolated, raped, destroyed. That is to say, in perfidiously 'sacrificing' the boy's 'integrity' ("You have taken away from me the dignity I have preserved"), the poet too *sacrifices* the religious (Islamic) and erotic-poetic framework (chaste love) which foregrounded his erotic-subjective 'disintegration' (sacrifice) at the hands of his love-object. By this 'pagan' sacrifice which he performs in 'obedience' to the high priest of iniquity Iblīs, the poet does more than vindicate his erotic mastery by means of a reversal: he *dissolves* the 'sacred' or 'transcendent' logic (religious morality, Fate and also, chaste erotic love) that foregrounds the erotic antithesis between the desiring subject and the object of his desire (in the opening lines). In sacrificing the 'object' of his desire (boy) by means of a homoerotic rape—a flagrant parody of heterosexual consummation—the poet sacrifices the differentiating logic of erotic experience altogether. Here we have an expression of Dionysian oneness according to which subjecthood dissolves.

This radical dissolution of the 'logic' that governs 'subjectivity' is precisely what accounts for the 'seductive' quality of an episode that would otherwise appear to be a 'rude awakening' constitutive of dissonant 'empirical' 'reality.' For in the conclusion of this poem, 'real' or authentic experience comes at the cost of coherence, consciousness,

'preserved dignity' as the weeping boy would have it or the integrity of 'self'. Like the bubbling wine that is hardly contained in its vessel, erotic experience—and experience as a whole therefore—breaks the limit of what can be 'organized' or 'rationalized' since the 'subject' of erotic desire is no longer independent of or 'master' of desire; rather than the heroic 'subject' who, by the mastery of his will, consumes or apprehends the 'object' of his desire without any threat to his 'self', the desiring 'subject' (who is seduced and who seduces) is himself the object or 'victim' of a volatile game of seduction.

Presumably, an ending such as the one we see, would disturb any reader, ancient or modern and perhaps, especially the latter: for here we are confronted with something more grave than an act of homoerotic rape—if this can be imagined—we are confronted with an act of rape and pedophilia. In light of the 'seriousness' of the crime at hand, how does one respond to the laughter of the poet—which, in my view, forms one of the distinctly attractive or compelling features of the denouement? Is it the poet's laughter an indication of a heartless sinister cruelty, such as that of a medieval serial killer? How can I the reader respond? Am I to laugh with him? Am I to be seized with horror and disgust? Would the ugly 'reality' or transparency of this sexual ravishment cause me to regret the poem? In answer to this, I say no. For when I read of this 'rape'—this perfidious action about which the poet laughs, I cannot help but be seized with the strange mixture of triumph and horror—horror perhaps that I am participating—in spite of myself— in this abject erotic 'victory' which if it had occurred in real life, I would only regard with disgust, as though no part of me—either conscious or unconscious could even entertain identifying with the perpetrator of such a behavior! Yet in subjecting this odd feeling of vicarious 'triumph' to some degree of scrutiny, I realize that I have been seduced—

seduced into believing that this ‘rape’ had in fact occurred in reality, unmitigated by the figures of the poet’s fantasy. I realize that I have been duped and that this act of erotic consummation—however irreciprocal it may have been—is too the craft of seduction, perhaps the most elusive of them all. This is indicated by the image of the boy dragging his garb away, which the poet has touched with his ‘iniquitous’ behavior:

فقام يسحَب أذيالا منعَّمةً قد مسّها من يَدي ظُلْمٌ وعُدْوانُ

20. And [a young adolescent] left, dragging his delightful robes which I had
Touched with my iniquitous behaviour,

While it is clear to the reader that the poet has forced the boy to have sex with him—and totally uninhibited sex at that—indicating a pornographic, ‘real’ or ‘transparent’ close to an otherwise ‘poetic’ poem, the final reference to the boy’s ‘robe’ conjures—ever so craftily—the original erotic scheme of the poem:

ما لي و ما لك قد جزَّأتَني شِيَعاً وَأنتَ مِمَّا كَساني الدَّهرُ عُرياَنُ

4. Consider us both: You have rent me to pieces, though you yourself are bare of the
garment that Fate has made me wear.

If in line 4, the poet complains that the youth is exempt from wearing that (garment) in which Fate dresses him, by the conclusion of the poem, it is the boy who is dressed in a robe touched by the iniquitous appetite of the poet; the image of the boy dragging of his “delightful robe” would then signify his erotic defeat and by necessity, that of Fate.

Nevertheless and as I will show, the significance of the ‘garment’ surpasses that of a narrative or erotic ‘reversal’ (for this implies mere antithesis); instead I discover that the image of the boy’s tainted robe, an explicit reference to the ‘garment’ of Fate (i.e.

erotic deprivation) that the poet was forced to wear in line 4, functions as a sign of the pervasive presence of *seduction*, a poetic 'game' that has no 'end.' It is the 'garb' of the poet that symbolizes at once his Fate (recalling line 4) as the erotic 'qurbān' (sacrifice offering) and his status as seducer (line 5) in the initial erotic framework:

أراكَ تَعمَلُ فِي قَتلِي بِلا تِرَةٍ كأنَّ قَتلي عند الله قُربانُ

5. I see you work to kill me unavenged, as if to kill me is an offering to God.

The poet's status as a sacrifice victim (قُربانُ) is a condition imposed on him by Fate, the Fate which 'dresses' him; it is this 'garment' of Fate which is emblematic of the erotic antithesis between himself and the object of his desire (whom he refers to as 'naked of this garment in line 4).

Nevertheless, the poet's status as a victim or *qurbān* (the erotic and spiritual medium through which the sacrificer attains erotic transcendence) is itself a sign of the poet's status as erotic-poetic *seducer*. As I have shown previously, this is true insofar as the ritual of sacrifice is characterized by an interdependent, reflexive relation that in turn suggests the identification and interchangeability of the sacrificer and the victim. If by this logic, the figure of the *qurbān* points to the poet's agency as a seducer (when in fact it would seem to be the opposite), it follows that the 'garment' in which Fate dresses him (i.e. Fate dresses him as a victim) too points to this seductive agency.

In light of the above, it is significant that the poet makes special mention of the fact that *he the Poet* (he *the seducer*) has "touched" or defiled the boy's 'robe' (signifying the erotic violence done to his body) with his perfidious appetite. For at face value, it signals a mere erotic reversal: the poet is no longer the victim of the gazelle's immolating

glance (i.e. he no longer wears *the 'garment of a victim*); rather he is the one who sacrifices the gazelle (i.e. it is the boy *who wears the robe of victim*). By this interpretation, the erotic and literary 'game' of the poet-seducer reaches its balanced and satisfying conclusion.

The alternative interpretation of the 'ending' that I propose sees this metaphor of the 'robe/garment' as a re-opening of a poetic seduction that has no 'limit,' no 'target,' no 'end.' As the reader may observe, the boy's defiled 'robe' is an allusion to the 'garment' worn by the formerly victimized poet. Inasmuch as this 'garment' of the poet indicates his ambiguous status as *qurbān* and *seducer*, the reference to the attire of the seducer's victim serves to remind the reader of the reflexive and volatile nature of the erotic relation understood in terms of seduction: the victim is now the seducer and vice versa. More importantly, it is the 'work' of wine and its intoxicating experience—both as drink and as poetic activity— that is somehow responsible for this dissolution and flux even if the cause-effect logic is so tenuous that it appears not to exist. Finally, through all of this, the reader is reminded that the experience of erotic desire is indistinguishable from that of seduction: to desire is to be seduced and to seduce; that the experience of seduction is moreover indistinguishable from the experience of intoxication: Both indicate a violent collapse of sense and orientation; both come as the quintessential interruption of 'action' (implying transcendence) and logic. Both entail a sacrifice for its own sake. And finally that the seductive and therefore violent experience of wine is one and the same as the experience of poetry; for only in poetry—namely metaphor— can the 'garment' of a scapegoat be one and the same as the 'garment' of a predator; only in poetry can the 'garment' of the innocent and the sacred be at once the garment of the criminal and the

profane. It is this very immolation of the dividing and separating principles that seek to lend 'coherence' to otherwise equivocal signs that makes poetry so powerful, so tempting, so unbearably 'light.' Because I know that the 'rent' garb of the rape victim is just as easily the garb of the poet who victimizes him, because I know that the fabric of this garb, like the fabric of poetic signs, is now seamlessly intact, now rent to pieces, I know that I can be freed from my own moral inhibitions, taking pleasure and delight in the strange and dark reality of erotic intoxication.

Hence the poem closes with what has been till now read uniquely as the poet's ironic, playful homage to the Arab poetic tradition: the lion preying on the gazelle. Yet curiously, this 'hommage' resounds with the unbearable bacchic laughter of the Dionysos Philosophos which seems to say and in the words of Baudrillard, "One cannot be free of seduction, and the discourse of anti-seduction is but its last metamorphosis."[75]

Chapter 2 Tempting the Theologian: the "Cure" of Wine's Seduction.

2.1 Introduction

[75] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 43.

In the world of the wine poem, desire is precisely the over-reaching and unraveling of all categories and norms of thought, behaviour, identity. Wine, therefore has this character as well. It too is paradoxical, unidentifiable. —Noorani[76]

The notorious *hamzīya*, intended as a mock-polemical retort to Ibrahīm al-Naẓẓām (d. 840 C.E), a leading Mu'atazili theologian said to have censured the poet for the grave sin (*kabīra*) of drinking wine, is considered to be one of Abū Nuwās's exquisite pieces of wine praise.[77] Celebrated as much for the ethereal, occult beauty of its wine praise as it is for the mordant irony of its dialectical mood, the poem is a playful invective (*hijā'*) that targets the sophistry of pious men who take it upon themselves to admonish their fellow 'sinners.' [78]

The theologian's censure of wine-drinking forms the 'metaphysical' backdrop for the opening and closing lines of the poem. The poet's mock-heroic defense of wine drinking is counter-logical: divinely sanctioned censure leads astray from God; wine is desirable for the very quality for which it is forbidden. It is on the basis of this hubristic counter-logic that the poet in turn 'censures' the theologian's censure, commanding him to give him the forbidden drink.

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[76] Noorani,"Heterotopia," 354.

[77] According to al-Ghazālī, the poet and this theologian were friends before the latter embraced the principles of Mu 'tazilism and became a leading figure of one of its schools; later when the two men reunited, al-Nazzam censured the poet for wine-drinking, warning that committing such a grave sin will warrant punishment by hellfire. Dīwān, ed. al- Ghazālī, 6. Mu'tazilis believed that good and evil could be determined rationally, without recourse to revealed evidence. Richard M. Frank, *Early Islamic Theology: The Mu'tazilites and al-Ash'arī*, vol. II of *Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām*, ed., Dimitri Gutas. (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 7. Like all Muslim theologians and jurists, Mu'tazilis deemed wine as inherently evil and punishable by hell-fire (i.e., a grave sin or *kabīra*), not merely because it is denounced in the Qur'ān.

[78] Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 149. Kennedy situates his study of this poem within the general rhetorical framework of the invective (*hijā'*) and even more specifically within the the Umayyad tradition of *'naqā'id al-khamr* which he defines as "duelling dialogues of *hijā'*"(Chapter 3 of his book "*Hijā'*, the Bacchic Naqā'iḍ, and the Rhetorical Wine Poem" is dedicated to an analysis of this topic). He states that "In the Umayyad period reciprocal censure and *hijā'* came together in the *naqā'iḍ* of wine; these may be seen to be part of the literary backdrop by which Abū Nuwās was influenced and to which he added a new quality of rhetoric or dialectic, aided by the deft structuring of his poems."

Following the note of theological disputation that forms the back-drop of the opening apostrophe, the poet, as if to 'persuade' his interlocutor by means of an irrefutable enticement, 'loses his self' in an ecstatic piece of wine praise—the 'poetic space' proper—in which he exalts the otherworldly and sensuous potency of wine. Wine is the erotic focal point of the poem. Supplanting both the beloved of chaste erotic verse and the sacred logos of religious epistemology, 'she' is the unique 'object' of praise and veneration. Beginning with the third line of the poem, the reader and presumably the theologian are 'initiated' so-to-speak into the sacred-profane mysteries of wine-drinking by a figure as strange and puzzling as the liquid she bears. This figure, a cross-dressing bi-erotic female Cup-bearer *(ṣāqīya*), is endowed with specific erotic traits that are unique to wine's experience. The poet's interlocutor—and the reader along with him—are thus 'led' through the wine praise, almost in spite of themselves, by an erotically transgressive body or figure of excess who circles amidst reveling youths with the sole 'purpose' of delighting them with the experience of wine. The circling movement of the Cup-bearer, whose feminine, erotically ambivalent identity is seamlessly identified with the feminine presence of wine, underscores the circular and as such, subversively playful 'rationale' of the opening line. Towards the close of the poem, the poet praises the refinement of wine at the expense of the conventional tropes of the classical Arabian ode. Finally and in circular style, the poet closes on the note of censure with which he began, this time rebuking the theologian on account of his blasphemy.

In his *Wine Song***,** Kennedy reads the poem as an example of an ancient poetic genre—the invective (*hijā'*), one which colorfully brings into play various topoi common to the tradition such as *jahl, hamm* (care or worry), *istighfār* (repentance). He considers

the description of wine (*waṣf al-khamr*) to be particularly sophisticated for its fusion of the qualities of woman and wine. He also points out the notable circular structure of the poem's logic. Noorani reads the poem as enacting a kind of dialectic of 'self-dissolution' or transgression. According to this dialectic, the poet views the transgressive activity of wine-drinking as permitting a kind of transcendence, one which allows for an "experience of authenticity" that both precedes and supercedes the reality of ordinary existence. Wine's paradox is thus both sacrilegious and transcendent.[79]

Drawing upon the above scholarship, my reading emphasizes the fundamentally erotic, seductive and as such, iconoclastic character of wine the 'drink' and the poetic 'figure.' As I will show in my reading of the opening apostrophe of the poem, the poet ascribes to wine the transgressive duality of medicine and poison for which the experience of love (found more specifically in the figure of the beloved) is celebrated in the Arab-Persian tradition of love poetry. It is precisely as feminine *erotic* figure that wine transgresses her status as a 'drink' that can be merely consumed. The poet indicates this 'undrinkable' quality first by the logic of his opening line and second in the poetic space of the wine praise itself. The poet then goes on to 'argue'—seductively and therefore non-discursively—for wine's desirability through the circling movements of this Cup-bearer. Against the background of theological strictures or religious epistemology's claim to truth and transcendence, the poet's seductive 'defense' of wine is ultimately crafted as the defense of poetic activity; the poem is a fine example of the seductive rationale of bacchic verse and ultimately of the way in which poetry 'tempts' or leads astray from the discursive or 'productive' function of language.

[79] Noorani, **"**Heterotopia," 358-360.

2.2 The Reading

Erotic Antidote: More Wine!

Wine is the correlate of desire, and like desire, can only be released by means of a violation—Noorani

دعْ عنكَ لومي فانَّ اللومَ إغراءُ وداوني بالتي كانت هي الداءُ

1. Censure me not, for censure but tempts me; cure me rather with the cause of my ill—

In his opening apostrophe, the poet participates in the conventional rebuke of the censurer using the imperative "Da'" (literally: 'Leave aside" or "Cast off")[80] and in so doing, offsets the climate of theological disputation with a characteristically bacchic mood of urgency and impiety. The logic by which the poet stages his 'defense' of wine-drinking is notably circular and as such, anti-discursive: proscription (of wine) is but an enticement;[81] wine (rather than religious censure) is the antidote for the malady it causes.

The attitude of the poet strikes the contemporary reader for its all-too-familiar resonance; indeed who has not found him or herself in the position of rebel without a cause, having to defend even mildly self-destructive behavior against the reproof of kill-joy types who believe it to be their socially or divinely ordained vocation to 'save' fellow citizens and souls from immoral detours? In such a situation, the attitude adopted is rebellious and the logic employed to defend the appetite for excess is inexorably counter-

[80] Literally, the poet tells his censurer, "Cast aside your blame or reproof."

[81] The logic which states that censure is a temptation (*fa-inna l-lawma ighrā'u*) is in no measure the invention of the poet but rather, and as Kennedy observes, it is "derived from a well-attested topos" ; Kennedy notes two possible precursers in whose model the poet may be following: the Ummayad poet Harītha b. Badr and the pre-Islamic poet al-A'šhā, whose "wa-ka'sin šaribtu 'alā ladhdhatin wa-ukhrā tadāwaytu min-hā bi-hā, is more traditionally put forward as providing the model for Abū Nuwās' line." Concerning the former, Kennedy observes that "*Fa-inna l-lawma…qad tughrī* is apparently alluded to by Abū Nuwās' *fa-inna l-lawma ighrā'u*." Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 188.

intuitive: 'Leave me the hell alone! It (whatever self-destructive activity it is) makes me feel good!' or 'Who are you to judge? You don't know how great it (the self-destructive activity) is unless you've done it yourself!' We defend the 'it' knowing full well that it is a dangerous object to desire and yet the more unlawful 'it' is—that is to say, the more elusive the object of our desire— the more seductive 'it' becomes.

Forbidden 'objects' have an ineffable enchantment. They fascinate, they attract, they incite desire. Erotic lack quickly gives way to obsession: the more I am deprived of that which I desire, the more I am consumed with desire. This is why the verbal 'defense' of bad behavior is inevitably accompanied by the anti-heroic, self-negating 'action' of indulgence. It is upon the premise of this erotic counter-logic that that the poet tells his holier-than–thou interlocutor not to censure him: 'Censure (i.e., Depriving me of that which I desire) but tempts (causes me to desire it more).'

It is the theologian's perspective on wine (that it is a sin punishable by eternal condemnation) which forms the 'metaphysical' backdrop of the poem and which the poet addresses, playfully and derisively, in the opening line. In order to address the poet's 'defense' of wine and its rhetorical correlate, poetry, it will be necessary to briefly consider the religious perspective it targets._

Islamic epistemology regards human experience in terms of a dichotomy or polarity. Hence almost every human action may fall under the category of either good or evil (or otherwise put, beneficial or harmful); what is good pertains to what is permissible or lawful (*ḥalāl*) while what is evil pertains to the forbidden (*ḥarām*), or unlawful.[82] An

[82] For more on the linguistic, rhetorical, religious and legal significance of these binary terms, see Joseph E. Lowry, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, s.v. "Lawful and Unlawful," http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2253/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_COM-00107 {accessed March 15, 2010}.

action or behavior is good when it is oriented towards the perfection of the rational soul, the transcendent self; this is achieved by means of the self's willful mastery over the baser instincts and the passions. A bad behavior by contrast is driven by the desire to indulge the animal or primordial self and is unconcerned with immortality; rather it indulges the pleasure of the moment, with no ulterior view to the spiritual continuity of self. All bad behavior implies the desire to gain pleasurable access to the irrational self, the desiring self. This comes at the cost of higher 'purpose.' In this sense any 'object' has the potential to be 'bad' if the person sacrifices the transcendence of his will in favor of excessive behavior. Yet wine is a particularly strange 'object' of desire in that it is cultivated and consumed primarily for its excessive, self-consuming quality; that is, its primary reason for existence is its intoxicating potency, which 'consumes' and debilitates the mind and body of the drinker. For this reason, wine has been relegated by the tradition of the Qur'ān, along with poetry to the suspect realm of the 'forbidden,' cast aside as a 'disease.'[83]

On the basis of the epistemological dichotomies discussed above, the Qur'ān commands that every Muslim (i.e., the whole community) encourage righteous deeds and reprove what is iniquitous ("*al-'amr bil-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar"*).[84] By this

[83] As previously noted (see Chapter 1), the Qur'ān takes an ambivalent attitude towards wine; it is the tradition of the Hadīth (collected sayings of the prophet Muḥammad) which institutionalize the prohibition of wine. As Kueny observes, "Unlike the Qur'an, the Hadith are consistent…in their condemnation of wine and other intoxicants. Although they still find wine to be an ambiguous substance, they no longer treat this ambiguity as having any positive qualities... Instead, wine—more specifically the toxic effects of wine—become a source of danger that must be contained…The Hadith seek only to identify, define, and contain what is ethically (and therefore cosmically) corrosive. As a result, the Hadith present the Prophet (or one of his companions) setting up lists of prohibited ingredients from which wine was made, doling out formulaic punishments for wine-induced transgressions…There can be no room for ambiguous substances like wine in an orderly world, for they would contradict and undermine the very nature and structure of the cosmos." Kueny, *Rhetoric*, 26.

[84] Cook observes that the concurrence of the two phrases 'commanding right' and 'forbidding wrong' are found in 8 Qur'anic verses; seldom do these two commands appear in isolation from one another. See the following Sūras: 3:104, 3:110, 3:114, 7:157, 9:71, 9:112, 22:41, 31:17. Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, (Princeton: Cambridge University Press,

decree, every Muslim has the authority to forbid any action or activity deemed sinful. The language of interdiction reflects the metaphysical imperative of 'containing,' 'delimiting' or 'circumscribing' experience (understood as 'desire' and the world of objects) based on the potential harm or benefit a particular action or 'object' poses to the desiring self. Censuring language thus operates on the epistemological pretense that all experience (desire and its objects) is 'knowable' and thereby discernable according to pristine polarities ('good' and 'evil' etc). So long as these binary values are not 'confused,' that is, so long as the bad is not mistaken for the good (based on ignorance or incorrect knowledge), the desiring self maintains his or her moral and spiritual integrity. If censure preserves the sanctity of the sacred (anything reflecting the godliness or goodness of the subject in question, the 'self'), it does so by means of exclusion; it banishes, does away with, excludes (or at least, it presumes to do so) those desires and objects which it deems as 'dangerous' uncontainable or excessive.

Against the theological view that censuring bad things is beneficial, the poet makes a hubristic claim which brings to light the inefficacy of metaphysical language (language operating in the service of moral transcendence): *censure tempts*. That is, prohibitive language (desires and/or objects of desire), cannot, contrary to what it claims about itself, ensure that the outcome or 'effect' of its 'intent' will be morally beneficial; for, as the poet indicates, interdiction 'contains' *nothing if not the seed of its own undoing*. Rather censure, insofar as it arouses desire (without promising fulfillment), has the excessive *effect* of *leading one astray* from its transcendent 'motive' and 'purpose,' which is to keep erotic excess in check.

2000), 13. Cook also observes that "Forbidding wrong is…one of the 'five principles' (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*) of Mu'tazilism." Ibid.,196.

Hence the censuring language which the theologian deems as 'good' or beneficial (insofar as it keeps excess in check), the poet regards as no less 'subversive' than the excessive 'object' of censure, wine. Language, for the poet, is not so transparent (as metaphysics would have us believe) and consequently, what is 'good' or 'evil,' 'harmful' or beneficial' is relative at best. This is a 'truth' which the poet will communicate most playfully in the second hemistich, where the controversial 'object' in question—wine—is eulogized for the very trait for which it is cast off as a grave sin (*kabīra*). As I will show, it is on the basis of its transgressive, ungraspable and therefore *poetic* character that the poet constructs his 'defense' of wine; not only does the poet 'defend' this 'drink' against the theologian's proscription, he *prescribes* (via the imperative "Cure me…") it as the more authentic antidote to that 'ill' (excess) for which the language of proscription 'knows' itself to be the 'cure.'

As the *antidote* to this 'disease' of religious sophistry, the poet prescribes a strange 'drink' characterized by its liminal or *erotic* character; a dangerously ambiguous object of desire, wine is at once toxic and medicinal, harmful and beneficial: "Cure me with the cause of my ill." It is this *seductive* character of wine that the poet counter-prescribes for the ill or disease that is religious censure. To desire wine is to desire a substance which has the dynamic potency and potential to transgress, exceed and elude the binary oppositions that form the foundation for metaphysical knowledge.[85] For reasons of its indigestible potency as an intoxicant, wine constitutes that which, on the

[85] For an important analysis of the way in which meaning overflows language, see Jacques Derrida "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination*, trans., Barbara Johnson, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61-156. In this influential study of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Derrida critiques Plato's domestication of the term *pharmakon*, a Greek word which denotes "remedy" and "poison," and which Derrida reads as a semantic overflow that precedes, exceeds and transgresses the binary oppositions that form the foundation of metaphysics.

level of language, cannot be contained within or defined in terms of a particular semantic value. Rather to the contrary, wine assimilates the vicissitude of values that correlate to human experience; for this reason, it is semantically both excessive and elusive: it is both — and neither— a cure and an ill!

An 'object' which is not only uncontainable (insofar as it is excessive) within the parameters of a particular value but which, precisely as excess, assimilates and acts as a 'bouleversement,' a confusion or upheaval of value altogether, wine eludes the 'grasp' of the metaphysical function of language. Hence in defending wine, the poet does not 'defend' the object of his desire so much as he defends his *desire for unidentifiable, slippery or ungraspable objects,* his *desire to be seduced.* The poet signifies this desire for the activity of seduction when in a play on the root letters (د و ي) from which the contrary significations of disease and/medicine are derived, he expresses his desire to be cured (داوى) by the same 'object' that is his malady (داء).[86] Here it is helpful to briefly consider the erotic-poetic function of wine in terms of Baudrillard's understanding of the 'feminine'; the feminine, for Baudrillard, is the quintessential site of seduction, the "principle of uncertainty"; more specifically, it is a fluid body or space in which a given 'reality,' or any given 'discourse,' is overturned, subverted, inverted, or travestied.[87] In line one, the seduction of wine expresses 'her' *potential* to both destroy and restore: *she* (*hīya*) is a healing balm and/or a life-threatening disease. This *erotic potential* of wine in turn indicates 'her' power to transform any given erotic reality into an alternate one, to *subvert* reality. This is true not only with respect to its transforming potential as an

[86] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I Part 3 (1863-1893; repr., Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), "dāwaytuhu" and "dawan."

[87] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 12.

intoxicating drink, but more importantly, with respect to its transforming potential as a *rhetorical figure*.

Not only does this *poetic* potency of wine—its potential to alter or subvert the semantic body and/or space that it pervades—cause the poet who desires it to be drunk, it pervades and transmutes him such that he becomes himself becomes *an agent of seduction.* In other words, the condition of being seduced gives way to the activity of seducing. In line one, the poet, at once seduced and *transformed* by wine's liminal and transgressive character, in turn seduces the theologian. He does so by *reversing* the prohibitive logic of his reproof (Thou shalt not drink because drinking is a sin) so that religiously sanctioned reproof appears to operate as a leading astray: Censure is a *seduction*.

The poet's 'seduction' begins with the customarily anti-heroic rebuke of the theologian's rebuke: Cast off your blame! In declaring, "Censure me Not," the poet parodies the imperative ('Thou Shalt Not') of the censurer's reproof by rendering it a 'Thou Shalt Not tell me thou shalt not!';in so doing, the poet negates the sacred 'Thou Shalt Not' with the profane *call to sin*: 'Thou shalt give me the cause of my ill or *sin'*. Hence, the poet essentially tells the theologian: 'Shut up and fetch me a drink!'

The force of the poet's rebuke of the theologian lies in its playful and as such *poetic* subversion of the Qur'ānic decree which commands all Muslims to "Encourage righteous deeds and Reprove what is iniquitous." Since the theologian's reproof is a gesture sanctioned by the sacred text of the Qur'ān, the poet, in preying upon the 'signs' of the theologian's reproof, does violence to the very epistemological foundation (the Qur'ān) which prescribes the activity of censuring iniquitous deeds. It is thus that the

poet, at once prohibiting censure while at the same time decreeing that the censurer give him drink, parodies the inimitable rhetoric of the Qur'ān and in so doing, 'hallows' the grave sin (*kabīra*) of wine-drinking with the very language that prohibits it. Rather than an edifying, productive, deliberative gesture, the censure called for by the Qur'ān, would, by the poet's logic, operate as a temptation (*ighrā'u*), a leading astray: *seduction*. The circular logic with which the poet maintains that the sanctioned imperative of the interlocutor is in fact a-leading-astray from the sanctity that it upholds is underscored by an intralinear chiasmus the word "censure" (in "*Censure* me not for *Censur*e but tempts"). Thus and in a gesture of *rhetorical* drunkenness, the poet seductively 'unravels' both the theologian's censure and the epistemological framework within which he does so. Just as wine debilitates or 'undoes' the moral transcendence of the 'self' when it is imbibed, so does the poet seductively 'undo' the moralizing logic of censure by pointing to its underlying toxicity: *forbidding seductive objects is tantamount to seduction*.

It is thus that the poet hubristically draws out the harm latent in the logic of religious epistemology: prohibitive language (censure) is a temptation on the basis of its seductive quality (it incites desire). What would be an apparent 'cure' (refraining from drink) from the standpoint of religion is for the poet a disease of 'sophistry.' This is confirmed in the last line of the poem in which the poet commands once again that theologian abstain from the sophistry of presuming that God will not forgive the sin of wine-drinking.

As I show in my reading of the wine praise that follows, the climate of theological disputation that forms the backdrop of the opening line is literally 'consumed' or sacrificed by the *erotic-poetic* potency of wine. No longer addressing his interlocutor or

engaging him in a mock-dialectic, it was as though the poet were counterbalancing the theologian's prohibition of wine by turning his back on the relational aspect of dialectic all together; in so doing, the poet allows himself, the interlocutor and the reader along with them to become inebriated, sacrificed, and transformed by the erotic- *poetic* potency of wine. The poem is a fine example of the seductive rationale of bacchic verse and ultimately of the way in which poetry 'tempts' or leads astray from the discursive or 'productive' function of language. Against theology's claim to truth and transcendence, the poet's seductive 'defense' of wine is ultimately crafted as the defense of poetic activity; this is true insofar as poetry is an intoxicated language that dissolves metaphysical and moral distinctions while assimilating unto itself the contrary values and vicissitude of erotic experience. Contrary to the productive language of metaphysics, poetry commemorates *the lack of* sense and signification.

The Ecstasy of Wine
I will cut the cords of care with the wine glass/For there is no physician for care like the wine glass—Abū Nuwās[88]

In a mood of wonderment, the poet praises this 'drink' as something *beyond* medicinal:

صفراءُ لا تنْزلُ الأحزانُ سَاحَتها لو مسَّها حجرٌ مسّتها سراءُ

2. A pale wine whose house is not visited by sorrows, imparting joy even to the rock that touches it;

The potency of wine is such that she has the alchemical power to animate a stone, causing it to experience joy. The description of wine thus marks an *ecstatic* and as such,

[88] Cited and translated by Noorani, "Heterotopia," 349. See al-Ghazālī edition, 159; Wagner, 165.

poetic departure from the epistemological framework that foregrounds the opening apostrophe. As Kennedy observes, "The weight of criticism and censure implicit in the initial backdrop of poem fades to insignificance." In contrast to the burdensome prohibitive 'space' of moral existence, the space of wine **(**سَاحَتَها**)** is one of pure joy, unspoiled or uncontaminated by the care of human suffering. Here the poet draws on the ancient topos of *hamm* (care or worrying) according to which wine is the antidote to the everyday sufferings imposed by Fate (*al-dahr*). The poet will develop this theme in line (…) of this poem in which Time (also implying Fate) bows to the untamable desires of reveling drinkers on account of wine's care-dissolving potency. As Noorani explains[89]:

> Care is the term for all the miseries of ordinary existence, the subjective experience of fate. Therefore the lifting of care signifies escape from everyday life. To be blissful perpetually in spite of fate (*'alā al-dahr***),** means to escape time and fate, and hence to be care-free. Wine is the privileged means to this condition.

The power of wine to dispel *hamm* and allow the self to escape from the burdens of everyday life is a testament to her excessive or erotically transgressive potency. As Noorani states, wine's power to dispel suffering goes "hand in hand with moral dissolution" since "the essence of care is the constant struggle to control desire and to satisfy it in prescribed ways. Care lies in the self-awareness necessary to conform to social norms and expectations, to maintain one's status and propriety. The elimination of care is therefore attended by various forms of excess."[90] The erotically transgressive character of wine is evident in the second hemistich in which the stone is 'touched' by joy in merely 'touching' the wine. The image is striking in that it suggests the

[89] Noorani, "Heterotopia," 349.

[90] Noorani, *Heterotopia*, 349.

transgressive nature of the erotic relation between the drinker and his 'drink': no sooner does wine touch the palate of the drinker that it begins to exceed the status of a potable substance, consuming and transforming him by its inebriating potency. Wine not only induces a sensation of joy or ecstasy (by dispelling care), she permits an *ekstasis*, an *erotic* dis-possession of self, wherein the 'moral' self is taken out of its domestic peripheries. This ekstasis is signified figuratively and structurally: first in the radical 'departure' away from the polemical backdrop of the first line and second, in the image of the stone so 'touched' by wine that it is transformed in its very essence.

As I will show in the following section, this subversive character of wine is enacted by the circular movement of the strange, erotically ambiguous *figure* who pours wine to the delight of those who desire it and who thereby *tempts* both the interlocutor and the reader with the mysteries of wine.

From the Lips of the Grail…Figures of Seduction

…the poetic text *evokes* but does not make *substantial* what once appeared.—Georges Bataille[91]

من كفِّ ذاتِ حِرٍ في زيٍّ ذي ذكر لها مُحِبّان لوطيٌّ و زنَّاءُ
قامتْ بإبريقِها و اللَّيلُ معتَكِرٌ فَلاحَ من وجْهها في البيتِ لألاءُ
فأرسَلَتْ من فمِ الإبريقِ صافيةً كأنما أخْذُها بالعينِ إغْفاءُ

3. Received from the palm of a woman clad as a man, whose lovers are two: the fornicator and the sodomite.
4. As she stood with her wine-jug on a dark night her face emitted a pearly light,
5. Casting pure [wine] from the lip of the grail—a sedative for the eye to behold;

Beginning with the third line of the poem, the reader and presumably the theologian are 'initiated' so-to-speak into the sacred-profane mysteries of wine-drinking

[91] Bataille, *Visions of Excess,* 241.

by a figure as strange and puzzling as the liquid she bears. This figure, most certainly a Cup-bearer *(sāqīya*), is endowed with specific erotic traits that are unique to wine's experience. As I will show, the erotic identification of the Cup-bearer to wine and *also the way in which they are identified* is crucial to an appreciation of the poet's *poetic* 'counter-prescription' in the opening line. More specifically, I will show how the figure of the Cup-bearer—her traits and her movement in the central space of the poem— not only functions as a figure for that 'undrinkable' drink but as such, enacts the seductive, iconoclastic and quintessentially *poetic* 'rationale' of wine's experience.

This figure is described first and foremost as a feminine figure: 'From the palm of a *woman*.' The significance of this point is crucial since in the Arab tradition of Bacchic-erotic verse*,* wine is a distinctly feminine presence.[92] It is in the space of the *feminine* that the identity of the Cup-bearer coalesces with that of wine. This fusion of the feminine qualities of Cup-bearer and wine is indicated in the feminine possessive pronoun (ها). In the second hemistich of the third line, the word لها (translated as "whose") is ambiguous, suggesting that the two lovers belong either to the Cup-bearer and/or to wine ("received from the palm of a woman"): فَلاحَ من وجْهها في البيتِ لألاء. In the second hemistich of line 4, the ambiguity of the feminine possessive pronoun (ها) of the word وجْهها ("her face") suggests the identification of the Cup-bearer with wine. This is true when we consider that the image of wine radiating light is a topos of the Arab tradition of descriptive wine praise (*wasf al-khamr*), one that can be traced back to the pre-Islamic

[92] Kennedy, *Wine song*, 26. Here Kennedy mentions some of the feminine epithets for wine that date from the pre-Islamic period, observing that poets of the later periods develop this imagery in their wine poetry. See "Feminine Imagery" in Chapter One of his book for a general survey of the development of the feminine imagery of wine in the Umayyad period through the early 'Abbasid period.

ode. Hence, as the Cup-bearer ("she") rises with her wine jug in the pitch dark of night, *her* face emitting a pearly light, there too arises the question of *whose* face emits the light (the Cup-bearer's or the wine's?), leading one to wonder if this figure is not herself the very embodiment of the magical liquid she bears in her palm.

As I have stated before, the ambiguity of the feminine possessive pronoun is significant insofar as it suggests a fusion of identity, indicating that the Cup-bearer should be read as a figure for wine. Paradoxically, this fusion of identity (a kind of excess) implies a *slipping* or dissolution. When two figures can be read as one figure, when in a moment of poetic drunkenness the distinction between two forms are blurred or dissolved, this is a moment in which each signification *eludes* 'grasp.' In the first hemistich of line 3, which in the Arabic literally reads, "From the palm of a woman," (implying that the subject 'wine' is received or poured from her palm) there is only the suggestion of wine's presence as it is being held by or poured from the palm of the Cup-bearer; that is to say, no *substantial* mention of wine is made. If, however, wine is indeed 'present' both as a grammatical subject and as a poetic sign, it is so by function of the Cup-bearer's palm, the unique vessel by which the precious gift of wine (both the substance and its immaterial effect, intoxication) can be received. That is to say, the Cup-bearer's body (her palm) indicates or signifies wine's 'body.' Here, the Cup-bearer would *appear* to function as the *icon* (image) of wine, the poetic body that renders wine visible and palpable, or rather, apprehensible. Yet as I will show, the specific traits of the Cup-bearer only attests to the difficulty of 'containing' wine as an image or rendering it 'apprehensible' as a sign.

This feminine figure from whose palm the 'feminine' drink of wine is served is first described in distinctly *erotic* terms, indicating yet another point of similarity with wine:

من كفِّ ذاتِ حِرٍ في زيٍّ ذي ذكر لها مُحِبّان لوطيٌّ و زنَّاءُ

3. Received from the palm of a woman clad as a man, whose lovers are two: the fornicator and the sodomite.

Unabashedly described as a female cross-dresser with a penchant for bi-erotic activity (fornication and sodomy), the erotic nature of the Cup-bearer is characterized in terms of a slippery duality**:** she is described first as an erotic subject possessing a gender duality, a woman dressed as a man—a transvestite. She is secondly described in terms of her duality as an erotic object: her lovers are the fornicator and the sodomite (the latter is an adjectival reference which translates as "the people of Lot"). At the same time, her duality as an erotic object does not preclude her own status as a lover; as one who is both the recipient and giver of these two forms of erotic activity, she is at once beloved and lover, loved and loving women and men alike.

The duality or 'split' in the Cup-bearer's desiring nature indicates that she is a transgressive figure, a figure of excess: she is a cross-gendered being (a feminine-male subject) who participates in the giving and receiving of two traditionally opposed forms of erotic activity (sodomy and fornication) each of which, from the point of view of Islam, is *harām* in its own right. The word 'activity' is appropriate in this context since at least one of the 'lovers' of the Cup-bearer (the fornicator) is described in terms of a *verb*: the gerund زنَّاءُ which signifies the act of fornicating.

The erotic identity of the Cup-bearer thus implies a *movement*, an oscillation to and from erotic poles; this movement or motion of desire implies a transgression insofar as it *crosses over* (hence etymological sense of trans-gress), *exceeds* and therefore *violates* the metaphysical distinctions that form the foundation for religious epistemology: woman/man, subject/object, lover-beloved. In *Erotism*, Georges Bataille speaks of eroticism as a space of transgression or violence: "In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation."[93] His erotic 'crossing over' of normative ontological and erotic categories is thus the site of a *violence*, a violence signified by the 'split' in the Cup-bearer's desiring nature**,** her liminal or transgressive character.

The ambiguous or 'split' character of the Cup-bearer's desiring nature— its *violence*—is a form of excess. But this excess, this violent or violating *crossing over* (that 'sacrifices' the domestic peripheries of what it means to be a desiring subject, a man or a woman) also implies erotic munificence, plenitude, *consummation.* As Bataille goes on to explain, the act of making love, what would be the moment of consummation, is analogous to the rite of sacrifice; consummation is the moment in which one being sacrifices the other, in which each partner is 'dispossessed' of his/herself, in which their 'forms' dissolve or 'die' in the vertigo, the 'disorder' of love-making.[94] The Cup-bearer's erotic polarity (her 'split') thus implies the sacrifice of mutually exclusive erotic states or categories, categories which have become 'confused,' swallowed up, united in a single body. For this reason, the Cup-bearer signifies the experience of violation (transgression)

[93] Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans., Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 16.

[94] Bataille, *Erotism*,17-18.

as consummation or plenitude; for it is through the violence or 'split' of her erotic being —her paradox—that she may be called a figure of excess, one in whom all boundaries of desire are traversed and confused. Woman-man, erotic subject-object, desiring and desired by women and men alike, the Cup-bearer is the 'consummate' figure for *the unrestricted and therefore transgressive activity of desire*; she is the body of erotic vicissitude.

The reader—and presumably the poet's interlocutor—are thus initiated into the 'mysteries' of wine's seductive experience by a figure ambiguously feminine, erotic, a figure of love's violence and consummation. A figure effervescent, 'uncontainable,' transgressive, exceeding ontological and erotic categories, eluding therefore all categories. It is for reasons of her cross-gender body —a body which in the realm of the knowable slips the 'grasp' of apprehension—that the Cup-bearer conjures and demands to be read as a hermaphrodite. In his *A Lover's Discourse,* Roland Barthes explains, "The hermaphrodite, or the androgyne, figure of that 'ancient unity of which the desire and the pursuit constitute what we call love,' is *beyond figuration*; or at least all I could achieve *is monstrous, grotesque, improbable body*."[95] A body "improbable," "grotesque," "beyond figuration," Barthes' hermaphrodite is a 'split' figure, a figure of erotic paradox, a figure that exceeds (goes 'beyond') and violates conventional semantic categories, thereby eluding the 'grasp' of language. As the consummate figure in whose 'improbable body'—a body otherwise 'unknowable' to us in everyday life—contrary erotic signs are confused, the hermaphrodite breaks or 'splits' its own signification such

[95] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 227. Barthes' musing references one of the speeches in the *Symposium* of Plato, that of the comedian Aristophanes; more precisely, Barthes muses upon the poet's famous double-sexed humanoids who, after being sliced in half as a punishment for their hubris, spend their lives in the desperate search to be united to their missing or 'other half.' See *Symposium* 189c4-d6.

that it 'eludes' the grasp of understanding; hence, it is "beyond figuration." It is in the sense of its 'unknowable' quality that the hermaphrodite may be called a seductive (it exceeds and eludes) and therefore iconoclastic figure. This seductive, iconoclastic quality of the hermaphrodite (implied by the Cup-bearer's cross-gender body) renders it a suitable figure for wine's own seductive, iconoclastic or inebriating experience. In order to attain a better 'grasp' of the way in which the hermaphroditic Cup-bearer functions as the appropriate 'sign' for experience of wine, it is helpful to return to the opening line of the poem.

In the opening apostrophe, the poet seduces his interlocutor—and the reader—with an 'improbable' notion, the notion that a 'drink' is more than a 'drink' to be merely consumed, more than a 'drink' that should be prohibited for its diabolic effects; rather, wine is endowed with a strange, transubstantiating potency that renders it at once a "disease" and a "medicine": "Cure me with the cause of my ill." Wine, the poet implies, is desirable for its liminal, ambiguous character. This liminality of wine's experience—its *violence*—the poet *indicates* linguistically (and semantically) by pointing to the shared etymology (the unity) of the contrary senses of "cure" and "ill." More than a 'drink' which, from the point of view of Islam, would signify the perdition of the self (it is a *kabīra*, punishable by eternal damnation), wine implies a sacred-profane experience whereby the erotic transcendence of the authentic 'self' is *consecrated* by way of a transgressive *sacrifice* of 'self.' The drinker-subject who 'consumes' wine is in turn 'consumed' (intoxicated) by this strange undrinkable 'object' such that the drinker's subjective 'self' becomes indistinguishable from the 'object' he presumably consumes. No longer is the drinker's 'self' authenticated by the drinker's metaphysical awareness of

his subjectivity (his mastery over objects); rather, there occurs in the moment of drunkenness a communion among contrary erotic states: the drinker and the drink, the subject and the object, the lover and the beloved all melt into one another in what Barthes refers to as that "'ancient unity of which the desire and the pursuit constitute what we call love.'"

Thus and as the poet indicates in the opening apostrophe, wine is more than a 'drink,' more than an object appropriable by the mastery of the drinker, more than a disease or a passage to hell. Assimilating unto itself the paradox and vicissitude of erotic experience, wine implies *multiplicity*, an experience that violates and transgresses the peripheries of the 'self' and along with it, the metaphysical realm of the 'knowable.' Since it cannot be 'grasped' or rendered apprehensible by the mastery of language, wine is an erotically 'improbable body', a figure 'beyond figuration,' a seductive, iconoclastic figure: a *hermaphrodite*.[96] Nevertheless, it is significant that the Cup-bearer is described specifically as a cross-dresser (transvestite) and not a hermaphrodite; for as I will show, the transvestite implies one who is both fascinated and *seduced* by the 'improbable' body of the hermaphrodite and who in turn *seduces* by engaging in a play of signs.

Although gender-blurring has become increasingly recognized as a critical element in cultural studies, cross-dressers would have been undoubtedly offensive to the sensibility of the medieval Orthodox theologian. The Arabic description of the Cup-bearer's gender and sexuality is bitingly graphic, shockingly transgressive: she is

[96] It is in the "grotesque," "improbable," seductive and therefore iconoclastic body ("beyond figuration") of the hermaphrodite that wine reaches its apotheosis, conjuring in the image of the *hermaphroditic* wine god, Dionysos and along with him, the "grotesque," seductive, hubristic figure of the Satyr. Concerning Dionysos' blurry sexuality, Walter Otto cites classical authorities: "In Aeschylus he is called contemptuously 'the woman one"…;in Euripedes, the "womanly stranger"... At times he is also called "the man-womanish." Walter F. Otto, *Dionysos: Myth and Cult*, trans. Robert B. Palmer (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1981), 176.

literally described as 'a person who has a vagina in the clothing of a person who has a penis.' She is a person who not only 'possesses' the sex of a woman but who, on the level of appearance, *usurps* the sex of the man, making what is not her own as if it were her own. The language of the poem uncovers something deeply disturbing and equally seductive about transvestism, its gratuitous or poetic preoccupation with erotic signs, something to which the contemporary reader risks to have become immune or desensitized.

In his *Seduction*, Baudrillard unravels the erotic-poetic fascination of the transvestite, whom he reads as a figure for seduction:

> Transvestism. Neither homosexuals nor transsexuals, transvestites like to play with the indistinctness of the sexes. The spell they cast, over themselves as well as others, is born of sexual vacillation and not, as is customary, the attraction of one sex for the other…*What transvestites love is this game of signs, what excites them is to seduce the signs themselves.* With them everything is makeup, theater, seduction. They appear obsessed with games of sex, but they are obsessed, first of all, with play itself…"[97]

For Baudrillard, the transvestite is not a man who desires to be a woman or woman who wants to be a man; it is not a question of desiring or coveting the male or female sex or of satisfying the desire to merely alter one's sexual identity (to 'permanently' become a male or a female). Rather, the desire of the transvestite is far more subversive; for as the poem indicates, the transvestite desires to usurp and play with the signs of Nature such that what is properly belonging to one sex (to nature) is uprooted from its 'proper' or 'productive' function and at least in appearance 'appropriated' by a body to which this 'sign' does not belong—this is the meaning of 'play.' That is to say, the transvestite loves or desires the *playful* (unproductive/destructive) and therefore *seductive* activity of

[97] Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 13; emphasis added.

perverting, subverting or inverting the 'logos' of sexuality, of *leading 'signs' astray*: "everything is played out in the vertigo of this inversion, this *transubstantiation of sex into signs that is the secret of all seduction*."[98] Baudrillard's description of the transvestite's seductive activity implicitly draws out its strange *bacchic-poetic* character : the "secret" of the transvestite's seductive power is precisely this *vertiginous* ("vertigo") game or play in which sex (bodies of Nature) is 'transubstantiated' into "signs" (poetic body). The transvestite loves to seduce the 'signs' of Nature such that 'signifiers' are led astray from their proper 'signification,' resulting in a kind of erotic travesty of signification or hyper-signification: "Perhaps the transvestite's ability to seduce comes straight from parody—a parody of sex by its *over-signification*."[99] The word "over-signification," implies an uncontainable bubbling, an effervescence of meaning which, when attempted to be 'understood' or 'decoded' discursively, is only reducible to a kind of *nonsense*, suggesting the inchoateness (recalling Baudrillard's use of the word "vertigo") both of drunken and poetic experience. [100] The transvestite's desire to seduce ('lead astray') and be seduced— the desire to sacrifice and transmute ("transubstantiation") the signs of 'sex' through the sacrifice and transmutation of one's own body—may thus be understood at once in terms of the drinker's erotic relation to wine and the poet's erotic relation to language.

The drinker loves and is seduced by wine insofar as it implies an experience of seduction, an experience wherein the drinker's 'self' (his nature) is subverted,

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid., 14;emphasis added.

[100] 'Nonsense is the outcome of every possible sense." Georges Bataille*, Inner Experience*, trans., Leslie Anne Boldt (New York: SUNY Press, 1988), 101.

transubstantiated into a space of alterity, a condition that eludes the 'grasp' of the drinker's subjective mastery. Hence, just as the transvestite loves the inversion or parody of sex, the drinker loves the inversion or parody of his 'self.' In either cases, the seductive activity of 'parody' or 'inversion' is nothing if not *poetic*: for what is poetry if not the 'leading astray' of signs from their metaphysical servitude, the "vertigo" of inversion, the "transubstantiation" of signs that lead us from the realm of the 'known' to the 'unknowable' that is the "secret" of all seduction.

This is how the cross-dressing Cup-bearer is a figure of seduction: as a transvestite, she signifies the *desire* to conjure *improbable figures* (the hermaphrodite), to seduce with images, to violate and subvert the 'signs' of sex such that what is apprehensible 'slips' into the unknowable**.** It is in light of the transvestite's obsession with the distinctly poetic activity of sacrificing and transmuting signification (a game of seduction), that the figure of the Cup-bearer may be read both as a figure for wine and its seductive experience and ultimately as the figure for poetry itself. In other words, the distinctly poetic quality of wine's seductive, iconoclastic experience is most powerfully indicated by the travestying figure of the Cup-bearer. This is true when we consider the vast symbolic registers of the wine god Dionysos: the god of theatre, the god of masks, Dionysos is a travestying deity, a "strange" (*xenos*) god for whom "everything is makeup, theater, seduction" (Baudrillard); his unique ability to transform his appearance, through paroxysmal epiphanies, into contrary forms that make him unrecognizable (as a god) renders him the ultimate 'iconoclastic' figure or a figure which splits its own apprehension.[101]

[101] "His [Dionysos] ability to transform himself into something else is often stressed. He is the "god of two forms"…the "god of many forms"…More frightening and serious than the multiplicity, however, are the duality and contrast in Dionysus' nature." Otto, *Dionysos*, 110.

It is the Cup-bearer's erotically travestying quality that renders her the most powerful symbol and indicator for wine's own iconoclastic or *poetic* 'presence.' The split in her erotically 'improbable' body thus bespeaks the metaphysical failure of language to *substantiate* (to lend coherence to) the 'excessive' and therefore 'uncontainable' quality of wine's intoxicating potency, its 'unknowability,' its *poetry.*

'Unbearable Lightness'

The metaphor of light is the 'site' wherein the 'undrinkable' quality of wine is seamlessly identified with the excess poetic experience; this distinctly poetic effervescence of wine is indicated in line four in which the face *either of the Cup-bearer or of the wine*—for there is ambiguity there— is described as emitting a pearly light:

قامتْ بإبريقِها و اللَّيلُ معتَكِرٌ فَلاحَ من وجْهها في البيتِ لألاءُ

4. As she stood with her wine-jug on a dark night her face emitted a pearly light.

According to the literal translation of the second hemistich, which reads: "a pearly light (لألاءُ) shone forth (لاحَ) from her face in the house," it is light rather than the face that is in the nominative case: light *radiates* or *shines* from the face. The face of the Cup-bearer and/or of wine is the source of the *light's shining*. The verse places special emphasis on the activity of light—its shining (لاحَ) forth from the face— thus indicating the munificent, celestial, miraculous quality of wine. As Noorani explains, "Wine is celestial because it miraculously produces light. This too indicates its supernatural origin in a

realm opposed to the dark bodies of ordinary existence."[102] This light (لألاءُ) shone forth from the "face" has a blazing, ecstatic, 'uncontainable' quality; for the verbal form (I) of the noun used to denote "light**," (** لألأ **),** suggests also the shining of a star, the flickering of a light, or the blazing of a fire**.** More than a shining, fiery brilliance, the light of the face suggests the munificent excess of poetic activity: for the word signifying light (لألاء) shares the same etymology as the word for "pearl**"** (لؤلؤة).[103] The pearl, in both the Arab and Persian tradition, is the prized metaphor for the poetic figure; to string pearls in a necklace is to compose a beautiful poem. The verse thus suggests that wine's experience signifies a kind of munificent, ecstatic emanation of poetic signs or figures.

In this same verse yet another space offers itself up to the confluence of the experiences of wine and of poetry: the "bayt" (البيتِ) or "house." The fiery light shines *in the 'house'* (في البيتِ). The image is striking for its ambiguity: more than a 'house,' (*bayt*) connotes the 'home' of poetic verse, the stanza.[104] Here the reader may observe the stark contrast between the pitch dark night (first hemistich) and the ecstatic irradiance of

[102] Noorani,"Heterotopia and the Wine," 352. Bencheikh observes that the ethereal luminosity of wine is a recurring theme in the Nuwasian wine song: "Éclat et luminosité du vin constituent l'un des themes majeurs de l'oeuvre bachique d'Abū Nuwās." Jamel Bencheikh, "Poésies Bachiques d'Abū Nuwās: Themes et personnages." *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 18 (1963-4), 28. Bencheikh devotes a chapter of his study to the survey of the constellation of metaphors used to convey wine's luminosity; among these are the metaphors of the sun, the light of morning, fire, a trembling or sparking flame, a torch, stars and planets.

[103] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 7 (Beirut: Librairie du liban ,1980), "la'la'a" and "lu'lu'atun."

[104] See Footnote 9 of Chapter 16 in Agamben's important study on the topology of erotic desire, phantasm and poetry: "The usage of the word "stanza' to indicate a part of the canzone or poem derives from the Arabic term *bayt*, which means 'dwelling place,' 'tent,' and at the same time 'verse."According to Arab authors, *bayt* also refers to the principal verse of a poem composed in praise of a person to whom one wishes to express desire, and in particular the verse in which the object of desire is expressed. (See the entry for *bayt* in E.W. Lane, Arab-English Dictionary.)." Giorgio Agamben,. *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans., Ronald L. Martinez. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 130-131.

wine's *poetic* experience (second hemistich). Wine is indeed more than a 'drink': its 'face' emits figures of poetry that shine forth luminously; this generous radiance of poetic activity is experienced in a purely poetic space, a verse of poetry, a stanza.

The 'uncontainable' quality of wine's activity, its *poetic effervescence* (excess), is conveyed once again in the image of the Cup-bearer pouring or dispatching (أرسلَتْ) wine from the mouth (فم) of the wine jug:

فأرسلَتْ من فم الإبريق صافيةً كأنما أخْدُها بالعين إغْفاءُ

5. Casting pure [wine] from the lip of the grail—a sedative for the eye to behold;

The verb '*arsala* (أرسلَ translated as "Casting" in the first hemistich) signifies at once the activity of pouring or dispatching (a liquid) and the activity of using *a word without restriction* or *signifying*.[105] That the pouring of wine (the 'drink') is conveyed in terms of signifying a message suggests that wine is more than a drink: it was as if wine, proceeding from the 'mouth' of the wine jug, were a message, an unrestricted emanation of signs that could no more be contained by the jug (excess) than the light that emanated splendidly from her 'face.' The use of the verb '*arsala* here is striking in that it brings to light the generosity of poetic signifying: 'pure' signs pour munificently from the mouth of the grail; here there is the suggestion of a kind of divine emanation, a self-overflowing.

The second hemistich of line four describes the problem of imagining the form of wine. The excessive, effulgently luminous nature of wine is such that it cannot be

[105] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 3 (Beirut: Librairie du liban ,1980), "'irsālun." The term also means setting loose, unbinding or liberating, which is befitting for this bacchic context, since, in the poetry of Abū Nuwās, wine is preserved for the consummate moment in which it can be poured out of its container and consumed by the drinker.

'grasped' by the eye: كأنما أخْذُها بالعين إغْفاءُ … According to the literal translation of this line which reads, "as if seizing the wine with the eye *were* slumber," the very vision of wine, or rather, the attempt to captivate or seize its image (*eikon)* with the eyes (i.e., its ideation) amounts to the blindness of the eyes or the incapacity to see or to apprehend forms. Insomuch as it cannot be contained as 'image,' wine is inapprehensible, unfathomable. Here there is the powerful sense in which the logic of ideating wine parallels the logic of ideating the sun.

Bataille's provocative essay entitled "Rotten Sun" helps to understand the existential paradox implied by the metaphor of the sun—its split or iconoclastic character.[106] He begins by explaining that the sun implies a split in man's spiritual being, at one time signifying his elevated rational aspiration to uncover and to behold the summit of truth in the fullness of its glory and the *madness* of his exceeding the limitation of his vision and therefore of the contemplation of that vision. Conversely, he explains, it is insofar as the sun splits man that it is itself split: on the one hand, the sun signifies the munificent emanation of light that promises man the most elevated and comprehensive contemplation of existence; on the other, it signifies the sublime excess of luminosity that disintegrates any proximity to the apprehension of its form. Hence, one finds, in Bataille's suggestion that the very excessiveness of the sun is what eludes its apprehension, an illuminating paradigm for understanding the problem of wine's ineffability as a sign in language.

More than a 'drink' to be merely consumed, the excessive brilliance of wine renders it sun-like: "She is the sun, though the sun burns and our wine exceeds it in every

[106] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 57-58.

beauty" (تفوقها هي الشمسُ إلا أنّ للشمس وقدوةً وقهوتُها في كل حسنٍ").[107] The excess of its form, one of the distinguishing traits of Abū Nuwās's wine, is such that it blinds, foiling and violating our capacity to form a unified idea about it, to 'seize' or to apprehend it; as Noorani observes:

> …on a cognitive level, wine proves to be *ungraspable*…its 'meaning' (ma'nā) is so subtle that it can be sought only through conjecture. The *eye fails in the attempt to visualize it*. The *imagination cannot fix it*. It is impossible to form any certainty about it. In all of these respects wine *exceeds* its physical location, its material manifestation, and the social and cognitive categories by which it ought to have a unitary identity.[108]

In drawing out the excessive-elusive paradox of wine, its seductive, 'uncontainable' or iconoclastic character (it cannot be contained as a figure) quality, Noorani indicates the quintessentially poetic character of wine.

In the Nuwasian wine song, the poetic quality of wine is further indicated by its subtle form, its 'unbearable lightness' that renders it "a thing to be grasped by the instinct and sensitivity of your intellect."[109] Wine is the drink of subtle intellects; this, the poet tells us, is what makes wine, by its very essence, superior to water.[110] In line 6, wine is described as a form so delicate, limpid and pure that water, unsuited for the mixture with wine, literally recoils from its form:[111]

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[107] English translation in Appendix B in Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 266. The poem is cited in Arabic in same Appendix, Ibid., 275.

[108] Noorani, *Heterotopia*, 354; emphasis mine.

[109] Translation cited in Appendix B, Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 267.

[110] Barthes in his *Mythologies* remarks on the antipathy between water and wine: "Bachelard has given 'substantial psycho-analysis' of this fluid…and shown that wine is sap of the sun and earth, that its basic state is not the moist but the dry, and that on such grounds the substance which is most contrary to it is water." Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans., Annette Lavers, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 58.

[111] A topos of the Nuwasian wine song and of the wine song genre overall is the unhappy mixture or 'marriage' of water and wine, which most often results in the effervescent, often violent bubbling and/or foaming of wine. For a comprehensive survey of this kind of imagery, see Bencheikh, "Poesies Bachiques," 42-47.

رقَّتْ عن الماءِ حتَّى ما يلائمُها لطافةً وجفا عن شكلِها الماءُ

6. More gentle than water, which ill suits her delicate [nature]. How coarse water is!

The verb جفا denotes at once the quality of roughness, coarseness or crudeness (having crude or ruffian manners) and the activity of avoiding or shunning; the second hemistich of line 6 may thus be read in two ways: "the water recoiled from or shunned (wine's) form" and "the water was too rough or vulgar for her form." The root meaning of the verb used to describe the activity of water moreover suggests its stern, rigid or unyielding quality which contrasts sharply with wine's generously self-overflowing brilliance and limpid or pliable form. In portraying an antipathy between the vulgar, aversive, quotidian substance that is water and the ethereal (and not so substantial), munificent essence that is wine, the poet discards the 'desert' aesthetic of the heroic model of poetry (the classical Arabian ode) in favor of the 'innovative' urbane aesthetic of erotic-bacchic poetry. It is the 'functional' quality of water that qualifies it as coarse or mundane: water is a substance that quenches thirst and ensures the continuity or longevity of the individual's life. Wine, by contrast, exceeds its status as a thirst-slaking 'drink' (it 'satisfies'); rather, one loves wine inasmuch as it consumes, 'unravels' and ultimately transforms the 'self,' granting access to a transcendent world characterized by paradox and *multiplicity*:

لو مزجتَ بها نُوراً لمازجها حتى تَوَلَّدَ أنْوارٌ وأضواءُ

7. If you were to mix light into [the wine] it would be pliant in the mixing, and become irradiant.

Thus while the combination of wine and water produces nothing worthy of mention, the combination of wine and light literally results in the *birth* (تَوَلَّدَ) of a *multiplicity* (أنْوارٌ وأضواءُ) of lights. That wine couples well with light is a testament to her sacred, numinous, transcendent quality; at the same time, her malleability and procreativity when mixed with light indicates the erotically liminal character of her transcendence: unlike the uniformity, unity, certainty or permanence ("truth") sought after by metaphysics, the type of 'knowledge' that wine affords is characterized by flux and multiplicity. As can be seen in the ensuing line, this 'insight' that wine affords implies a transgression or violation of the order of Time.

The Abode of Wine…

Line 8 depicts a kind of counter-reality in which Time (الزَمانُ), the enemy of desire, caters to the drunken whims of dallying youths:

دارتْ على فِتْيةٍ دانَ الزَمانُ لهمْ فما يُصيبُهم إلا بما شاؤوا

8. She circled amongst men to whom Time was indebted—men afflicted by Time only as they pleased.

The cure-ill topos of the opening line of the poem is amplified: whereas in the first line, wine functions as the transgressive antidote to the prohibitive logic of Islamic law (and the positivist project of epistemology as a whole), here wine violates or interrupts the very temporal order ("Time") which forms the foundation for religious epistemology.

The gift of wine is the gift of immanence, a timeless, placeless space in which desire is liberated from the care and constraints (*hamm*) of everyday life. This space of

drunkenness implies the undoing or unraveling of the linear temporal logic governing moral life. More than an 'undoing', drunkenness permits a reversal of this logic: whereas in everyday life, human desire and the possibility for its fulfillment are subject to the limitations imposed by Time/Fate (human mortality), Time is here 'indebted to' (دانَ الزَمانُ لهمْ) the desires of the drinkers.

The use of the third person feminine verb دارتْ ('she circled') in the second hemistich describes the sensuously feminine movement of wine, her 'circling' motion. As previously discussed, the feminine signifies a liminal, transgressive space, the space of 'reversibility,' of seduction; this is important when we consider that in the opening line, the poet vindicates wine-drinking through a subversion of the prohibitive logic of Islamic epistemology. The circular movement of wine (and/or the Cupbearer) described in line 8 thus functions as the poetic enactment of the circular, seductive rationale of the opening line of the poem which violates and subverts the teleological (linear and purposeful) structure of religious epistemology.

In lines 9 and 10, the poet opposes the inebriating experience of wine, its desire-unleashing potency to the experience of lost spaces, the abandoned abodes of those heroic poet-lovers who would stand weeping before them.[112]

لِتِلْكَ أبكى ولا أبكى لمنْزِلةٍ كانت تَحُلُّ بها هنْدٌ و أسْماءُ
حاشا لدرة أن تُبْنَى الخيامُ لها وأن تروحَ عليها الإبلُ والشاءُ

[112] Here the poet is here drawing on an ancient topos of the classical ode (*qaṣīda*), that of the *'aṭlāl* or the abandoned abode, where traditionally, the poet-lover would weep after his beloved's departure. Kennedy observes that in the *qaṣīda*, this nostalgic moment has the rhetorical function of inciting the poet-lover to take solace in wine-drinking; at times, the poet may even reject the *'aṭlāl* in favor of wine-drinking. Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 40. Here Abū Nuwās radicalizes this motif by choosing to weep over wine rather than the beloved figures of ancient tradition.

9. For her do I cry, not the spot at which Asmā' and Hind once alighted—
10. No tent is set up for the wine to be visited by camels and sheep!

As Kennedy observes, the poet in the line 9 invokes the names of the beloved woman (Asmā' and Hind) of ancient poetry only to contrast these with the quintessentially feminine presence of wine.[113] The poet then goes on to mock (line 10), in his characteristically mordant style, those classical poets who follows in the footsteps of the Bedouin tradition of poetry: the 'abode' of wine surpasses the vulgar, domestic encampment of the Arabs.[114]

More than You Know…

In the final two lines, the poet revisits the climate of theological disputation (line one) with two irreverent imperatives:

فقل لمنْ يدَّعى في العلْمِ فلسفةً حفظتَ شيئاً غابتْ عنْكَ أشياء
لا تحْظُر العفْوَ إنْ كنتَ امْرَأ حَرِجا فإنَّ حظرَكه في الدينِ أزراءُ

11. Tell him who would claim philosophy as part of his knowledge: "You have learnt some things, but much more escapes you;
12. Do not deprive [me] of God's forgiveness, if you are a man who would shame me; to deprive me of this is a blasphemy.

[113] Kennedy observes that "Asma' and Hind are proverbial names of loved ones in the antique *nasib*; Durra, by contrast was the servant-girl of Abu Nuwas. Wine is a sensuously feminine entity ("whose house is not visited by sorrow," unlike the proverbial Asma' or Hind), and "she" is described in such a way as to blend with the cross-dressed *ghulamiyya*: light irradiates blindingly from both." Kennedy, *Abu Nuwas: A Genius of Poetry*, 68.

[114] "If a joke is intended in line 10, one senses that it is at the expense of the poet's adversary: 'Perish the thought that the vine should have a tent set up for her and that camels and sheep should alight there.' This verse is antagonistic, ridiculing the urban poets who continued to compose in the manner of their Bedouin predecessors, and thus provides a natural transition to the sharp critique contained in the final phase of the poem." Kennedy, *Wine Song,* 190.

The poet rebukes the sophistry of "philosophers' who lay claim to knowledge or 'truth': you have learnt (حفظتَ or literally, *memorized*) 'one thing' (شيئاً) and yet a *multiplicity* of things (أشياء) eludes you.[115] The particle ف ("so") in the first hemistich of line 11 playfully suggests a logical continuity from the climate of theological disputation of line 1, when in fact this space of dialectic has been interrupted by the seductive, poetic space of the wine praise. In line 11, the poet points to the elusive nature of the 'object,' thereby calling into question the very premise for which wine has been prohibited: 'knowledge' (*'ilm*) is a 'thing' that can no more be 'contained' or apprehended than the excessive experience of wine. His use of the verb "to memorize" (حفظتَ) is striking in this context since it implies that the theologian's understanding of 'truth' is shallow or purely mimetic. In claiming that a 'multiplicity' of things 'eludes' him, the poet indicates that there exist 'truths' that can neither be circumscribed nor apprehended by the metaphysical function of language. On the basis of this logic, the poet subverts the theologian's self-righteous condemnation of him (line 12): judgment is a blasphemy, a deplorable excess or hubris, in that it dares to 'apprehend' or delimit the divine munificence of God.

The poem thus closes full circle on a note of paradox: authentic 'knowing' emerges from the *unknowing* implied by the experience of drunkenness. Knowledge

[115] Kennedy notes that the second hemistich of line 11 "expands a commonplace topic—*jahl,* which contrasts the adversary's claim to knowledge within what in the 'Abbasid period was the new-found context of philosophical discussion: (11a) qul li-man yadda 'ī fi l-'ilmi falsafatan (Tell him who would claim philosophy as part of his knowledge…)." Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 190. The term 'jahl' literally signifies 'ignorance'; accordingly, the Pre-Islamic era is known as Jahilīya or the 'Age of Ignorance'; Noorani observes that *jahl* also refers to the violent or passionate excess or lack of self-control. Noorani, "Heterotopia," 347. Hence and in suggesting that his censurer lacks knowledge, the poet is implying that he is not only ignorant (of religion) but also hubristic or excessive.

(*'ilm*) is not a thing to be 'grasped' by the mastery of the desiring subject's intent; to subscribe to such an idea betrays not only one's ignorance, but one's lack of self-control (delusional self-inflatedness). The 'wisdom of the vine' thus teaches that there are some 'truths' which exceed and elude 'apprehension,' and that poetry *is the experience* of this 'truth' or this seduction.

Part II Erotic Knowledge: Wine, Philosophy and Poetry in the *Symposium*

Introduction to Part II

In Part I Chapter 2 of my dissertation, I have shown how the ninth-century wine poet stages a mock-dialectic with a well-known theologian of his day, claiming that philosophy (*falsafa*) does not suffice as knowledge (*'ilm*) and that anyone who claims to have or 'possess' philosophic knowledge, such as his theological adversary claims, is inevitably deluded by it:

فقل لمنْ يدَّعى في العلْمِ فلسفةً حفظتَ شيئاً غابتْ عنْكَ أشياء

11. Tell him who would claim philosophy as part of his knowledge: "You have learnt some things, but much more escapes you."

In the second hemistich, the poet suggests, by his use of the word denoting "to memorize" **(حفظتَ),** that the type of knowledge which the theologian claims to possess is perfunctory, superficial—that is to say, purely *mimetic*—while in the meantime, a 'multiplicity of things' escape him.[116] Against this sophistic brand of rationalist thought which, in the name of religious truth, casts off wine-drinking as an unforgivable sin (*kabīra*), the poet 'prescribes' the purely erotic (desire for its own sake), irrational experience of paradox and multiplicity found only in wine: "Cure me with the cause of my ill"; that is, the poet prescribes an 'object' which, from the point of view of metaphysics, slips into the realm of the unknowable and which grants the drinker access to a liberated, transcendent realm characterized by excess, liminality and vicissitude, a space unfettered by metaphysical imperatives and limitations. Yet, and as the form and logic of the poem indicates, in order to have access to this more authentic form of knowledge that drunkenness imparts, a precious sacrifice is in order; that is to say, the 'self' as we know it must be violated in order then to be liberated by the knowledge that drunkenness permits. This is how wine occupies the erotic, liminal and therefore profane-sacred status of cure and ill: it liberates the self (i.e., it releases desire) by means of a violation or transgression of the self (i.e., indulging forbidden desire). As I have argued, the counter-intuitive logic and imagery that the poet uses to 'defend' wine ultimately

[116] Interestingly and as I will show in Chapter 3, the poet's suggestion that *falsafa* is a superficial, mimetic kind of knowledge (versus the knowledge offered to us by wine) echoes Socrates' rejection of poetry on the grounds that it imitates only the appearance of reality or truth since it lacks correct understanding of the 'objects' about which it speaks.

reveals wine to be the quintessential figure for the transgressive, seductive power of poetic activity. In short, Abū Nuwās's anti-philosophical 'defense' of wine-drinking is crafted as the seductive, anti-discursive and therefore poetic defense of poetic activity.s

In light of the above, Part II of my dissertation introduces the work of Plato as a 'rationalist,' 'dialectical or 'philosophical' lens through which to better appreciate the irrational, seductive or 'anti-philosophic' strains of Abū Nuwās's *khamrīya*.[117] A comparative study of Plato, the fifth-century 'Patriarch' of western metaphysics and Abū Nuwās, a poet notorious for his subversive attitude towards Islamic epistemology, is significant insofar as both traditions of thought renounce drunkenness and poetry as morally debilitating experiences. Whereas in the Islamic tradition it is wine that is viewed as so great a sin such that its consumption merits eternal damnation, in the work of Plato—namely the *Republic*—it is the long-standing tradition of tragic poetry which suffers the most scathing indictment in the form of expulsion from the educational system of the philosophic city (*kallipolis*).

In Book X, Socrates infamously banishes poets who follow in the tradition of Homer and Hesiod from his ideal philosophic city, claiming that there is an "ancient quarrel" between poetry and philosophy, one that he hardly deems reconcilable (607b-c). Given the vital, even sacred role that poetry plays in Greek education, his gesture is undoubtedly radical. Why does Socrates take such extreme measures against ancient, sacred tradition which must have played a critical role in his own formation as a

[117] *Phaedrus* is the other erotic dialogue of Plato, which like the *Symposium* offers an expressly positive view of poetry and other 'manic' arts. For a translation and useful commentary on both erotic dialogues, see William S. Cobb. *The "Symposium" and the "Phaedrus": Plato's Erotic Dialogues*. (Albany: State University of New York, 1993).

philosopher and most certainly in that of Plato?[118] While Socrates unabashedly condemns mimetic poets and poetry, his negative attitude to the consumption of wine is more understated. Although he does not prohibit its consumption, Socrates, at various parts of the dialogue, indicates in no uncertain terms that the experience of drunkenness is at odds with the philosophic way of life, claiming that "drunkenness, softness, and idleness are also most inappropriate for our guardians"(398e). Yet of the two 'dangerous' desires, it is poetry which Plato via Socrates views as the most menacing, so much so that he discusses its threat in Books II, III and X of the dialogue. Why is this so?

In Book X, Socrates overtly denounces tragic poetry on the grounds that it "is likely to distort the thought process of anyone who hears it, unless he has the knowledge of what it is really like, as a drug to counteract it"(595b). Thus, poetry, for Socrates, is a kind of disease which only a particular kind of drug, philosophic *knowledge,* can definitively cure. Only knowledge of the truth, the prized 'object' of the philosopher's desire, can render one immune to the corrosive effect that poetry has on the soul. At the conclusion of his discussion of poetry, Socrates declares a kind of war between poetry and philosophy, one according to which philosophy is the righteous victor: "…let's also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy, which is evidenced by such expressions as 'the dog yelping and shrieking at its master…'"(607b-c). Only when poetry is able to defend itself, can it be admitted once again into the city: "Isn't it just that such poetry should return from exile when it has successfully defended itself, whether in lyric or any other meter?"(607d). Socrates goes on to say that if such a defense is not possible, "we'll behave like people who have fallen in love with someone

[118] "Plato is said to have given up a promising career as a tragic poet to write them" [his dialogues]. Martha C. Nussbaum. *The Fragility of Goodness*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 126.

but who force themselves to stay away from him, because they realize that their passion isn't beneficial"(607e). Like a person whom I love but whom I am forced to leave at the risk of losing my own sanity ('self'), poetry is a seductive desire without which 'I' am better off. What makes poetry such a dangerous form of desire? Or better, what form of desire would immunize me to its toxic effect?

Chapter 3 of my dissertation addresses the above questions in two parts: first and by means of a brief study of the relations among desire (*eros*), drunkenness, mimetic poetry, philosophy and tyranny in the *Republic*, I show that Socrates' intolerant attitude to the ancient tradition of mimetic poetry is ultimately founded on its vital correlation to the erotic experiences of tyranny and drunkenness. More specifically, Socrates' characterization of poets and poetic activity ultimately suggests that poetry is a *logos* that is *intoxicated* and/or tyrannized by *eros* in all its perilous manifestations; precisely as a language 'intoxicated' by figures or images of desire, it is unaware of its 'objects' and by this lack of awareness, seduces those who are ignorant of the 'truth.' For this reason, Socrates stages an enmity between the purely erotic *logos* of poetry—a language non-knowledge and self-undoing that indiscriminately caters to our appetite for erotic excess—and the purposeful, deliberative, edifying *logos* of philosophy which is concerned with self-control (*sôphrosunê*), self-knowledge or self-realization and revelation.

Second and in order to better appreciate the 'other side' (philosophical) of this 'irreconcilable quarrel,' Section 3.3 of Chapter 3 introduces a critical reading of the erotic and philosophic dialogue of the *Symposium*. Precisely inasmuch as it is a *philosophic dialogue*, the principal *objective* of the *Symposium* is to inquire into the true nature of its 'object,' *eros* by way of a conversation among multiple, often incompatible perspectives

on the same topic which altogether force the reader to think critically about his own presuppositions. Set within the dramatic context of an exuberant drinking-party fizzing with wine and homoerotic desire, the philosophic 'dialogue' proper consists of six speeches delivered by six invited guests who praise of the god of sexual love, Eros and lastly, a 'bastard' speech delivered by a drunken party-crasher whose sudden appearance takes the larger 'conversation' among the guests to a paradoxically 'open-ended halt.' Each of these seven speeches presents a particular picture of erotic love and why it merits praise; nevertheless, of these seven speeches, it is Socrates' speech (the sixth and officially the 'last') concerning *eros* and its relation to philosophical language which scholars have traditionally 'canonized' as the consummate vision of 'Platonic love.' More precisely, Socrates speech on *eros* has traditionally been regarded as the sober mouthpiece of Plato's own ideational and transcendental vision concerning philosophy and how it can be, for those who desire it, the most satisfying love one could ever imagine.

Nevertheless, and, as I illustrate in the latter part of Chapter 3 as well as in my new reading of the dialogue in Chapter 4, pinning down either Socrates' and/or Plato's view on what *eros* actually is turns out to be no simple affair. In Section 3.3 of Chapter 3, I discuss the cardinal features of Socrates' 'philosophic' antidote to the problem of desire with the aim of challenging the conventional view that his vision of philosophic *logos* is so 'rational' and 'philosophical' as to preclude any association with poetic activity. Rather, I argue that *eros* is *by Socrates' own definition* 'much more' than a rational, teleological, ethical labor of love which is somehow 'immune' to or which 'immunizes' people from the immoral proclivity for indulging in excessive behavior.

Part II Chapter 4 of my dissertation proceeds to a more integrated perspective on this literary and dramatic work that takes into account its cardinally erotic, bacchic and rhetorical features; more specifically, it illustrates how the erotic dialogue of the *Symposium* proves to be of critical relevance to the study of the transgressive and seductive 'poetics' of wine praise. This is true insofar as Plato's *Symposium*, which in the Greek translates as 'Drinking-Party' is an *erotic* work of literature which is in every way shaped, pervaded and 'intoxicated' by the very forms of desire—drunkenness and poetry —with which philosophy sees itself at odds.[119] Ultimately, and upon the basis of this new approach to reading the dialogue found in Chapter 4, my dissertation challenges the purported enmity which the tradition of metaphysics (common both to the Greeks and Muslim Arabs) aims to draw between itself and the long-standing poetic tradition.

Chapter 3: Metaphysical *Eros*.

3.1. Introduction.

This chapter consists of two parts. The first part (3.2) offers a brief examination of the grounds for which Socrates in the *Republic* renounces the erotic experiences of wine and poetry as dangerous, self-destructive forms of knowledge which are ultimately at odds with the philosophic way of life, a way of life concerned with self-mastery, self-knowledge, and self-edification. The second part of this chapter (3.3) casts a critical gaze at Socrates' famous speech on erotic desire and its vital relation to philosophy in the *Symposium*. Through an examination of some key aspects of Socrates' celebrated speech

[119] Rowe, *Plato: Symposium*, 5.

on the 'true' nature and orientation of *eros,* Chapter 3 challenges the conventional view that Socrates' vision conveys a univocally 'philosophical' paradigm.

3.2 Tyrannical Loves: Wine and Poetry in Plato's *Republic.*

"Tell me this, however. Is excessive pleasure compatible with moderation?" Socrates in the *Republic*, 402e

In this section, I will show how in the *Republic*, the erotic experiences of wine and poetry are vitally intertwined. This is true insofar as both wine and poetry consort with the worst possible manifestation of human corruption, tyranny. First I will briefly show how wine and intoxication are connected to the tyrant's corrupt erotic desires. Second, I will examine the reasons for which Socrates ultimately regards the tradition of tragic poetry as instrumental to the formation of the tyrant. Finally and upon the basis of the above, I will argue that the philosophic argument through which Socrates casts poets and poetry under such great suspicion reveals that poetry can be understood as the rhetorical correlate of wine and its intoxicating experience; precisely as such, poetic language signifies the dangerous unraveling of the 'self' and its mastery over desire. Insomuch as its figures ferment and overflow with contrary and mixed images of desire, poetry celebrates 'experience' in its pure vicissitude, desire released from its highest metaphysical 'orientation,' the apprehension of the divine form of the good. For Socrates then, poetry is immoral on the grounds that it celebrates desire for desire's sake; it is a dangerous 'game': *seduction*.

In the *Republic*, Socrates paints his vision of the perfect city, a city free of political corruption, or the *kallipolis*. Such a city is ruled by the four principal virtues that a 'good' and rational citizen also possesses: wisdom, courage, moderation (*sôphrosunê*), and justice. Socrates makes the argument that if such a city could exist and

if it should remain free of corruption, it must elect a guardian or ruler who not only possesses these four virtues along with other key traits, but who, most importantly, devotes his entire life to the practice of philosophy. More specifically, the philosopher-king is a man whose desire is *oriented* towards the rational pursuit of knowledge. Such a man is most suited for guardianship insofar as he is guided by the rational part of his soul —the superior part—which guards over and controls the dangerous desires that correspond to the inferior parts of himself.[120] Because he chooses to approach all desires with an attitude of self-control, the philosopher is one who conscientiously *orients* his desire towards what he considers to be the ultimate object, knowledge or wisdom. More specifically, he desires to know and see the intelligible, yet incorporeal form of the 'good' rather than shadows or images of it.[121] That is to say, the philosopher is concerned with things in their essence rather than what they appear to be. This requires him to know and study the essence of what each thing is in its own right and to moreover discern the essential differences and similarities among all things that are. As I will show further in my discussion of Book X, this latter point is critical to an appreciation of Socrates' indictment of the imitative poet. Hence, and insofar as the philosopher possesses true

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[120] See Socrates' discussion on the tripartite soul: 435c-441c. The soul consists of three parts which ought to be brought into harmony: the rational or the 'higher self', the spirited which is concerned with emotions, and the appetitive, which desires to gratify all bodily lusts and pleasures. In the erotic dialogue of the *Phaedrus*, a similar theory is disclosed by means of the tripartite metaphor of the charioteer. See *Phaedrus* 253c-255a.

[121] See the influential allegory of the Cave (514a-517c) in which Socrates compares the lack of education to the bleak experience of human cave-dwellers who, having remained prisoners of an underground cave since childhood, have never seen the sun and therefore, mistake shadows of human artifacts that a fire illuminates on the cave wall (i.e., the "visible realm") for the invisible or "intelligible realm" (the "Good"). In this passage, Socrates makes the poignant argument that "the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body" (518 c). Moreover, philosophers, or those who possess authentic knowledge of the truth, must possess the humility to 'descend' into the underground realm and teach cave-dwellers, or those who are ignorant of the truth, how to make their journey upwards (579 c-d).

knowledge rather than opinion (which is concerned only with the appearance of reality), he alone is fit to protect the interests of the city, seeking to ensure the collective good of its people.

In Book IX, Socrates offers a riveting portrait of the philosopher's nemesis, the tyrant. A consideration of Socrates' evocative references to wine in this part of his discussion is necessary in order to show how wine and drunkenness are vitally linked to the desire for tyranny and therefore diametrically opposed to the philosophic way of life.[122] Socrates' portrayal of the tyrant begins with the affirmation that within the soul of each person, there exist lawless desires which are for the most part contained by laws and reason: "Some of our unnecessary pleasures and desires seem to me to be lawless. They are probably present in everyone, but they are held in check by the laws and by the better desires in alliance with reason"(571 b). The desires of which he speaks are those which we suppress in our waking life, but which shamelessly emerge from our subconscious as we sleep: "Our dreams make it clear that there is a dangerous, wild and lawless form of desire in everyone…"(572b). He describes the desires of one who goes to bed drunk as a kind of *reveling* beast which revolts against the rational or ruling part of ourselves (which sleeps) and will do anything to gratify itself: "Then the beastly and savage part, full of food and drink, casts off sleep and seeks to find a way to gratify itself…there is nothing it won't dare to do at such a time, free of all control by shame or reason…"(571c). By contrast, a person with a philosophic nature would not experience dreams that are so lawless because he will have subdued the inferior parts of his soul, the appetitive and the

[122] For a contrary view by Plato on wine and its relation to philosophy, see Elizabeth Belfiore, "Wine and Catharsis of the Emotions in Plato's Laws," *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 36, No. 2 (1986): 421-427. Belfiore shows how in the *Laws*, written close to Plato's death, Socrates adopts a paradoxical view of wine: a kind of *pharmakon* which, provided that it is administered in proper doses, can actually help to produce self-control or *sôphrosunê*.

spirited, to the rational part before going to sleep: "And when he has quieted these two parts and aroused the third, in which reason resides, and so takes his rest, you know that it is then that he best grasps the truth and that the visions that appear in his dreams are least lawless"(572a-b). Socrates' comparison of the tyrannical person's dream to the philosopher's dreaming is striking in its phrasing: in the former description, Socrates emphasizes not the drunkard's actions but the activity of the "beastly and savage part" within him that is "full of food and drink," suggesting that drunkenness is an experience in which the rational self is totally consumed and possessed by the desire for excess; by contrast, his latter description places emphasis on the control that the philosopher actively exerts over his own desires: "when he has *quieted* these two parts and *aroused* the third…"(emphasis mine); in so doing, he draws attention to the rational decision of the philosopher to subordinate his irrational desires and thereby exercise self-control.

Socrates then goes on to describe how an ordinary man with a decent nature becomes tyrannical.[123] Such a man, before he became a tyrant, is brought up in a corrupted democracy where freedom has given way to lawlessness.[124] Then some "clever enchanters and tyrant-makers" cluster around this man with the aim of making him a ruler and "plant in him a powerful erotic love, like a great winged drone, to be the leader of those idle desires that spend whatever is at hand"(572e). Insomuch as the drone is a honeybee which has no sting and makes no honey, it operates as the perfect figure for all

[123] As I will show, Socrates' principal charge against poetry (Book X) is that it corrupts decent men by nurturing the parts of their souls which enslave them, turning them into tyrants.

[124] "Come, then, how does tyranny come into being? It's fairly clear that it evolves from democracy" (562a); Socrates goes on to argue that democracy's "insatiable desire for freedom" (562c), which he compares to the insatiating activity of getting drunk ("so that it [democratic city] gets drunk by drinking more than it should of the unmixed wine of freedom…"(562 c-d), eventually leads to the desire to enslave and tyrannize. The logic of this dialectic describes a process by which "excessive action in one direction usually sets up a reaction in the opposite direction"(563e) and specifically, "Extreme freedom can't be expected to lead to anything but a change to extreme slavery…"(564a).

desires which are superfluous, wasteful, vain, accursed and which are therefore opposed to the productive, edifying 'work' of philosophy. More importantly, Socrates describes this erotic tyranny of the drone in such a way as to signify the wasteful, corruptive activity of wine-drinking: "And when the other desires—filled with incense, myrrh, wreaths, *wine*, and the other pleasures found in their company—buzz around the drone, nurturing it and making it grow as large as possible, they plant the sting of longing in it" (573a, emphasis mine). The drone is nurtured by a host of intoxicated desires (for they are filled with wine) until it becomes mad or "frenzied"(573b). By this description, Socrates indicates that the tyrant's distinguishing feature is his inability to control a lawless form of erotic desire which in turn takes hold of him. Hence, the tyrant is a tyrant to the degree that his *eros* tyrannizes him; Socrates confirms this when he asks, rhetorically, "Is this the reason that erotic love has long been called a tyrant?"(573b). From there, Socrates affirms that a drunken man necessarily possesses a tyrannical mind (573c) and correspondingly a mad man is so deluded by his irrational desires that he presumes to be able to rule not only men but gods (573c). Finally, Socrates concludes his portrait by describing the tyrant as a one who is all at once drunk, filled with desire and mad (573c). Hence, in the *Republic*, wine and its intoxicating experience operate as a figure for the self-consuming and therefore self-destructive tyranny that Eros exerts over the rational soul. Insofar as the tyrant is misled and deluded by a host of unnecessary erotic appetites, he is in every way 'consumed' and in that sense intoxicated by Eros. This tyranny that Eros exerts over the tyrant in turn leads him to commit outrageous or excessive acts or *hubris*.

Socrates' rather poetic portrayal of the tyrant may compel the reader to wonder about his wholly negative attitude towards the poets. Certainly Socrates has managed to exploit figurative language as a means of portraying the path that leads even decent men to moral corruption. Why then does he banish the poets from his 'good city'? In BK X, Socrates claims that Homer and other poets "eulogize tyranny as godlike" (568b); in the same passage, he reiterates this claim, saying: "…since the tragic poets are wise, they'll forgive us and those whose constitutions resemble ours, if we don't admit them into our city, since they praise tyranny" (568 b). How is it that poets praise a form of desire wholly antithetical to the philosophic life? Put otherwise, how is that poets praise a kind of irreverent, drunken, mad form of desire? Socrates' argument for why poetry praises tyranny is complex. He lays the groundwork for his argument concerning poetry as early as Book II, in which he discusses the kind of education that the guardian of the *kallipolis* should receive in order to live a life of virtue and escape corruption. This philosophic education should consist of a particular brand of poetry or 'story-telling' wholly different from that of the tradition of Homer and Hesiod. Since he and Adeimantus/Glaucon are founders of the city, it is up to them to determine what is admissible and what is not.

In Book II, Socrates raises two principal objections to tragic poetry. His first objection to it is that it gives a false account of the gods: "Those [stories] that Homer, Hesiod and other poets tell us, for surely they composed false stories…"(377d). More than a false account, these stories give a "bad image of what the gods and heroes are like" (377d), depicting them as "warring, fighting, or plotting against one another" even "hating their families or friends"(378c). This second objection is more problematic: for it suggests that even if the gods were in truth corrupt, this is not information to which

anyone should have access. Indeed, Socrates argues that even if poetic stories about the gods were truthful, they have an immoral effect on vulnerable listeners and for this reason, should be strictly prohibited: "But even if it [story about the gods Ouranos and Cronos] were true, it should be passed over in silence, not told to foolish young people"(378a, parenthetical added). Socrates' statement conjures a kind of foreboding regime, a Farhenheit 451 scenario, in which only elect guardians are granted access to a form of knowledge considered too dangerous for the ignorant, vulnerable masses. Because the vast majority of young people, however good-natured, simply "can't distinguish what is allegorical from what isn't, and the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable" (378e), any poetry that represents the gods as lawless, tyrannical beings must not be admitted into the city: "We won't admit stories into our city—whether allegorical or not—about Hera being chained by her son, nor about Hephaestus being hurled from heaven by his father when he was trying to help his mother […]" (378d-e).

Yet Socrates' argument in Book II poses two philosophic difficulties which, as I will show in 3.3, one encounters in his speech in the *Symposium*: First, how does a person actually *know* what is true or untrue concerning the gods, especially when all that the Greeks know about them has been transmitted by the poets? Second, if falsehood is a bad thing or a form of corruption, then how is it 'good,' just or virtuous to object that young people hear stories about bad things even when these stories are accurate portrayals of reality? Moreover, how exactly does one determine the 'falsehood' or the 'badness' of a particular story? What is the *measure* of goodness or truthfulness?

Socrates attempts to address these questions in Book X, in which he exposes the philosophical reasons for which tragic poetry in the tradition of Homer and Hesiod should be banned from the philosophic education. He addresses this question in two distinct parts: the first part, which he develops at length, concerns the poet's relationship to the objects he creates or more specifically, the 'knowledge' he possesses concerning those objects. It is here that Socrates lays the foundation for the second part of his argument (602c-607a), which concerns the effect that poetry has on the soul.

In the first part of his argument, Socrates introduces an extensive analogy which allows him to illustrate how and why a poet's knowledge of empirical reality is inauthentic, thereby constituting a distortion of the truth. Playing on the word *poiētēs*, which in the Greek signifies both 'maker' and 'poet,' Socrates proceeds to compare three types of 'makers'–god, a carpenter, and a painter—and their respective relationships to what is presumably a single object, a bed.[125] Here Socrates aims to show that while poets share the same title as 'makers,' they are in fact no more than imitators of appearances. Taking the bed as an example of an object 'made,' Socrates first argues that god, the creator of all being, is the only genuine *poiētēs* ('maker'), since he invented all forms that exist, including the form or being of the 'bed.' Next in line is the carpenter who 'makes' beds, but whose bed is in its own way an imitation since it copies the being of a bed which god had made. Third, there is the painter, whom Socrates will identify with the poet. The painter copies the image of the carpenter's bed, which is itself a copy of god's bed. As such, the painter's 'bed' is an imitation of an imitation, an object twice removed from its form or nature, conceived of by god. Precisely insomuch as the imitative arts are

[125] G.M.A. Grube, *Plato: Republic*. Revised by C.D.C Reeve. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992, 266.

twice removed from the truth, they constitute a distortion of 'reality': whereas the painter's one-dimensional 'bed' appears quite realistic to an uncritical eye, it in fact fails to capture the three-dimensional reality of the bed that the carpenter has made. For this reason, Socrates explains: "…imitation is far removed from the truth, for it touches only small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image. And that, it seems is why it can produce everything" (598b). Having differentiated between the activities of 'making' and 'imitating,' which the Greeks understood under the name of a single activity (*poiētēs*), Socrates is now in a position to discredit the conventional view that poets, the foremost among whom is Homer, are omniscient, possessing genuine knowledge of all things that pertain to life. He does so first by identifying the distortive imitation of the painter with that of the poet. On the basis of that analogy, Socrates argues that tragic poets and their "leader Homer" are "by nature third from the king and the truth, as are all other imitators" (597e). In further support of this claim, Socrates argues that if indeed poets such as Homer had genuine knowledge of the truth, they would not bother to imitate it but would instead make a meaningful contribution to society (599b). The critical implication here is that art is fundamentally opposed to the virtuous and collectively beneficial *action* which philosophy seeks to produce in citizens. In every sense, the artist, by choosing to imitate virtue in words rather than to translate words into action, is a liability to the collective good of the society. Hence and on the basis of their inability to constructively contribute to the education of citizens, Socrates concludes that "all poetic imitators, beginning with Homer, imitate images of virtue and all the other things they write about and have no grasp of the truth" (600e).

In further support of his claim that poets do not know the 'objects' (crafts) about which they speak, Socrates proceeds to compare the imitator (such as a painter) to the craftsman, or the one who crafts a given object for people to use. According to Socrates, only the user of a given object, such as a flute, truly knows everything there is to know about the object. The craftsman, or the one who fabricates the object, knows his object through his dealings with the one who uses it and for this reason, knows how to make a given object well. Yet unlike a craftsman such as a cobbler or a flute-maker, imitators neither directly experience the 'objects' which they imitate nor do they consort with people who actually know those objects well. Hence, whereas the craftsman's expertise is based on the direct and tangible relation he bears to the object of his craft as well as his relation to the person who uses the object, the poet's knowledge is derived from imitating the appearances of actions, people and objects which he does not know at first hand.

By this analogy, we are to understand that the craftsman is to the philosopher what the painter is to the poet: in the same way that a craftsman may be called an expert in his craft insofar as he studies every dimension of his craft (601d), the philosopher has direct experience of the forms of virtue because he devotes his life to speculative analysis about every aspect of it. The poet, on the contrary, is a kind of charlatan who manages to dupe the majority of his listeners since he goes on imitating "even though he doesn't know the good or bad qualities of anything, but what he'll imitate […], is what appears fine or beautiful to the majority of people who know nothing"(602b). Hence tragic poetry, insomuch as it constitutes an "imitation" is no more than "a kind of game and not something to be taken seriously" (602b).

Indeed Socrates' charge that poetry is a 'game' is a serious one. Not only does it suggest that poetry is gratuitous or unproductive from the point of view of moral education (since it does not 'know' the object of its imitation), but it suggests an ethical recklessness or a total lack of regard for ethics, which is ultimately in keeping with the self-destructive nature of the tyrant. In order to show how poetry corrupts souls, Socrates first attempts to determine "on which of a person's parts" does poetry "exert its power?" (602c) Once again, Socrates resorts to the use of simile in order to show how poetry is a game of trickery which exerts its 'magical' power on the weakest part of our souls, the irrational part. Like a water image in which the proportions of the reflection are so askew that our souls become 'confused' and deceived, mimetic art (he uses painting as an example) exploits the weakness in our nature by distorting the correct proportions of reality (602d). Our only defense against such trickery resides in the rational, scientific, discerning part of ourselves—the superior part—which is concerned with "calculating, measuring and weighing" objects in order to determine whether or not a given object is true or false (602d-e). This is the part of the soul which is suspicious of contradictions and paradoxes (since it cannot believe contrary things about the same thing at the same time) (602e).[126] On the other hand, if our propensity for erotic excess (the irrational and inferior part of our nature) is left unbridled by the rational, superior part of the soul, it will not only mistake such illusory imitations (i.e., *mimēsis*) for the truth (since it is unconcerned with such alarming contradictions and paradoxes), it will find them so

[126] See *Republic* 436 b-c. It is critical to remark that Socrates makes a claim which he outrightly contradicts at the conclusion of the *Symposium*: that the same man cannot produce tragedy and comedy. This is an important point of difference between the two dialogues which has merited much speculation and debate surrounding Plato's position on *eros* and its relationship to philosophy and mimetic art. For an engaging and sympathetic perspective on the relation between the two works, see Stanley Rosen, "The Role of Eros in Plato's *Republic*" *The Review of Metaphysics* 18, No. 3 (March 1965): 452-475.

fascinating and seductive that it will "consort" with it to produce false and therefore "inferior offspring" (603b).

Thus far, Socrates makes the general claim that all mimetic art (including poetry) is an inferior form of knowledge insofar as it "consorts with a part of us that is far from reason, and the result of their being friends and companions is neither sound nor true" (603a-b). At this point, Socrates returns from the problem of mimetic art in general to that of poetry in particular. The specific charges that he lodges against the tragic poet are as follows: first, "an imitative poet puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual by making images that are far removed from the truth and by gratifying the irrational part, which cannot distinguish the large and the small but believes that the same things are large at one time and small at another" (605b-c). Since the poet imitates the vicissitude of a hero's action (whether compulsory or not) and emotion ("pleasure or pain") (603c) without ever discriminating between shameful or decent, rational or irrational behavior, he allows his audience vicarious access to an "excitable and multicolored character"(605a) who is ruled by the parts of the soul that are "irrational, idle" and 'cowardly'604d). In other words, because the poet imitates a character behaving in a myriad of ways which reveal him to be in a condition of self-contradiction, flux, self-debilitation and confusion (603c-e), he sets a dangerous model for the constitution of citizens.

Socrates' charge against poets is thus double-edged: on the one hand, he admonishes their failure to capture reality in its true or 'empirical' dimensions, and on the other hand, he reprimands their unique gift for capturing in images the overarching 'truth'

of human experience that is failure and suffering.[127] Why should mimetic poetry be in anyway different than the grim, absurd, iniquitous or often titillating 'real world' problems it represents—even if it does not represent them in 'scientific' accordance with an 'actual' event that had occurred? And since most humans are double-minded and at constant war with their own desires, how is it that poetry fails to convey the truth of what it means to be human? Here it is significant to recall Socrates' earlier assertion that tragic poetry should be banished from the city *even if* the images it makes tell the truth, for the majority of young citizens cannot 'handle' the truth.[128]

An answer to the above questions may be found in Socrates' second and principal charge against poets, which is that "it is able to corrupt even decent people" (605b) or even those individuals who possess a philosophic nature. The reason for this lies in the fact that in the soul of each individual, there is an irrational part that "hungers" (606a) for the pleasurable release offered to it by catharsis; human beings derive pleasure for pathos: "When even the best of us hear Homer or some other tragedian imitating one of the heroes sorrowing…and beating his breast, you know we enjoy it, give ourselves up to following it, sympathize with the hero, take his sufferings seriously…"(605c-d). Not only do we derive momentary pleasure from vicarious laughter and tears, but we internalize the images we see and experience such that they permanently alter our moral constitution. Like the drone of the tyrant described in Book IX, poetic images etch themselves into our erotic sensibilities, fanning the fires of appetitive urges that lay dormant within us, feeding them, indulging them, unleashing them—without ever *satisfying* them—until '*Eros* the tyrant' (573b) in turn overpowers 'reason.' In this way, "poetic imitation" has

[127] This is a special point which I address in the new reading of the *Symposium* in Chapter 4 by means of a reading of Alcibiades' poetic account of his failure to seduce Socrates.

[128] See 378d-e and 387b-c.

the effect of 'nurturing' the desire for pleasure and pain of all sorts, establishing them as tyrannical "rulers in us when they ought to wither and be ruled…"(606d). Contrary to philosophic language whose primary 'objective' is to *orient* or lead souls upward, by means of a rational intent, towards the transcendent 'telos' that would satisfy and fulfill desire, poetry senselessly imitates desire's dangerous vagrancies, its multiplicity, its vicissitude, paying no heed to the veracity of its representation (even if its images are true) or the morally debilitating effect that its distortive images has on its listeners. Thus, Socrates concludes: "If you admit the pleasure-giving Muse, whether in lyric or epic poetry, pleasure and pain will be kings in your city instead of law or the thing that everyone has always believed to be best, namely, reason" (607a).

As Socrates' argument in the *Republic* powerfully suggests, poetry is a language at once *so consumed* by images of human desire (which may or may not correspond to the 'reality' it copies) and so heedless (violating) of the metaphysical limits that provide order and sense to our daily existence that it can be understood as the *rhetorical correlate of drunken experience*. Like a drunken body filled with, pervaded, intoxicated, and ultimately transubstantiated by the *erotic* juice of the vine— a drunkard staggering about *aimlessly*, sometimes laughing other times weeping or lawlessly violent—poetic language is blind or unknowing, disoriented (and thus *disorienting*),'self'-undoing.[129]

[129] For a striking example for the way in which poetic language achieves coalescence among the experiences of seduction, drunkenness and poetic activity, see the concluding section of Part I Chapter 1 of my thesis. Presumably consumed—literally and figuratively— by the intoxicating, *poetic* potency of wine, the poet describes a dissolute, nocturnal fantasia in which 'drunkards assault drunkards' and Satan acts as a high priest overseeing an instant of violent, homoerotic debauchery; the figures of this drunken episode suggest a total violation of the 'metaphysical order '(as described both within the narrative framework of the poem and beyond it) that properly distinguishes between lover and beloved, subject and object, drinker and drink; hence, when the young victim of the poet's debauchery complains that the dignity he has 'preserved' has been 'torn' from him, the poet retorts only with callous laughter, thus indicating the self-unraveling triumph (and tyranny) of drunken experience over the metaphysical imperative of 'self-preservation.'

In the first place, if drunkenness is the 'madness' of the body, poetry is the 'madness' of language. Tragic poetry in the Greek tradition is an ecstatic experience wherein the poet is *out of* his wits. He is dispossessed of his rational 'self' (the part of himself which is in control over desire) and is, in turn, possessed by a kind of 'knowledge' (in the form of language) which does not proceed from his own 'subjectivity' but from an 'other' (the 'Muse').

In the erotic dialogue of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates conflates poetic madness with the madness of drunken experience: "A third kind of possession and madness comes from the Muses: taking a soft virgin soul and arousing it to a Bacchic frenzy of expression in lyric…"(*Phaed*., 245a1-a4). Just as the poet is maddened by the Muse, the drinker of wine is 'consumed' by an experience of alterity, the intoxicating 'gift' of wine which dispossess him of his self-mastery or his rational mastery over desire. This is why Socrates states, in the *Republic*, that Eros is a tyrant and why he suggests that, inasmuch as the drunkard, and the madman are ruled by desire, they too are tyrants (573b-c). This is also why Socrates condemns poets: they praise tyranny insofar as they cut desire loose from its metaphysical orientation (which is to apprehend the true form of the good), exalting desire for desire's sake. Poetry, like drunkenness, is thus, for Socrates, a 'game' and not a serious endeavor since it does not edify those who partake of its madness and in fact, both experiences are sought after for their own sake, which is the cathartic and invigorating pleasure of *erotic release*.

In the second place, poetic figures themselves, namely metaphor, do violence to the uniformity and transparency (mimetic) of language. Just as the intoxicating juice of the vine radically alters the disposition of the 'self' by means of a violation of that sacred

limit which would separate the 'drinker' from the 'drink,' so too does poetic language radically alter the constitution of 'metaphysical language,' a language which lays claim to the unseen 'truth' of all being, by means of a *sacrifice*. Poetic language, by means of its metaphors, deflowers words, tearing them away from their domestic kinship to the world of 'objects' and conjoining them to 'objects' which are strange to them; by this sacrificial act, poetry produces transubstantiated images that draw attention to their own *erotic paradox* and which, in so doing, configure a new, impossible, ecstatic 'reality' that permits us to step outside of ourselves and see things we would not have seen before.[130] In this regard, Socrates' accusation that poets fail to faithfully and uniformly depict 'truth' is *true* yet all too *obvious*, since poetic language, already 'knowing itself' to be a 'gift' of *erotic* and *divine dispossession* (it is after all the work of the 'Muse'), does not recognize the integral opposition between fact and fiction, knowledge of the 'truth' and mystery or *seduction*. This is special point to which I will return at the conclusion of this chapter and also, in the concluding analysis of Chapter 4.

It is thus that Socrates stages an unflinching animosity between the purposeful, rational, productive, ethical desire of philosophy and the gratuitous, irrational, drunken seduction that is poetry. Only when poetry has successfully defended itself, Socrates tells us, may it be readmitted into the philosophic city; otherwise, "we'll behave like people who have fallen in love with someone but who force themselves to stay away from him, because they realize that their passion isn't beneficial"(607e). The simile that Socrates uses to compare the 'fatal attraction' that one experiences for a human being who is not good for him/her to the harmful desire to participate in poetic activity is striking insofar

[130] An example of this can be found in the monstrous and 'impossible' figure of the transvestite discussed in Chapter 2.

as it intimately links sexual passion (*eros*) with the desire for some form of knowledge. The critical implication of Socrates' metaphor is that there exists a kind of love or passion for a special type of 'object' or knowledge that is beneficial to us, one that 'satisfies' us, one that we should embrace whole-heartedly; this type of "knowledge" is like a "drug" that would 'counteract' (595b) the morally debilitating effect of *poetic desire*, that intoxicated (and intoxicating) *logos* for which our poet Abū Nuwās offers up an impassioned, drunken and hence, anti-philosophical defense centuries after the *Republic* was written (see Chapter 2).

3.3 *Eros* the Philosopher?

When the mind reaches out to know, the space of desire opens and a necessary fiction transpires.—Anne Carson.[131]

In order to better appreciate this vital association that Socrates forges between *eros*, a word denoting "sexual passion" and knowledge, it is necessary to turn to the most influential theory of erotic love in the history of Western metaphysics, Socrates' 'philosophic' speech in the *Symposium*. It is in this speech that Socrates essentially aligns sexual love with the *desire for wisdom* or philosophy, in such a way that philosophic desire becomes the rational, dialectical, ascending *logos* through which true knowledge, in the form of a divine revelation, may be 'attained.

[131] Carson, *Eros*, 171.

Socrates' speech begins only after the lofty conclusion of Agathon's penultimate speech in praise of Eros the god of sexual love. It is significant that Socrates' 'speech' does not take the form of a monologue like the previous speeches, but rather, of a conversation or dialectic (*dialegesthai*), since, as we shall see, this is precisely the kind of *logos* that comes to define the *erotic* activity of philosophy. Socrates speech thus takes the form of two conversations or dialogues: the first occurs at the periphery of his 'speech proper,' between himself and the host of the party, Agathon, who also happens to be a tragic poet. The second conversation takes the form of Socrates' memory—or so he tells us—and it occurs between Socrates-the-pupil and a mysterious seer by the name of Diotima, who teaches him all he knows about erotics or more precisely, philosophy.

Just before it is Socrates' turn to speak, Agathon, whose name signifies 'good,' had given a highly rhetorical speech that painted Eros as plenitude, , one which closely resembles himself: he is the most beautiful, perfectly virtuous, wise insofar as he is a poet, and beloved by all.[132] In essence, Agathon's Eros is an ideal hardly attainable by humans. Although human beings are in essence defined by their desire, Agathon's Love does not resemble us in the least. Only after Socrates engages him in a point-by-point exercise of logic, in which both agree about certain intrinsic qualities of *Eros*, does Agathon find himself at a loss: Eros is neither beautiful nor good, after all. Here we may observe that from the very outset, Socrates' speech is situated within the context of a serious but friendly encounter between philosophy and the tradition of tragic poetry (i.e., mimetic poetry) which he scathingly condemns in the *Republic*. In keeping with Socrates' assertion in the *Republic* that poets do not genuinely know the truth about which they speak, but only the *appearance* of the truth, Socrates' brief but important

[132] See 195a-197e.

dialectic with Agathon has the ultimate consequence of forcing the *apparently* 'good' poet to admit that he *in fact* knows nothing about Eros (201 b10). Agathon gives his elenchus after Socrates forces him to agree on some critical points concerning the nature of Eros which he learned from his teacher Diotima: Eros is the *love of something* (199e-200a). It loves only what it does not possess in the present (200a10-b1), and even if it does possess that thing currently, it wishes to possess it *in the future as well* (200c5-d5). Upon the basis of those key points, which he develops further via his conversation with Diotima and to which I will return further in my discussion, Socrates forces Agathon to behold the deficiency of his own speech in which he had claimed that Love is of beauty, not of ugliness. Socrates explains that if this were true, then Love *lacks* beauty, or else he would not desire it (201b3). Finally, he goes on to point out that if Love is lacking what is beautiful, then it is necessarily lacking what is good, since what is beautiful is also good (201c4-c5). In this way, Socrates unmasks the not-so-pretty truth about the god of sexual love, Eros: Eros is not beautiful, nor is he good, nor, for this reason, can he be a god (since, as we are left to conjecture, only gods possess beauty and goodness perfectly).

At this point, Socrates continues his exposition of the nature of Eros by means of a recollected conversation between his former self and a feminine seer by the name of Diotima.[133] In conjuring the power of recollective memory, Socrates puts himself in the position of the naïve student, who, like the poet Agathon, believed that Eros is a beautiful, beloved deity in order to illustrate what the true character of Eros is. The conversation between Diotima and Socrates picks up, roughly, where Socrates and Agathon left off (that is, on the question of Eros's lack of beauty and goodness) and

[133] See Chapter 4 for a treatment of the mythic, dramatic and poetic registers of Diotima's presence.

culminates, by way of ascent, with a sudden and extraordinary 'vision' of an inapprehensible beauty that opens itself up to the gaze of the philosophic lover. How does the primordial love for sexual pleasure culminate with a philosopher's initiation into the mysteries of the Unseen? In keeping with its extraordinary 'ending,' Socrates' speech is extraordinarily complex, slipping in and out of dialectic, extended monologues and deceptively simple myths. This makes tracing out a 'rational paradigm' of *ero*s difficult to achieve by following the text organically**.** While my reading can do no justice to its complexity and richness, it will draw out the cardinal features of Socrates via Diotima's paradigm in order to address the following questions: What is *philosophic eros*? In what way does this desire function as loving antidote to the all-consuming yet insatiating *eros* of poetry? Or better, c*an philosophy provide* everlasting *fulfillment or joy*? If so, can it do so without recourse to the seductive, drunken figures of poetic activity? In my discussion, I focus on the key features of Socrates' *eros* in order to point, in a preliminary way, to a few of its intrinsic problems. That the larger part of his speech occurs in the *dramatic* form of a recollected or imagined dialogue between himself and a mysterious woman named Diotima—a dialogue that is itself wrought with the troubling presence of myth—is a paradox both tragic and comic which I address in Chapter 4. The aim of this Chapter is then to bring to light just a few of the rational limitations posed by Socrates' complex philosophic 'paradigm' and how these may undermine, if not altogether undo, the purported enmity existing between philosophy and poetry.

Before the mystic Diotima 'enters the picture,' the first lesson that Socrates teaches Agathon is that Eros is always the love of something (199e-200 a). In some sense, Eros is like a transitive verb that must have an 'object' to impart it with meaning.

Concerning this point, Roochnik observes, "When sensing or thinking, it is impossible not to sense or think of something; similarly, when loving, it is impossible not to love something" or "Eros is 'intentional.'"[134] The second critical point Socrates makes is that Eros only wants *that which it lacks* (200a10-b1) or something that is not present to him at the moment.[135] But Socrates, recognizing the insufficiency of this description, goes on to explain the following: even if Eros possesses an 'object' in the moment (such as money or health), it wants to ensure that it will *continue to possess that thing in the future* as well (200 c5-d5). In other words, Eros does not prize momentary acquisition; it desires with a view to the *future.* As Roochnik observes, Eros is essential "temporal" [136]; we are perpetually striving towards completeness, a condition which, insomuch as we are finite, is unattainable. Eros is then a negative experience of the *present*, a 'hole' in our hearts that strives towards the *potentiality* (futuristic) of ongoing 'fulfillment' or 'completeness.' In essence, Eros is the *desire to eradicate itself*. As I will show, this is an existential paradox of which Diotima is well aware and which she attempts to 'resolve' in the latter part of her speech by means of two extended metaphors: that of pregnancy and giving birth and that of the ladder of mysteries. But before doing so, she will first attempt to paint a more vivid image of Eros's paradoxical nature in order to show how it is that Eros can be a philosopher.

Diotima's discussion with Socrates picks up where his discussion with Agathon left off: on the question of Eros' beauty. Socrates asks Diotima: if Eros is not beautiful or good (it lacks these), then is it ugly or bad? (201e9) In other words, is Eros pure lack or

[134] David Roochnik, *The Tragedy of Reason: Toward a Platonic Conception of Logos*. New York and London: Routledge , 1990, 109.

[135] See also summary of these points: 200e5-e10.

[136] Roochnik, *Tragedy*, 110.

pure impoverishment? The mystic teacher quickly hushes Socrates blasphemous assumption, claiming that there exists an *in-between* and this middle way is Eros (201e10-202b5). Diotima's characterization of Eros as a daimôn (201e-202e) complicates things significantly, for in so doing, she has imbued Desire, which we understand to be lacking and finite, with a spiritual nature that is oriented towards immortality, a fact which allows her to give Desire the structure of an vertical movement, or ascent. As Roochnik observes, "Diotima devotes the rest of her speech to articulating the structure of this daimôn, this 'spiritual' force that shapes human lives."[137] Moreover, Diotima shows that the activity of this daemonic force is fundamentally motivated by the imperative of filling the 'hole' in its nature by means of the eternal possession of its 'object.' The precise nature of the 'object' that Eros seeks is a topic which she will develop at great length.

Before considering Eros's 'object,' let us first return to the lover or the one who desires. When Socrates teaches Agathon that Eros is the love of something, he speaks of a *relation*. Eros is the capacity of the desiring 'subject' to enter into relationship with 'objects.'[138] The relation 'begins' in the *present moment*, with a subject whose need or lack is palpable to him, and 'ends' in the *indeterminate* future, with the object that contains within it the *promise or potential* of fulfillment. Diotima points out that this need is so elemental that it is felt strongly even by animals (207a6-b1). Awareness of lack is the condition of the one who loves. Eros is a lover.

What then is the 'object' of this lack or need? What does the lover (Eros) *love*? Socrates tells Agathon that the 'object' of the subject's desire (his lacking) is "something

[137] Roochnik, *Tragedy*, 111.

[138] Roochnik, *Tragedy*, 109

not available and something not present to him; and what he does not have, what he himself is not, and what he is lacking"(200e2-e6). To this 'absent' character of the 'object,' Diotima adds *beauty*. The 'object' of Desire is "beautiful things"(204d3) and "Love is love in relation to what is beautiful" (204b4). What I need or lack translates as *something that looks 'good' to me*; the beloved is 'beautiful' or attractive in my eyes. For Diotima, there is a certain measure of equivalency between what is 'good' and what is 'beautiful,' a matter that she seems to take for granted, when she substitutes the 'good' for the 'beautiful'(204e1) without giving reasons for doing so.[139] Thus she says, "What is loveable is in fact what is really beautiful, graceful, perfect, and to be counted as blessed"(204c4-c6). The 'object' of the lover's desires is thus as follows: in the first place, it is something which he *needs* and which is *not present* to him—or if it is in the moment, he wants it to be present to him *always*—and in the second place, it is 'good' or 'beautiful' in his eyes. But, as Diotima teaches Socrates, desire has an ultimate objective or 'telos,' whether or not we are aware of it: that of providing us with "happiness" (*eudaimonia*: 204e7). In essence, humans desire to continually possess beautiful and good things *insofar* as possession of these things imparts happiness or joy: "those who are happy are happy by virtue of possessing good things" (205a1-a2). In other words, the eternal possession of the beautiful and the good is a *means* to an end, and this end is *joy*. This is a fact which humans take for granted but which few people would dispute. Thus Diotima teaches Socrates, "the whole of desire for good things and for happiness is 'the supreme and treacherous love,' to be found in everyone"(205d1-d3).

[139] Roochnik observes that this is not so arbitrary, for "the Greek word for beautiful, *kalos*, has "moral" overtones." Ibid., 111.

Insomuch as permanent possession of the good or the beautiful has the ultimate *purpose* (*telo*s) of producing *happiness*, Eros is a teleological force; as Diotima observes, "people are even willing to have their own feet and hands cut off, if their own state seems to them to be a bad one"(205e3-e6).[140] Since human beings are all lovers whose happiness is contingent upon possessing beautiful 'objects' *forever*, it follows, then, that the true 'telos' of our desire is *immortality* (207a4), since immortality is precisely *what we do not have* and *can never have*. Immortality is the 'telos' which summarizes the blissful state in which all that I lack presents itself to me at the moment, with *self-overflowing abundance*. Falling in love is the prime example of an experience which, however transitory, bears striking resemblance to this condition of inflatedness. "Forever" accurately sums up the desire to possess an individual beyond the sobering peripheries of this life within which 'I' am circumscribed.

Nevertheless, Diotima's argument confronts us with a serious problem. Human beings are finite, not Olympian gods. The present life in which we desire is finite, circumscribed by 'endings'; it has clear edges. As Carson observes, "Eros is an issue of boundaries. He exists because certain boundaries do."[141] Moreover, the grim certitude of death stamps our existence with another imperative, that of continual, unrelenting flux. The cyclical character of Nature is a testament to this: Spring, the season of birth, quickly surrenders to the climate of death and barrenness that is Winter, which in its own time

[140] It is has been observed that Diotima is alluding to a previous speech given by the comic poet Aristophanes, who claimed that humans are *symbolons* who seek their 'other halves' in order to be made 'whole' (192e10). Socrates via Diotima refutes the notion that Eros is of 'wholeness' found in sexual union with another being. For Diotima, the erotic 'object' in question is not the welding together of beings who have been sliced in two and thus separated from their 'other half' but it is rather the unseen, unchanging, pure and unmixed form of the Beautiful and the Good. That the Beautiful is apprehensible as an 'object' is problem which I address at the conclusion of this chapter.

[141] Carson, *Eros*, 30.

gives way to a burgeoning of new life. As the seasons indicate, desire is a movement in time and space punctuated by lush instants of contentment which then give in to barren expanses of longing; in this short life, we are ensured only a bitter-sweet mix of hellos and goodbyes, delight and anguish, recuperation and loss. In short, desire is fated to never rest from its grueling journey towards immorality, its true *object* and *condition* for its *fulfillment.*

Finitude and flux are two problems which Diotima already takes into account in her speech. This is why she characterizes Eros as 'in-between' or daemonic. Eros stands for the middle way that separates diametrically opposed values: ugliness and beauty, ignorance and wisdom, poverty and wealth, finitude and immorality. Eros's very own finitude and flux are ontological 'truths' which she will illustrate, paradoxically, by means of an allegory concerning Eros's conception. Yet, at the same time that her myth points to Eros's 'malady,' it also reveals that Eros's very own nature contains within it the seed of a philosophical 'antidote' to these problems, one which she will develop into her famous ladder paradigm.

By Diotima's mythic account, Penia, an impoverished woman, comes begging at the doorways of a divine feast held (she is *uninvited*) in honor of Aphrodite, hoping to conceive a child with a divinity. When she finds Poros, son of Mêtis ('cunning intelligence')[142], drunk and passed out in Zeus's garden, she plots to have a child with him and succeeds. This is how Eros is conceived (203b1-c3). Taken at face value, we are to understand Eros as the progeny of two diametrically figures: the feminine principle which stands for lack, need and mortality, Penia and the masculine principle which stands for self-overflowing and divinity, Poros. Eros, as Diotima wishes to make clear, is *in-*

[142] Rowe, *Symposium*, 176.

between these values, or he has a *relational* character. Like his mother, who stands for deprivation, Eros has a gnawing 'hole in his heart' that hungers endlessly; his ability to achieve satisfaction is limited by his own finitude, his mortality, which in turn dictates the necessity of flux. Desire is a *problem of Time*. Diotima tells us that, in keeping with his mortal nature, Eros is "always poor, and far from delicate and beautiful…he is hard, dirty, barefoot, homeless, always sleeping on the ground, without blankets, stretching out under the sky in doorways and by the roadside"(203 c7-d3). Occupying the liminal threshold between life and death, home and homelessness, Eros is always placeless or *atopos.* For this reason, he is in flux, oscillating between poles of poverty and abundance, life and death: (203e2-e3). For this reason, he does not live in a castle or a house with a white-picket fence—or if he did, it would not be 'happily ever after'—for before he knew it, he would be "homeless…sleeping on the ground, without blankets…and by the roadside"(203d1-d3).

The question is, how do we overcome our very own nature, if it dictates that we cannot ever guarantee getting what we want, even if for a moment? According to Diotima, the answer lies, once again, within the *relational structure* of Desire itself: desire is not pure lack, but it is *in relation* to an 'object' that it deems beautiful and that it wills to possess permanently. This 'something' that it wills to possess is integral to its nature, for without an 'object' or 'telos,' desire cannot exist; we would either be dead or non-existent. Desire is of *something* that lies just beyond our reach. Hence, and by this relational quality of Desire, it *is in our very nature* to strive for something greater than ourselves, a perfect and immortal beauty, a beloved that is transcendent. The 'object' which Penia lacks is precisely what the gods possess: overabundance (indicated by

drunkenness), self-sufficiency (plenitude) and immortality (lack of desire). Divine self-overflowing is the image of Eros's father, the drunken god who gives of himself inexhaustibly and without the slightest bit of effort. This self-abundance is what Penia lacks and seeks to gain by waiting for the opportune—yet nonetheless illicit— time to lay with the god. Penia's crime is not terribly creative; she does not go out of her way to 'rape' Poros but rather, the opportunity simply opens itself to her when he falls asleep in a drunken stupor. Because Penia is a principal of deprivation, she has a necrophilic quality: she lays with an unconscious god. If Penia, however, signifies this pure lack, this total impoverishment, this 'hungry hole' which can hardly move beyond itself but lingers in its place, Poros indicates a condition of plenitude that is also pure self-oblivion; unaware of his own generosity, his drunken stupor is just a 'gift that keeps on giving.'

What Diotima's myth illustrates by means of the image of the drunken deity is that there is another side of our nature that is *god-like*: the divinely 'resourceful' side that finds ways to overcome obstacles. Thus and by way of his divine parentage, Eros is "a schemer after the beautiful and good, courageous, impetuous, and intense, a clever hunter, always weaving new devices, both passionate for wisdom and resourceful in looking for it, philosophizing through all his life, a clever magician, sorcerer, and sophist…"(203d4-d6). Because he was conceived on the occasion of Aphrodite's birth, Eros seeks only the *beautiful*. And since his father was an abundantly cunning and creative being, Eros is endowed with a *spiritual prowess*; he seeks the beautiful with a drive that is all at once impassioned, resourceful, creative, and unrelenting.

Diotima's myth thus teaches that a lover's nature is a strange 'mix' of human deprivation and divine creativity or resourcefulness, suffering and consolation. We are

lovers insofar as we have a hungry hole inside our nature that pushes us to strive beyond it, even if it is something so great that it is 'out of our league' such as an 'idea' we simply cannot cognitively apprehend.[143] Somewhere *in-between* the primordial 'hole' of a lover's present state (indicative of Penia's finitude) and that beautiful 'object' that contains within it the promise of self-sufficiency (signified of Poros's immorality), there is some *awareness* of a difference or a paradox. This awareness of difference is *erotic*. The 'mortal' side of Eros indicates that he is caught in Time, trapped in himself, much like the farcical sliced-in-half figures of Aristophanes who stumble about life searching for their 'other half.' Yet the 'immortal' side of Eros keeps *reaching* and striving to overcome this problem by orienting itself towards immortality. Eros's 'home' is thus the relentless, spirited search for a 'home.'

While Diotima's allegory teaches us that Eros is as much a spiritual, creative drive as it is a primordial hunger, it does not make clear how exactly Eros transcends its own paradox or if it does achieve immortality, in what way this makes Eros a lover of wisdom or a philosopher. Diotima first addresses the question of knowledge very early in her speech, when she corrects Socrates' assumption that Eros is ugly and bad because he is not beautiful. Eros, she tells him is an in-between. In order to illustrate this, she explains that someone is not ignorant just because he is not wise; rather, "correct belief" or knowledge of the truth is somewhere in-between these two values (202a5-a9). To better illustrate his in-between quality, she compares Eros to a daimôn or a great spirit that is neither mortal nor immortal. By her exposition, Diotima establishes an implicit identification among the various erotic 'objects' that a philosopher seeks: beauty, wisdom

[143] This will be the theme of the next chapter. The narrative frame of the philosophic dialogue is told by a self-declared inferior man, Aristodemus, who, like Penia, attends a drinking party to which he is not invited.

and immortality. Only after she weaves her allegory concerning Eros does she explain that wisdom is beautiful and that Eros, insofar as he is a lover of wisdom, is a philosopher: "Wisdom is actually one of the most beautiful things, and Love is love in relation to what is beautiful, so that Love is necessarily a philosopher, and as a philosopher, necessarily between wisdom and ignorance" (204b3-b5). Precisely insofar as he seeks wisdom, which is beautiful, the philosopher is in-between the condition of godliness (for gods are wise) and deprivation (for ignorant people are dead in their awareness; they do not know what they lack). Like Eros and the whole of humanity, the philosopher ultimately seeks immortality; but apart from most people, he does so by means of an impassioned search for wisdom. What does wisdom have to do with immortality?

Diotima's answer to this question lies in two principal metaphors: the horizontal metaphor of the daimôn and the vertical, more complex metaphor of 'procreation' which takes on the structure of an ascent. When Diotima calls Eros a daimôn or great spirit, she describes him as a messenger between gods and men. More than a messenger, he is an *interpreter* (202e4). He moves teleologically, like a *transitive verb*, towards the unseen 'object' that would provide meaning and sense; he then travels back to the 'hole' in himself with 'news from beyond,' *meaning* which he must interpret in light of his present understanding. Desire thus has a spiritual, animating, dynamic quality that is *self-reflexive*. It goes towards its 'telos'—immortality—then returns to itself again, as if to interpret the difference between what is not totally present to him and what is. The 'reach' of Desire is an activity that involves some measure of *self-knowledge*, even if self-knowledge is not the 'telos' of desire. That is to say, in order to pursue an 'object'

which I lack, I must arrive at the conclusion that that this object is advantageous to me. I must possess some measure of *knowledge* about my need and this 'object' I am pursuing and how this 'object' can satisfy my need for happiness. Perhaps for this reason, every desire that is oriented towards immortality (joy found in self-sufficiency) is also, in some measure and more often without realizing it, oriented towards self-knowledge or *wisdom*. The daemonic nature of Eros clearly indicates that desire is a kind of intercourse with a pure, unchanging form of knowledge that cannot be expressed *as such* in words, but which can be intellected in bits and pieces, by way of the dynamic activity of *thinking* and *speaking*. *Logos* is *erotic*. Sending and receiving messages is a dynamic activity of *language*. Interpretation is also an activity of *logos*: it is a creative, dynamic activity that draws on faculties both rational and irrational and which is predicated upon an awareness both of what is known and unknown. *Our being is a matter of speaking.* As humans, we pursue joy and fulfillment by means of a speech that is aware of its divine and eternal 'telos' and that strives, dynamically and unrelentingly, to apprehend it. Logos is our 'home' away from home.

At this point, Diotima's understanding of the role that logos plays in the pursuit of immortality seems rather far-fetched: how can humans speak and interact with the gods when gods are more often than not silent and living somewhere up in the clouds? Procreating in body and in soul is the other metaphor that Diotima weaves in order to signify the striving activity of philosophic *logos.* Her way of describing the process takes us back to the world of flesh: Eros's unearthly role as messenger to and from the gods is now anchored within the distinctly *carnal* activity of labor and giving birth. In what way is philosophic logos a procreative process?

According to Diotima, all carnal creatures, human and animal alike, are driven by the same spiritual desire, the desire for immorality. Procreation is the distinctly *erotic* means by which they cope with the *erotic* problem of flux: "The same account applies to animals as to human beings: mortal nature seeks so far as it can to exist for ever and to be immortal. And it can achieve it only in this way, through the process of coming-into-being, because it always leaves behind something else that is new in place of the old…"(207 d1-d3). Diotima explains that human beings are always losing what they had before, whether in the form of physical traits or in the form of their emotions, opinions or pieces of knowledge (207e1-e5). Appropriately for what will be a 'philosophic paradigm,' she places special emphasis on the flux of *knowledge*: "forgetting is the departure of knowledge and going over something creates in us again a new memory in place of the one that is leaving us, and so preserves our knowledge in such a way as to make it seem the same"(208a). Knowledge is an 'object' that never remains the same, but is always changing insofar as humans are forgetful.[144] Here Diotima suggests that in order to gain wisdom, a prerequisite for the ultimate 'telos' of immortality, human beings must engage in a process of recuperation by means of which this fluctuating 'knowledge' is preserved. Diotima makes explicit that just as we are always in flux, "each individual piece of knowledge is subject to the same process" (208a2-a3). Although Diotima appears to be saying that knowledge has an intrinsically instable character, which would mean that all knowledge is in fact relative, she makes clear that knowledge changes only insofar as humans are forgetful (208a4-a5) and that the divine, unlike mortals, is always the same (208b1).

[144] There is special irony to this statement, given the fact that Diotima's 'speech' is itself the articulation of Socrates' recollective memory.

Insofar as knowledge is an 'object' that is unstable (since humans are unstable), the lover of wisdom must devise a way to 'hold on' to what is continually eluding his grasp. For Diotima, 'giving birth' to ideas in the form of words (logos) is the means by which we approximate the true form of wisdom. But how can we produce from within ourselves a form that lies exterior, even beyond us? How does the distinctly physical activity of procreation, an activity of 'making' (*poiêsis*), allow one to apprehend the *true and unchanging* form that exists beyond the realm of bodies?

According to Diotima, we 'lay hold' of the highest form of desire by means of amorous dialogue with a loved one; in talking introspectively about the 'objects' of our desire and how they change over time, we help one another discover what we truly value, or the true meaning of existence. As Roochnik observes, "It is because we talk that the objects of our eros change. Logos, which is produced by human erotic energy, provides a means for having a 'realization.' Logos functions like a lens through which we see the objects we love. When there is a disparity between what we are saying and what we are loving, then a need is felt to move on."[145]

As Diotima indicates, human beings are all "pregnant both in body and in soul," awaiting the proper season in which to give birth (206c1-c4). We are all pregnant with some awareness of our desires that is difficult to articulate. It is the proximity of the beautiful that enables us to give birth (206c5). In the presence of the beloved's beautiful form, the pregnant lover "becomes gracious, melts with joy, and gives birth and procreates"; beauty's proximity allows him to experience 'great excitement' in its presence (206e1). The presence of a beautiful and good person inspires us to 'open up'

[145]Roochnik, *Tragedy*, 116-117.

about our desires and their 'objects.' Oddly, the language that Diotima uses to describe this process of giving birth more closely evokes the pleasurable activity of heterosexual intercourse than the agonizing pangs of labor.[146] What Diotima is ultimately trying to evoke by use of this sexual language is a genuinely passionate and inspired experience that is as much carnal as it is soulful. All creative activity, the most elemental of which is having biological offspring, is as much a matter of messy bodily exchange (sexual intercourse) as it is a matter of entering into communion with the divine. Hence and taken in conjunction with the ladder paradigm, the significance of this metaphor lies in showing that philosophic logos is an erotic, passionate, productive, teleological, ethical and dialectical activity which, insomuch as it relentlessly strives to give expression to the highest beauty— *wisdom*—is able to slake our thirst for immortality.

Diotima goes on to explain that not all 'intercourse' (giving birth) is created equal, for different types of intercourse (also 'pregnancy') bring forth different types of offspring. Here she makes clear that procreation of the soul (speaking), which produces knowledge, is inevitably superior to that of the body; for this reason, people envy the tragic poets for their immortal glory (209d1-d5). Nevertheless, Diotima's praise of Homer and Hesiod in no way indicates that the 'logos' of poetry is on equal footing with that of philosophy. For while she acknowledges that poets and other craftsmen are procreators of wisdom and virtue (209a3-a4), she makes explicit that "…by far the greatest and most beautiful kind of wisdom is the setting in order of the affairs of the cities and households, which is called 'moderation' and 'justice'" (209a5-b1). Hence and just as we find in the *Republic*, guardianship of the polis, a duty which Socrates bestows

[146] For an engaging analysis of the development of the metaphor of spiritual pregnancy see E.E Pender "Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato's *Symposium*," *Classical Quarterly* 42 (i) (1992): 72-86 .

to the philosopher alone, is the most beautiful object of desire. The most beautiful 'procreation' is therefore that which is achieved by someone who is "pregnant with these [moderation and justice] things in his soul…by divine gift" (209b2). Diotima describes the activity of philosophic procreation as something at once passionate (in the sense of sexually erotic) and spiritual: "When someone is pregnant with these things ['moderation' and 'justice'] in his soul…by divine gift, and with the coming of the right age, desires to give birth and procreate, then…he too goes round looking for the beautiful object in which he might procreate; for he will never do so in what is ugly" (209b1-b5). The one who is pregnant with desire for virtue "warms to beautiful bodies rather than ugly ones" and "if he encounters a soul that is beautiful and noble and naturally well-endowed, his welcome for the combination—beautiful body and soul—is warm indeed; to this person he is full of resource when it comes to things to say about virtue"(209b9). In essence, Diotima is saying that intimate talk with a person whom we trust and love brings out a creative side of us, the 'resourceful' side of us that 'makes sense' out of our desires by an interpretive process of seeing the similarity and difference among things. Diotima further indicates that the impact of such intimate dialogue is so profound that even in the absence of such conversation, we continue to produce meaningful ideas: it is by "contact with what is beautiful, and associating with it, that he brings to birth and procreates the things with which he was for so long pregnant, both when he is present with him and when he is away from him but remembering him; and he joins with the other person in nurturing what has been born…" (209c3-c5).

As I will show, Diotima's pregnancy-procreation paradigm describes a *dialectical* process which occurs at the conjunction of a horizontal and vertical or ascending

movement: loving conversation and physical intimacy with a partner who possesses a beautiful soul (i.e., horizontal exchange) can inspire the lover to retrieve the creative impetus ("resources) that long lay dormant within him (i.e., 'pregnancy') and that will allow him to move through varying stages of insight and self-awareness (i.e., vertical exchange), until finally, he is able to behold that which he has been striving to 'capture' all long: the pure and unchanging form of the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

Diotima describes essentially four stages to this 'ascent'; together these summarize a methodical, rational process according to which the young apprentice transcends, by means of *speaking*, the love of sensuous particulars, realizing that the 'objects' that he desires bear a fundamental kinship to the 'objects' which are greater, more abstract and more universal. Whether or not the young lover-philosopher will in fact be initiated into the highest mysteries is uncertain; for certainly, there are those people who, in spite of their old age, remain fixated on the love of young and physically appealing bodies. Diotima makes clear to Socrates that there is no guarantee that Socrates himself will succeed; philosophizing is an activity which must be approached methodically or in a 'correct manner.' In this way, philosophy is to be distinguished from other erotic pursuits insofar as it is rational, teleological and methodical activity of speaking and thinking.

In the earliest stage of the philosopher's ascent (210a4-210b5), the young apprentice is filled with sensuous preoccupations. At this stage he has a longing in his soul which he cannot adequately articulate. By choosing a beautiful partner or guide with whom he can fall in love and who can inspire him, he can "procreate beautiful words, and then realize for himself that the beauty that there is in any body whatever is the twin of

that in any other…and that it's quite mad not to regard the beauty in all bodies as one and the same"(210b2–b3). Hence and in speaking with his beloved, the apprentice experiences a healthy level of disillusionment concerning the physical beauty of particulars. He learns to seek a universal beauty.

In the second stage of the ascent, the apprentice learns to love the soul more than the body, so that he is able to find beauty even in a partner who is physically unappealing, so long as he is a decent human being. In so doing, the apprentice finds beauty in more abstract pursuits such as the institutions and laws. Once he discovers how these various kinds of activities are related to one another (210b6-210c5), he goes on to contemplate the vast horizon of knowledge and through this, comes to the realization that fixating on individual love is a kind of slavery. Rather and in beholding the "great sea of beauty and contemplating that," he gives birth to "many beautiful, even magnificent, words and thoughts [logoi] in a love of wisdom that grudges nothing" (210d4-d6). At this stage the apprentice has fallen thoroughly in love with the practice of philosophy ("in a love of wisdom that grudges nothing") and is now experiencing awe before the world of beautiful insight that has opened itself up to him by way of it. This amazing 'vision' in turn leads him to articulate what it is he is seeing; in keeping with the beautiful character of the 'objects' he sees, he produces "beautiful" and "magnificent" *logoi*. In this way, the procreative activity of philosophic speech is an attempt to satisfy the greatest human desire, the desire for the eternal, unchanging, perfect Beauty.

After passing through these stages, the now-philosopher, standing at the apex of a life-long love affair with the forms of virtue, "will come now towards the final goal of matters of love [*ta erotika*], and will suddenly catch sight of a beauty amazing in its

nature—that very beauty, in fact, Socrates that all his previous toils were for…"(210e4-e6). Diotima then proceeds to a lavish and exalted description of a form which she largely describes in *negative* terms:

> first, a beauty that always is, and neither comes into being nor perishes, neither increases nor diminishes; secondly, one that is not beautiful in this respect but ugly in that, nor beautiful at one moment but not at another, nor beautiful in relation to this but ugly in relation to that, nor beautiful here nor ugly there, because some people find it beautiful while others find it ugly; nor again will beauty appear to him the sort of thing a face is, or hands, or anything else in which a body shares, or a speech, or a piece of knowledge, nor as having a location in some other thing, such as a living creature, or the earth, or the heavens, or anything else—but rather as being always itself by itself, in its own company, uniform, with all the other beautiful things sharing in it in such a way that when they come to be and perish, it does not in the slightest degree become either greater or less, nor is it affected in the slightest. (211a1-b6)

First, the pure beauty is an *eternally unchanging* form. It is perfectly and unchangingly *uniform*. Second and as a consequence of the first point, its form *cannot be apprehended in ideational terms*. Third, it is itself non-reciprocal or *non-relational*. It does not participate in forms heavenly or earthly, even while the whole of being partakes of it. For this reason, it cannot be described in terms of its relation to any particular value by which we describe experience (time, place etc.)

Finally, Diotima concludes her extended monologue with a question that is meant to be a purely rhetorical: musing upon the extraordinary feat of beholding the uniform image of truth, this "pure, clean, unmixed"(211e2) beauty that is moreover "not contaminated with things like human flesh, and colour, and much other mortal nonsense" (211e2-e3), she asks Socrates whether, in catching sight of this abstruse form that defies description, he recognizes that "he will succeed in bringing to birth, not phantoms of virtue, because he is not grasping a phantom, but true virtue, because he is grasping the

truth; and that when he has given birth to and nurtured true virtue, it belongs to him to be loved by the gods, and to him, *if to any human being*, to be immortal?"(212a3-a7; emphasis mine). It is on this lofty and no less mystifying note that Socrates concludes his praise of Eros, and by extension, his praise of the *eros* of wisdom, philosophy, claiming that he is persuaded by what Diotima taught him and that he, in turn, will try to persuade everyone else of the same thesis (212 b1-b2).

But before anyone could object, namely the poet Aristophanes, whose own speech Diotima implicitly critiques, he is interrupted by a loud banging on the door and before everyone knows it, a band of drunken revelers come storming in. The 'work' of philosophy is thus interrupted, violated by the influx of raucous wine-drinkers, the foremost among whom, the drunken Alcibiades, masquerading as Dionysos himself. One cannot help but wonder why this happens. What could be the reason for this outbreak of pandemonium, this outpour of intoxicated desire, led by Alcibiades?

While I leave a discussion of the significance of Alcibiades' intoxicated logos to Chapter 4, which specifically addresses the 'dramatic' (bacchic-poetic) registers of the entire dialogue, including Socrates' own speech, I would like to raise just a few questions surrounding Socrates' philosophic 'vision.' Since the 'telos' of philosophic desire is the apprehension of the pure and unmixed virtue, I will take as my point of departure the culmination of the labor of philosophy, this 'revelation' of the Beautiful as Such.

The first problem pertains to the question of fulfillment. At the opening of my discussion, I ask whether indeed philosophy can satisfy or provide happiness, as it claims to do. Presumably, the very purpose and motivation for the practice of philosophy is the 'apprehension' of the true, uniform and eternal form of virtue; after all, Diotima tells

Socrates that it is this revelation that is the reason for which the philosopher produces logos in ascending stages of understanding and insight. Logos (speech and thought) is how he will reach the summit of his search for immortality.

Language, as Diotima has taught us, is *erotic* and as such, it is 'in between' or *relational*. This relational quality of language implies that it can only 'lay hold' of an idea or image that bears some positive relationship to commonplace experience. What has absolutely no relation to the world in which I live, I cannot truly form any idea about (in thought or in speech). Yet the Beautiful as Such, the most prized 'object' of the philosopher's speaking, is strangely, this kind of experience which does not participate in being and therefore bears *no relation* to it. It is an 'object' that defies its own 'objecthood' insofar as it cannot be described in relational terms; it is a 'vision' which breaks the limit of what the ideational and/or interpretive function of language can *positively* apprehend. It is *iconoclastic*. For this reason, Diotima can only characterize it in *negative* terms. Yet when we consider that it is by means of *logos*, this rational, dialectical vehicle, that the philosopher is able to catch sight of this 'unseeable vision' in the first place, we are truly *astonished*: for how can language describe something that bears *no relation* whatsoever to the experience that it lays bare—whether in the way of time or of space—when *this is* precisely what language does: relate one piece of knowledge to another and produce some kind of uniformity and sense out of it? Oddly, all being partakes of this negative form, even while it does not partake of our being. If it is true that the highest beauty is *non-reciprocal* and as such, *non-erotic*, how, then, can the initiate 'grasp' it by means of a vehicle that is erotic or that is relational? How can the philosopher's thirst for immortality be slaked by a divine form that cannot be 'grasped'

by language, which is the sole condition by which the philosopher can arrive at the vision?

Moreover, and even if he were possible to 'grasp the truth,' is it possible for the philosopher to become beautiful, divine, immortal? Regarding the pure beauty, Frede observes that "The Socratic hunter may be able to find beauty, even take possession of a beauty, but he will never become beautiful."[147] It is noteworthy that Diotima expresses the ability to be god-like only as a *conditional*: "and that when he has given birth to and nurtured true virtue, it belongs to him to be loved by the gods, and to him, *if to any human being*, to be immortal?" It is common knowledge that humans die; Diotima's "if" is blatant acknowledgement of this fact.

There is yet another problem: the uniformity and permanence of the 'object' once it is attained. That is to say, if and when desire succeeds in attaining its desired 'object' by assimilating its likeness onto itself, the 'object' itself changes, for in that instant, it ceases to be an 'object.' It becomes a dead thing or it ceases to exist in the form that the lover *imagined* it to exist. Not only does the 'object' of desire *disappear* as such (*as something desirable*), once it is 'apprehended,' but the lover too *ceases to desire it*, or *desire ends*. As Carson observes, "A space must be maintained or desire ends."[148] What does this mean for philosophic desire? If the philosopher could assimilate the pure form of the beautiful, he would no longer desire it *as such* nor would the beautiful be beautiful to him; it would *lose its value*. If the philosopher no longer desired the true form of the beauty because he was able to seize it unto himself, this would mean either that he died in

[147] Dorothea Frede, "Out of the Cave: What Socrates Learned from Diotima," in *Nomodeiktes: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Oswald*, ed, Ralph M. Rosen and Joseph Farrell, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 414.

[148] Carson, *Eros*, 26.

that instant (for he would have nothing to live for beyond the highest mystery) or he would be a god, which we know to be impossible. The other possibility is this: he would go on living in a state of disillusionment because he realized that what he had thought was divine and transcendent was in fact nothing of consequence, since he was able to 'grasp' it.[149]

Flux or impermanence is the second problem I would like to address and which, as I have discussed previously, Diotima candidly acknowledges in her paradigm of Eros. Desire is by nature subject to flux, as are its 'objects,' among which is 'knowledge.' Diotima states that knowledge, *as we know* it, is never the same; like Eros, it passes and then comes to life again, it is forgotten and then recuperated. Yet even when it is recuperated, it is *not the same* as it was before it had been forgotten. In light of this fact, one wonders whether or not being wise is a condition that is itself subject to deterioration. As Socrates declares in the Republic, "How a city can engage in philosophy without being destroyed, *for all great things are prone to fall* and as the saying goes, fine things are really hard to achieve" (497d). Can a human being be continually wise, without collapsing into instants of foolishness? Or if he or she spoke Japanese fluently in youth, would he or she be just as fluent in the same language in old age? Moreover, can a human being be *uniform* in his wisdom? Can he or she be wise in all matter of knowledge and experience simultaneously, in an ever-metamorphosing world, where ideas, customs and beliefs change? For example, if a person has a Ph.D. in Western and Eastern philosophy, does this make him or her savvy in the art of diplomacy or in the affairs of

[149] This would be the opposite scenario of what happens in Alcibiades' experience (see Chapter 4), whose failure to 'possess' Socrates erotically results in his astonishing admiration of him as someone who is filled with the divine. Socrates could only appear to Alcibiades as such insofar as he eludes him.

the heart? Can he or she also be wise in the sport of jet-skiing or ballet? Would such a person know how to build a bridge or unclog a kitchen sink?

The problem of flux introduces a second problem, that of multiplicity and vicissitude. When something, such as knowledge, is changing, it takes on various forms and manifestations, revealing a multi-dimensional or myriad character.[150] For this reason, Diotima tells us, Eros can be anything from a hunter to philosopher to a magician. Again, if desire is constantly metamorphosing and language is the *vehicle* by which we express desire, then language itself is multi-colored or the *opposite of uniform*. For this reason, it *cannot possibly convey* that which is uniform at any given moment in time or space or by any single person. Like the wine of Abū Nuwās (Chapter 2) which is at once a cure and an disease, language has a *slipping* nature; it is *atopos* and though language may strive to take final rest in the 'home' of the true and perfect form of virtue, its very own nature, which is erotic, ordains for it a life of vagrancy and destitution.

This brings me to the final and most important point: the problem of imagination. Returning to the revelation of the pure beauty: how does the philosopher *know* that the form of the Beautiful or any other form of knowledge exists *independently of his imagination*? Aristotle describes desire as reaching out for some form of delight which he achieves by way of the activity of the imagination.[151] The operative question here is as follows: if I desire something insofar as I believe that I lack it and that satisfying this lack is something that will bring me happiness, what allows me to come to this conclusion? How do I really know that this 'object' is as I imagine it to be or that my 'lack' would be

[150] See *Republic* 604e. Here I am alluding to Book X of the Republic, in which Socrates criticizes poets on the grounds that they imitate the instable character of an individual.

[151] *Rhetoric* 1. 1370 a6

'filled' by this 'object'? Desire or lacking, is an issue of the present moment, but fulfillment exists somewhere either in the past (as a memory) or in the future (as a potential or wish). There is a temporal lapse, also a lapse of knowledge, that separates me from fulfillment. Because of this incongruity of time and space, I can never be sure that I will have what I want and that what I want, even if I have it, will satisfy me. But if I reach out towards an 'object,' I am taking a leap: I have decided that it *is what I judge it to be*. My knowledge of the 'object' of my love is a pretense, not wholly founded on the 'reality' or 'truth' of what it is. Early on in her conversation with Socrates, Diotima makes a striking statement: she says that even *if one does not give a rational account* of correct belief, it does not mean that it is false nor that it is true; for knowledge is *in-between* ignorance and wisdom. As Anderson observes, this is highly problematic, for it "implies two different (and in the end, incompatible) definitions of knowledge. Either knowledge is an opinion that the holder can support with reasons, or it is simply an opinion that is true."[152] If something is true and I cannot give a rational account for why it is true, then clearly there is a limit to what rational discourse can produce. On the other hand, I can argue for why something is true on a rational basis and yet it may not be true, since knowledge of the truth lies somewhere in between absolute values. Clearly and by Diotima's own account of the erotic nature of logos, philosophy has a blind spot. Here it is significant to observe that much of Socrates' speech takes the form of a *monologue*, not a dialectic; Socrates' 'dialectic' with Diotima comes to a halt mid-way through her exposition of her procreative paradigm, leaving us to wonder whether or not Socrates was

[152]Anderson, *Masks of Dionysos: A Commentary on Plato's "Symposium"*(Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 55.

every really rationally convinced or if he was simply 'consumed' by her ideas, as if possessed by the Muse of poetry.

The line that separates fact from fiction, *logos* from *mythos* is a problem which haunts the entire dialogue, in particular Socrates' speech. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, many incongruities in Socrates' speech suggest that Diotima may very well be a myth; not only is the frame of Socrates' *philosophy about philosophy* questionable, but its content is equally pervaded by poetic figures. As I have illustrated, Eros himself is the progeny of poetic images; he is a *metaphor*. Moreover, the extended metaphor of pregnancy and giving birth, which she qualifies in terms of 'making' or *poiêsis,* is a fundamental constituent of her philosophic paradigm, without which, it would be difficult to visualize or conceptualize the way in which language provides access to immortality. Even the 'ascent' is an image; people don't typically "move upwards" (211b6) but horizontally. If Socrates' speech is an attempt to show that dialectical, rational reasoning can lead one to the truth, then how does one account for his *total dependence on metaphor*? This speech wrought with metaphor suggests that all production of discourse, including Socrates' own, is a *creative* act oriented towards knowledge.

Diotima's allegory of Eros's conception clearly illustrates that Eros, the spirit messenger and the child of Poros and Penia, functions as more than just a *mythos* signifying the philosophic activity of *logos*. Rather, Eros is a *metaphor for metaphor*. When daemonic Eros acts as messenger to and from the gods, he acts as a dynamic and inspired medium: "being in the middle between both, it [daimôn] fills in the space between them, so that the whole is bound close together"(202e5-e6). The spirit messenger goes towards the realm of the unknown and the unseen, then returns to

himself, then back again, with the function of 'uniting' or reconciling the incongruity between what is known and what is unknown, what is present and what is absent. How can Desire produce uniformity and sense out of incongruity and paradox, except by an act of imagination? As Carson observes in her evocative study of Eros in the Greek tradition, "properly a noun, eros acts everywhere like a verb. Its action is to reach, and the reach of desire involves every lover in an activity of the imagination."[153] Diotima goes on to say that "it is through this that the whole expertise of the seer works its effects, and that of priests, and of those concerned with sacrifices, rites, spells, and the whole realm of seer and of magic"(202e6-203a). The activity of the Desire is thus an activity connected to the madness of the mantic arts or *poetry*. His 'magic' ability to *produce meaning out of paradox* or to *produce meaning as paradox* strongly suggests that Desire *acts as a metaphor*. For this reason, and by Diotima's account, Eros is as much a magician as he is a philosopher. If and precisely insomuch as it is metaphor, Eros can take any likeness it wants, however strange or contrary, then logos *cannot be limited* to a speech that is uniquely rational, teleological, positivistic and ultimately satisfying. Rather to the contrary, logos must also be irrational, volatile, disoriented, and seductive or poetic.

As I will show in Chapter 4 by means of a new literary reading, the logos of the *Symposium* by far *exceeds* that which can be 'contained' or domesticated within the 'grail' of Diotima's philosophic 'vision.' This is true insofar as her own paradigm betrays an alternative interpretation of Eros than the one she gives: Eros (and consequently logos) is the tragicomic and as such *poetic* offspring of an illicit coupling between Time and the unripened vine. For this reason and as I will show, philosophy cannot banish what lies within it; philosophy and poetry *do share the same mother and father*.

[153] Carson, *Eros*, 63.

Chapter 4 Bacchanalian Eros: A New Reading of the Symposium.

4.1 Introduction.

Parties are the enemies of inhibition and restraint.—Crick and Poulakos[154]

In this chapter, it is my principle aim to show that the *Symposium* is 'much more' than the most significant philosophic work on love in the history of Western metaphysics; rather, by means of a new reading of select episodes of the dialogue, I show that the *Symposium* is a masterful literary and dramatic work of fiction that subversively consorts with forms of desire—intoxication and poetry—that pose a threat to the famous 'philosophic' paradigm outlined in Chapter 3. My reading brings to light the subversive way in which the coalescent themes of the erotic, bacchic and the *poetic* frame, punctuate, pervade and in a sense 'intoxicate' the *logoi* of the dialogue such that it becomes difficult for the reader to discern with any certainty or clarity what Plato's 'truth' concerning *eros* and consequently philosophy actually might be. More precisely, I suggest that if one were to take Socrates' speech about Eros (his truth) as the 'philosophic' compass by which one navigates the text and unlocks the sober 'truth' about Platonic love and philosophy as a whole, one would inevitably discover the limitations of 'containing' or 'circumscribing' such knowledge by means of a uniquely rational, intentional, productive or dialectical logos (which for Socrates is *erotic*). To the contrary and as my re-reading of Socrates' famous paradigm will reveal, Eros is as excessive, effervescent, 'uncontainable,' and as such, elusive as the wine coursing through the veins of the symposiasts. The *erotic drama* of the *Symposium* thus reveals the strange way in which erotic desire, *in the form of wine*, motivates and *intoxicates* logos such that 'truth'—understood as the universal 'object' or *telos* of a deliberative, rational 'intent'—becomes in a sense ungraspable or *unknowable*. Knowledge is a *seduction*. The language of this 'philosophic' text can thus be said to consort with very forms of knowledge with which it is presumably at enmity: the experience of drunkenness and its rhetorical correlate, poetry.

Although the current state of scholarship has leaned towards a more balanced approach to reading this dialogue, taking into account that the *Symposium* is an ancient precursor to the modern-day novel, this has not always been the case. In a most recent and comprehensive study of the dialogue, *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure*

[154] Nathan Crick and John Poulakos. "Go Tell Alcibiades: Tragedy, Comedy, and Rhetoric in Plato's Symposium," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* Vol. 94, No. 1 (Feb 2008): 1.

and Myth in the 'Symposium, Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan take an innovative and wholly integrated approach to reading the work, recognizing it as a playful, literary drama of multiple genres that is also the ancient precursor to the modern-day novel, and a serious philosophical conversation that moves vertically and horizontally among a plethora of voices which demand to be considered as a composite whole.[155] In a similarly complex vein, Anderson, in *Masks of Dionysus*, interprets the philosophic dimension of the dialogue through the lens of its overarching dramatic theme: the Dionysian mask. More specifically, he argues that the Socratic imperative of self-knowledge involves a never-ending dialectic of self-unmasking.[156]

Drawing upon the above scholarship, my reading focuses on the key episodes of the dialogue which, in my view, most aptly bring into play the coalescent themes of the erotic, bacchic and the poetic. My approach to reading these key episodes owes much to the work of Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan—beyond what can be briefly stated. In particular, I follow their method of introducing the dialogue's central themes through the playful, yet dialectical lens of its mimetic framework. Additionally, following the work of Anderson, my reading addresses the running 'contest' between poetry and philosophy by paying close attention to the symbolic registers of the Dionysian setting within which these two forms of desire are brought into play.

4.2 The Question of the Drinking-Party: What Apollodorus heard through the Grape Vine (?)

[155] Corrigan, Kevin and Elena Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the 'Symposium,'* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

[156] Anderson, *Masks of Dionysos: A Commentary on Plato's "Symposium"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

The prologue to the *Symposium* opens with a spontaneous and equally puzzling address to some unknown interlocutors: "I believe I'm not unrehearsed in relation to what you people are asking about" (172a). To these unknown addressees, Apollodorus will relate a particular form of knowledge in which he is especially well-versed. Who are these 'people' and would their anonymity provide space for the reader as the interlocutor? Is this an open invitation to the dialogue? The question strikes first and foremost in that it appears to address the reader, and as far as the reader is concerned, there appears to be no one else to whom Apollodorus could be speaking.[157] Second, the question appeals to the reader's curiosity; what a seductive notion indeed that this story-teller would have the 'answer' I am looking for. This leads us to wonder how it is possible that he should know the answer to question that has not even been posed (at least in the space of Plato's writing, his *Symposium*). How curious indeed that a stranger would claim to be ready with an answer, to possess the 'object' of an inquiry (or inquiries) of which the reader is wholly unaware. The dialogue thus opens with an *uninvited 'answer'* to an *absent* question.[158] To a careful and suspecting reader, the integrity of this 'answer' is improbable given the fact that, having neither posed nor heard the question, the reader can never truly be sure that Apollodorus has fulfilled his claim of providing an answer. As I will demonstrate further, the 'answer' to the question, which turns out to be the event of a certain festivity held in honor of Agathon's victory as a tragedian, is just as elusive as the question itself. This is what makes Apollodorus's opening statement so

[157] "The anonymous companion is perhaps you, me, Plato, or literally anyone who writes or reads the Symposium."Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 8.

[158] Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 7. The authors observe that he begins with a reply "to a question that is yet to be posed."

seductive and as such, more befitting for the prologue to a dramatic work of literature than a 'philosophic' account.

The elusiveness of this 'question' to which Apollodorus confidently claims to provide an 'answer' is underscored by the placeless (*atopos*) and timeless quality of his speech and by extension, of the philosophic dialogue he will recount.[159] In the first place, the question appears to have been posed sometime and someplace *anterior to* and therefore *beyond* the space of the dialogue itself; Apollodorus's 'answer'—his account of the speeches given at the banquet—thus emerges out of the *questionable* backdrop of a question that someone posed in a time and place preceding, exceeding, or transgressing the confines of Plato's writing, *his Symposium*. If somewhere and sometime *outside* of Plato's dialogue, an unknown (and perhaps even unknowable) question was posed, the 'answer' that lies *inside* Plato's writing is no less uncertain: for Apollodorus's 'answer,' or his account of what happened at the symposium, takes the form of an elaborate second-hand report (about the erotic-philosophic banquet) nestled within a conversation that is deceptively 'live' or 'present' even while temporally and spatially indeterminate. Regarding this conversation, the reader does not actually *know* the time frame or the place within which it is taking place; neither can the reader be certain that he or she is not an uninvited 'guest,' eavesdropping on Apollodorus's conversation with his unnamed interlocutor. Moreover and as we discover upon further reading, this conversation that we participate in—as if in spite of ourselves—is characterized by an uncontainable or effervescent quality which has little regard for the spatial and chronological 'order' of experience. That is, Apollodorus's speech appears to *move*—ever so casually and as such,

[159] Ibid. Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan observe "three curious features of the prologue" which are as follows: "the anonymity of the person addressed; the placelessness of the conversation; and the timelessness, or timefulness, of the hidden dialogues nestled one within the other."

seamlessly—in and out of the space of conversations and/or speeches that had occurred at some point in the indeterminate past.

The story of this philosophic banquet thus emerges out of a quasi-mythic space, foreshadowing the integral role that myth and therefore poetry will play, both implicitly and explicitly, among the 'philosophic' speeches given at the banquet. In particular, it foreshadows the peculiar way in which myth (*mythos*) operates as an *erotic* flux, *moving* in and out of the dialogue in sudden and unexpected ways, often in the form of interruption: first, the allegorical (it draws upon myth) speech of the comic poet Aristophanes, who speaks after recovering from a bout of hiccups which disrupts the sequence of the speech-giving; next, the mythic, otherworldly quality of Diotima's speech via Socrates and within her 'myth,' the myth of Eros conception; lastly, the sudden and raucous intrusion of Alcibiades, who, dressed as the wine god, exploits the use of poetic figures to praise his beloved Socrates. That the transmitter of this narrative, Apollodorus, is also foreign to the city towards which he is traveling is significant when we consider that it is Dionysus, noted for his foreign or non-Greek origins, who invisibly presides over the space of the banquet (our *Symposium*).

It is thus within the temporally, spatially, and as I will show, *experientially,* inchoate 'perimeters' of a *moving* conversation (occurring between himself, an unnamed companion and perhaps also the reader) that Apollodorus will presumably 'satisfy' our desire to learn about the speeches given at the banquet. But first, he will take an impromptu *detour* in order to relate what proves to be a critical anecdote about a prior conversation he had surrounding the event of the symposium. As Apollodorus relates, it was *on his way* up to town from his native Phalerum and towards a town unknown to us

that an old acquaintance by the name of Glaucon literally shouts out and *stops* him in his tracks, *desirous* to confirm details regarding some of the speeches (172a-b).[160] After discussing some details surrounding the transmission of the story, Apollodorus agrees to rehearse the details of the banquet to his friend while traveling to town.

Even before undertaking a close examination of this anecdote and the significance that it holds for the dialogue as a whole, one cannot help but pause to consider the spontaneous, seemingly haphazard way in which the central *erotic* themes of the larger 'conversation' (i.e., the framework of the dialogue) are brought into play in this 'miniature' one. They are as follows: the 'placeless' (*atopos outopos*) or indeterminate character of speech and thought (logos), logos as a *flux* characterized by continuous interruptions and detours, and desire as an open-ended reach towards knowledge (it may or may not be satisfied). In the first place, the setting of the 'miniature' episode recounted by Apollodorus is pervaded by the same timeless and placeless quality as that of the larger 'conversation.' Although we are aware that the anecdote is set some time in the past, we are neither informed as to when precisely nor where. As Glazov-Corrigan observes, "The *Symposium* casts us literally into the middle of things…"[161] Moreover, this timeless, placeless character of the narrative setting is amplified by its motional character.[162] That is, somewhere on his way from his home town in Phalerum towards a particular town which he does not specify, Apollodorus *moves*.[163] The timeless and

[160] Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic at Play*, 8.

[161] Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic at Play*, 7.

[162] Ibid., 8.

[163] Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan observe that Apollodorus's spatial movement upwards constitutes a "comic parody of philosophy" for "The verb *aniôn* (going up), used at 172a2, is the same verb as that used in the ladder of ascent in Socrates-Diotima's speech later (*epaniôn* {211b}). Ibid.,10.

placeless character of Apollodorus's movement echoes our own 'movement' through Apollodorus's variegated speech, towards the indeterminate 'answer' (i.e., knowledge of the philosophic dialogue) we are now tempted to hear about.

The fact that the town towards which Apollodorus travels is unspecified is perhaps a subtle reminder to the reader that the *telos* towards which we are headed may not exist as we imagine it (or as Apollodorus promises); or perhaps, it suggests that we may never get there.[164] Or rather it may suggest that *the going towards* a particular destination may take *sudden, unexpected* turns. Support for this latter interpretation may be found in the suddenness of Apollodorus's encounter with Glaucon; Apollodorus makes a special point of saying that after Glaucon called out to him, he stopped and waited for his friend (172a). That is to say, his movement was *interrupted*. More importantly, it is Glaucon's *desire to know* about the banquet which *disrupts* Apollodorus's oriented movement and which therefore signals a kind of *detour*. In keeping with the 'larger' framework of Apollodorus's 'conversation' with you and I, the detour is not spatial but rather it occurs on the level of speech; that is, Glaucon's interruption of Apollodorus's travel leads to a conversation Apollodorus would not have otherwise had. Significantly, it is this past conversation with Glaucon that motivates Apollodorus's digression within the 'larger' conversation he has with you and me; or more succinctly, just when it seems he is about to give us the 'answer' we are looking for, he begins to tell about a prior conversation in which he himself was stopped and interrupted! The reader, eager to hear the 'answer' to the mysterious question that motivates Apollodorus's speech, is compelled to *follow the course* of this digression.

[164] Here I am making specific reference to Diotima's characterization of Eros as signifying the lover's movement or moving towards the object(s) of his desire which he lacks and hopes will fulfill him. See 3.3 of Chapter 3 of this thesis for an exposition of her speech.

Does this digression have a motivation or 'purpose'? And if so what is it? In order to answer these questions, one must 'go with the flow' of Apollodorus's apparent meanderings.

No sooner is Apollodorus stopped in his tracks than he relates the intention behind Glaucon's calling him: "I was just looking for you as I wanted to ask about the party at Agathon's when Socrates, Alcibiades, and the others were present for dinner. What were the speeches about love?"(172b); for if Apollodorus agrees to engage in friendly conversation that stops him on his way to town, it is insofar as Glaucon *desired* to know about them. Glaucon's *desire* to hear about the speeches is essential to an appreciation not only of Apollodorus's 'conversation' with the unknown interlocutor (and thus the so-called 'prologue') but of the dialogue as a whole. For we learn later, when Apollodorus 'zooms' back into the 'present' conversation with the unnamed Companion, that Glaucon's sudden inquiry would not be the first time someone has expressed the desire to hear about the speeches (173c). This statement gives us a clue as to what the original 'question' forming the backdrop of the prologue might have been; that is, Apollodorus indicates that Glaucon's inquiry echoes unknown companion's desire to hear about the speeches. Hence, it is the *desire to know the speeches* which serves as a catalyst for Apollodorus's own speech, or this narrative framework through which we receive an account of the 'erotic dialogue' as we 'know' it. The 'question' and 'answer' of Apollodorus's prologue is thus implicated in the *erotics of speech as knowledge,* a central theme of the dialogue which motivates and inspires the 'philosophic' speeches we so *desire* to hear about and which is moreover in keeping with Diotima via Socrates' description of *eros* as a motive force.

It is the *desire for knowledge* (about the speeches) which motivates the 'question' that forms the placeless and timeless backdrop of Apollodorus's 'answer.' In order to satisfy this inquiry, Apollodorus decides to interrupt the flow of a conversation oriented towards providing an answer in order to take a detour in time and place. Why does he desire to do so? As he suggests in 173 c, he wants to show us that he is not unprepared to provide an answer; he desires to show his prowess in iterating speeches not his own and this calls for a *digression.* This digression is by no means a singular occurrence. Rather and as I will show, the theme of detour or digression is fundamental to an appreciation of the *erotic* form and rhetoric of the dialogue as a whole, for it operates as a foreshadowing of the various detours and/or disruptions of erotic body and speech that punctuate the otherwise 'orderly' philosophic space of the banquet. Such detours include: Socrates' sudden pause on the way to Agathon's house, the disordering of the speeches caused by Aristophanes' hiccups, the climactic and "sudden" (*exaiphnês*) appearance of Diotima in Socrates' speech, and Alciabiades' anti-climactic and equally "sudden" (*exaiphnês*) disruption of an otherwise (mostly) orderly, methodical setting followed by yet another upheaval caused by a band of revelers who, against the collective decision of the guests to stay sober, force everyone to drink. Most importantly, I will show, first and foremost through a reading of Apollodorus's prologue, that these sudden eruptions and rovings of body and speech are not merely implicated in the erotics of knowledge, but that they are *by definition* (i.e., Diotima via Socrates' definition) *erotic*. This is true insofar as interruption and/or digression indicate the presence of flux and or change, a characteristic which, as I have discussed in Chapter 3, Diotima via Socrates ascribes to *Eros* in her portrayal of him as oscillating between polarities of living and dying, remembering and

forgetting. In other words, the only thing constant about *Eros* is that 'he' is subject to constant change and flux, thereby undermining the viability of permanent acquisition.

Thus and returning to Apollodorus's anecdotal digression: it is his desire to ensure the interlocutor's faith in his *truth-preserving* narrative (that is, the capacity to preserve knowledge from the contagion of change) which motivates his recounting of his prior conversation with Glaucon. As it turns out, Apollodorus's narrative digression operates as a 'character lens' through which the reader is invited to critically examine the credibility of his 'answer' to the question concerning the speeches. More specifically, the reader will learn some *erotic* details regarding the transmission of reports about the banquet which, *contrary to the intention of the narrator*, call into question his credibility as a reporter and as such, the 'truth' of his mimetic report. In particular, the reader is invited to question the philosophic 'truth' of Diotima via Socrates' identification of *eros* to philosophic *logo*s or a speech that knows, determines or preserves its 'object' by means of a sober, intentional, deliberative process. By contrast, I will show that if Apollodorus's report is unreliable or questionable for its temporal and spatial lapses, discrepancies and or vagrancies, this is true insofar as *eros*—and by extension the *speech* that it motivates—is in its very essence as volatile, transgressive, and uncontainable as the wine which flowed in the veins of the attendees of the banquet.

According to Apollodorus, Glaucon stops him in his tracks in order to inquire about an event that took place *x* number of years ago, a 'philosophic' drinking-party that took place in honor of Agathon's victory as a tragedian, where speeches were given on the topic of love. Apollodorus's friend makes it clear that he has been in search of him, as he wanted to corroborate some shady second-hand report regarding the details concerning

some speeches given at this dinner party (172b). He explains that an unknown fellow, who had heard a foggy account of the speeches from a man named Phoenix, had recounted the event to him and had recommended that he speak also with Apollodorus on the basis that a report of the words of Socrates "it's most appropriate that you should report what your friend said" (172b). In short, Glaucon turns to Apollodorus in order to fill the 'holes' of an unclear report he received at second-hand because Apollodorus is a friend of Socrates and would therefore have the missing 'answer' to some questions concerning the banquet.

When the companion inquires as to whether or not Apollodorus was present at the party, Apollodorus' response is playful: "It seems the person who was telling you got absolutely nothing clear at all, if you think this gathering you're asking about happened recently, so that *I* could be there"(172c). Here Apollodorus admits that although he was not himself present at this dinner party, whoever suggested that he might have been has gotten it all wrong and should not be trusted as a source. By his statement, he implies that the unknown person who first narrated the details to Glaucon is less credible than himself, who *was not even present at the party*. The same sparkling confidence with which Apollodorus initially addresses the reader is apparent here, except that a shadow of doubt is cast upon his claim to know. Having learned that Apollodorus was *not* present at the party, the reader, previously invited to hear the 'answer' to his or her question, is now in a position to doubt the credibility of whatever it is Apollodorus has to say about it—and perhaps also any possible 'answer' to that unknown question that forms the backdrop of his narrative.

The reader realizes immediately that Apollodorus is going to give an account of a banquet that he did not attend. Moreover, it is not a recent banquet—hence the probability that *memory will escape him*. In fact Apollodorus' memory does indeed escape him as he later asserts (178a). Already the reader questions the legitimacy of Apollodorus's first statement: that he is able to tell us what I the reader desire to know. How can he do so when he was not himself there and when the banquet took place too long ago for anyone to recollect exactly what took place there? If we want to know a credible recollection of a special event—an event whose narrative details are especially critical to an understanding of philosophical distinctions—how can Apollodorus provide this to us? On what basis does he claim to know?

After admonishing his companion for not knowing that the party took place years ago, Apollodorus, as if to vindicate his absence from the banquet (and perhaps therefore is lack of credibility as a reporter), boastfully admonishes him for *not knowing* that he has been spending time with Socrates for the last three years: "*Don't you know*…that it's not yet three years that I've been spending time with Socrates, and have made it my business each day to know everything he is saying and doing?" [173a; emphasis added]. He then draws a sharp distinction between his conduct prior to and after becoming a follower of Socrates: "Before that, I simply rushed around this way and that, thinking I was achieving something; in fact, I was a more miserable figure than anyone you might care to mention —just like you now: I thought anything was a greater priority than doing philosophy" (173 a). Apollodorus's 'before and after' characterization of himself only heightens the reader's sense of caution: before Socrates he was running about at random, *purposeless*, disoriented; post-Socrates, he finds a new point of orientation (or fixation): philosophy.

Ironically, while Apollodorus intends to suggest that his encounter with Socrates is life-changing in a positive sense, his self-portrait only highlights the 'haphazard' quality of his new-found 'purpose.' What he is in fact 'achieving' is knowledge not of the practice of philosophy but of the *philosopher*, namely Socrates himself. Unabashedly revealing himself to be one who is obsessed with the most mundane details of the philosopher's existence, Apollodorus portrays himself as a groupie, a person who eats, speaks and breathes 'everything-Socrates.'[165]

While Apollodorus's journalistic obsession with keeping account of all the painstaking details pertaining to Socrates may qualify him—at least by his own estimation—as a credible historian, the reader meets with further difficulties. When the companion asks Apollodorus about the identity of his narrative source, Apollodorus reveals him to be a lover and imitator of Socrates, an Aristodemus who was present at the banquet (173 b). The reader, who up until this point is caught up in a dizzying whirlwind of 'who-said-what-when,' is relieved to learn that the report Apollodorus is about to give traces back to an original source. However the details concerning Apollodorus's source casts the shadow of suspicion over this newfound relief; for as it turns out, Aristodemus is the same person who narrated to Phoenix, the man who had given a report to the anonymous person who in turn delivered an unclear report to Glaucon. In other words, the report which Apollodorus's friend wishes to corroborate with Apollodorus is traceable to the same 'authentic' witness—Aristodemus—as the report that Apollodorus is about to give us; for if Aristodemus, who was present at the party, had given a report to Phoenix and Phoenix passes on this same report to the unknown friend (X) who in turn

[165] I owe this observation in particular, and along with it, countless others which have woven themselves into the fabric of my approach to reading the dialogue, to the marvelous Plato seminar co-taught by Dr. Kevin Corrigan and Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan in 2004 and which 'initiated' me, so-to-speak, into the intricacies of Plato's writing.

tells Apollodorus's friend, there is a great chance that the 'holes' in the report trace back to Aristodemus himself. Indeed and as the reader learns from Apollodorus's report of Aristodemus's narrative, Aristodemus's physical presence at the party does not preclude him from being 'absent' figuratively speaking. This latter problem, compounded with Apollodorus's own short-comings as a second-hand reporter, raises some serious questions surrounding the ultimate status of Plato's 'philosophic' dialogue: can we expect to receive a truthful account of what happened at this philosophic banquet? If not, what is Plato trying to tell us concerning the 'truth' about *eros* and philosophic language? Before exploring these questions any further, it is necessary to consider Apollodorus's primary 'source' concerning the speeches given at the banquet.

Two facts about Aristodemus make him a less-than desirable or questionable 'witness' to the event of the speeches at the symposium: first, his inability to recollect speeches or at least, provide a seamless account of what was said and second, his erotic devotion to Socrates. Regarding the first, we learn—from his own report via Apollodorus—that he could not remember much of what had occurred at the banquet: "Aristodemus, I have to say, didn't remember everything each person said, *nor in my turn do I remember everything he told me*…" [178a; emphasis added]. Not only does memory fail Aristodemus, it fails Apollodorus as well, and the fact that the reader has no idea as to which parts of the report each of them can't remember only heightens the sense of 'disorientedness.' Further in his report, just after he narrates the scene in which Agathon's guests agree to give an economium on love, Apollodorus interjects his report in order to caution us about the degree of Aristodemus's failure of memory: "Phaedrus gave a speech something like this, Aristodemus said, and after Phaedrus there were some

others which he was not quite able to remember; leaving these aside, he recounted Pausanias' speech" (180 c). Here the reader is given at least one glaring reason for doubting the veracity of the report: so much does memory fail Aristodemus that he takes a kind of *negative* poetic license in omitting some X number of speeches altogether! Yet Aristodemus's 'poetic omissions' are not the only problem: for just after Apollodorus's reminds his interlocutor(s) about both his and Aristodemus's imperfect memory (cited above), he makes a casual yet no less disquieting assertion: "…but what he [Aristodemus] remembered best, and the people who *seemed to me to say something worth remembering*—I'll tell you the speech each of these gave" [178a; brackets added]. In other words, even those speeches which Aristodemus remembers and reports imperfectly, Apollodorus unabashedly omits or edits or censures based on a purely 'selective memory.' The question of who spoke and what was said in between the speeches of Phaedrus and Pausanias is thus left open-ended— perhaps Plato's caution to the reader to avoid interpreting the quality of the speeches (their 'truth') in terms of their 'ascending' sequence. Hence and in spite of the narrator's claim to preserve the historical or empirical 'truth' about what was said at this infamous drinking-party, 'truth' eludes due to lapses and influxes of memory (even if consciously selective memory).[166] Although no explanation (other than that of human nature) is offered as to why the memory of Aristodemus oscillates between poles of remembrance and forgetfulness, the fact is not so appalling since, after all, the banquet occurred some five years ago and more lengthy speeches were given than the average person might be able to recall. That Apollodorus forgets some of the details recounted to him by Aristodemus is even less

[166] Again, this appears to be a very subtle foreshadowing of Diotima's portrait of *eros* as always oscillating between poles of memory and forgetfulness.

alarming since we know that his 'presence' is twice-removed from the event. Perhaps from the standpoint of credibility, the reader might find it reassuring that, at the very least, both Aristodemus and Apollodorus admit that they do forget, that forgetfulness is openly acknowledged and in good faith.

Nevertheless, it is a peculiar thing that Aristodemus would remember some six speeches in their entirety (or so it appears to the reader) and forget the majority of the speeches that were given in-between Phaedrus and Pausanias, even to the extent of *omitting* them altogether. This seemingly innocuous detail becomes glaring when we consider a special detail Aristodemus recounts at the close of his narrative (223b-d). Upon awakening from a long *drunken* slumber—for he mentions that the guests were forced to drink too much wine by a band of revelers— and upon realizing that he was asleep during the beginning of a conversation that had started among Socrates, Agathon and Aristophanes, Aristodemus—somehow and *despite having missed the beginning*—chooses *not to omit* the main point that Socrates was forcing them to admit to (223 c-d). Why does not Aristodemus omit Socrates' argument in the same way that he omits entire speeches given by other nameless guests on the basis that he could not provide us with a complete account? This leads us to the second point concerning Aristodemus's questionable credibility.

It is in fact Aristodemus's relation to Socrates which casts the greater shadow of doubt upon Aristodemus's narrative, precisely insofar as it remains *unacknowledged* as a liability. In his conversation with Glaucon, Apollodorus makes special mention of the fact that Aristodemus is a "lover of Socrates, I think as much as anyone among those who were around at that time" (173b); moreover he tells us that Aristodemus goes about

'barefoot,' it seems in idolatrous homage to his beloved (173 b). That Apollodorus emphasizes Aristodemus's erotic love for Socrates is no coincidence; for it forms part of his larger attempt to vindicate his own credibility as a second-hand reporter. As I have discussed previously, Apollodorus considers his own obsessive devotion to Socrates as evidence of his scrupulousness as a Socrates-specialist; hence and by this logic, if his 'source' was one of the most devoted at the time as he claims, it goes without saying that this would reflect well on him and his report.

Moreover and as we learn from Aristodemus's (via Apollodorus's) report of what happened on the day of the banquet, it is Aristodemus's blind idolization of Socrates that incites him to attend the banquet in the first place. When the uncustomarily 'dolled-up' Socrates asks him, in a rather playful tone, "'how do *you* feel about—maybe—being willing to go to the dinner, without an invitation?' Aristodemus replies, "Whatever you say" (174b). Further after his beloved Socrates cheekily incites him to go to the party uninvited, Aristodemus replies: "So see what defence you will give for bringing me, because *I* shan't admit that I come uninvited—I shall say it was you who invited me" (174c-d). And so, upon Socrates' command, Aristodemus goes where he otherwise would not have gone. By this brief account of their interaction, the reader may safely conclude that Aristodemus is more than just a lover and admirer of Socrates; rather, he is a blind follower and imitator. After all and as Apollodorus tells us, he walks about barefoot all the time in homage to him.

Hence and returning to the question of Aristodemus' selective omissions: it appears as though it is out of excessive *erotic* love for Socrates that Aristodemus lends more credence to anything Socrates says or does than to the speeches of those poor guests

whom he *silences* for the simple fact that *he does not love* them. It would seem as though the banquet is rosier with Socrates in it—and more worth telling about than any other dinner party held in more recent times. Apollodorus, keenly aware of this fact—and as such, no less guilty of erotic bias towards Socrates than Aristodemus—attempts to assuage the worries of his interlocutor (and the reader) with the following statement: "However, I did also ask Socrates himself, too, *about some of the things* I heard from Aristodemus, and he agreed with Aristodemus's account" (173b, Emphasis added). Is the reader to be consoled by the fact that Socrates confirms some the details of a second hand report? And what of the details about which Apollodorus *did not* ask Socrates? We do not know in fact which parts of the account are confirmed to be true. And as we may too recall, neither do we know which parts of the account Apollodorus either omitted or slanted—due to a memory lapse. Moreover, since the party was so long ago, how can we be sure that even Socrates himself remembers?[167] Nevertheless, Socrates' confirmation regarding certain details about the speeches appears to suffice for Apollodorus. Does it suffice for the reader? This is a *question* which I believe Plato intended to leave open-ended.

4.3 To Know or Not to Know: the *Drama* of Knowledge.

Sometime and someplace indeterminate, Apollodorus confidently greets us with the claim of an 'answer' to an 'absent' question that had been posed some time and some

[167] As I will discuss further in this reading, the reader is forced to confront this very same question with regard to Socrates' 'recollection' of his so-called conversation with Diotima. For by Diotima's own account, knowledge is in between ignorance and wisdom (202a5-a10); knowledge is thus indeterminate and like Eros, is subject to fluctuations. Precisely because of its fluctuating character, "knowledge goes out of us; forgetting is the departure of knowledge" (208a4-5). See Chapter 3 Section 3.3 for an exposition of these points.

place *beyond* the confines of Plato's writing. As the reader is led to infer, the question is the same one Glaucon poses to him: *do you know what the speeches were about?* What is the 'answer'? As the reader discovers, by means of the digressive 'ins-and-outs' of Apollodorus's conversation with an unnamed companion, the 'answer' to this question (ie., presumably, '*what happened* at the banquet?') is far more *elusive* than the question. That is to say, knowledge of the 'truth' about the symposium eludes us.

For although Apollodorus's journalistic 'he said that he said' incites us to trust in the integrity and veracity of his speech as if he were a kind of omniscient medium through which we gain access to a 'reality' we could not have otherwise experienced, he does not reproduce the events of the banquet (ie., speeches) *just as they occurred*. For in this first place, this would require him to be physically present at the banquet, which he was not. Moreover and even if he had been present—as we know only Aristodemus was—it would require him to be privy to every single speech or word uttered between various speakers as well as to remember them and this, as we learn both from Apollodorus and the first-hand witness Aristodemus, is not possible. In order to preserve the events of the party, Apollodorus via Aristodemus would have to *mime* or copy reality as if he had access to all of its spatial and temporal dimensions; that is, he would have to be 'present' to all forms of reality as though he were a divinity. Or he would have to have the kind of mystical knowledge which the Greeks ascribed to the poets and prophets alone.[168] Yet the latter is clearly not the case, and in fact, Apollodorus's speech gives us

[168] Concerning the mimetic frame of the dialogue, Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan observe that while the mimetic narration of Apollodorus is parodic insofar as it recalls the negative view of mimetic art in the *Republic*, it nonetheless functions so as to preserve the knowledge contained within the dialogue; hence there is a certain way in which mimetic art is presented in a positive light: "…the basic narrative structure of the *Symposium* is at least analogous to that third hand imitation of reality examined in the *Republic*, namely, epic narrative and mimetic poetry in general…this narrative force (while being gently mocked in the character of Apollodorus, who retells the events of the Symposium as a Homeric rhapsodist might recite poetry.) is also presented as a necessary precondition for the preservation of the historical

ample reason to be suspicious of the 'truth' it communicates by means of its mimetic narrative even in spite of his honest or good intentions. This is especially true when considering Socrates' indictment of mimetic art (and in particular the poetry) in the *Republic* on the grounds that it fails to represent reality in its full dimensions.[169] According to Socrates, mimetic art inevitably distorts what it presumes to faithfully portray, even in spite of a painter or poet's sincere attempt to represent reality as he sees it. In view of this, the reader may be tempted to conclude that Apollodorus's mimetic narrative utterly 'fails' in that it does not fulfill its confident claim to transmit to us the three-dimensional 'truth' about the speeches that took place at the symposium. Nevertheless and if indeed the mimetic framework of the dialogue does fail, what are we to make of the speeches it transmits, namely, Socrates' influential philosophical paradigm of philosophy?[170]

A consideration of the larger framework of Plato's writing—that is the dialogue of the *Symposium* as a whole—sheds new light on this 'failure.' For Plato's philosophical ideas takes the form of a spirited, dynamic and playful dialogue that takes place among a myriad of comic and tragic characters who, *brimming with desire*, speak and act *as if they exist independently* of an author (Plato). That Plato is a tragic poet who masks himself behind a plethora of characters is consistent with Socrates' description of the tragedian as one who 'hides' himself behind the heroes and gods whom he 'imitates' such that one cannot distinguish between his speech and that of his characters.[171] The

memory that makes the dialogue possible." Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 11-12.

[169] See my discussion of Socrates' negative view of mimetic art in *Republic* in 3.2 of Chapter 3.

[170] See footnote 16.

[171] See *Republic* 393a-c.

Symposium is thus a striking example of a *drama* which takes 'a life of its own' (hiding behind its author) and which invites our active participation as readers, however illicit our participation may seem. This is evidenced by Apollodorus's *open-ended* invitation addressed to an unknown interlocutor to hear what he has to say. Hence, while on the one hand, the *Symposium*'s mimetic frame poses a philosophic difficulty in that it fails to live up to its conscientious 'intent' to provide us with the 'facts' in their true dimensions (what would be a first-hand rather than 'third hand' imitation), this 'failure'—*tragic* in nature—forces the reader, on the other hand, to pose critical questions about what he or she believes to be true about the vital relations among desire, speech and knowledge.

As I have suggested in Section One of my reading, the narrative framework of the dialogue reveals nothing if not the excessive, volatile, haphazard and therefore elusive character of knowledge, or its purely *erotic* character. For although Apollodorus presumes and *desires* to faithfully reproduce all the knowledge he claims to have about the drinking party in painstaking detail by means of a first-hand mimetic speech—that is to say, a linear kind of "he said, she said" speech that is wholly conscientious of its narrative structure—we learn quickly that he is incognizant of the logical, temporal, spatial, psychological and physiological discrepancies which together undermine the very possibility for a 'true' or 'empirical' representation of the past.[172] Rather, it appears as though Apollodorus is the mouth piece of *so much more* than he intends or *desires* to convey. *Drunk* on a polyphony of speeches, Apollodorus's via Aristodemus's narration

[172] "There is also a decidedly comic irony in hearing a story of such potential depth recounted by someone who wishes to mark only its most external, chronologically linear signs. No story, then, and lest of all the Symposium, can be contained merely on the mimetic level…since other voices, thoughts, and ideas caught in the narrative as if by reflection will continue to possess their own life, a life collected but not directed or challenged within the narrative of faithful disciples." Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 19.

channels all of the speech and conversation that takes place among various speakers *as if these were taking place in the present*. That is and *despite his intention*, his logos takes the form of a *drama* that pays no heed to the logic of time and the peripheries of space. Precisely as *drama*, the speeches of Apollodorus and Aristodemus are *inebriated* by the variegated *erotic impulses* of a multiplicity of speakers (and their logoi), all of whom become unconscious or unsuspecting mediums for 'grasping' the 'truth' (about Socrates and the banquet itself).[173] As such, the entire framework of the *Symposium* poses a challenge (and threat) to the philosophic notion that 'truth' is knowable by means of an intentional, deliberative logos, a 'firsthand' mimetic logos. Rather, it seems that if the 'truth' of the banquet is at all 'knowable,' it is so by means of *drunken logos*, a speech which is generously *unconscious* of itself and which hubristically fails the Socratic imperative of self-knowledge, a speech that is both 'possessed' and 'disoriented' by the erotic vicissitude of memory and speech.[174]

Ever so *casually* hurled into the midst of these spatial and temporal ambiguities, the reader of the *Symposium*, is thus compelled to confront the *liminal* relation between fact and fiction, philosophy and poetry, sobriety and drunkenness.[175] As I will show

[173] There is much irony to the fact that *Apollo*-dorus, whose name suggests his affiliation with the god of moderation, is the mimetic artist who functions as the unsuspecting 'medium' of what is quintessentially bacchanalian drama, a drinking-party which pays homage to the god of wine and masks, Dionysos. In this way, the *Symposium* appears to satisfy Nietzsche's exaltation of Greek tragedy as "the Dionysian chorus which ever anew discharges itself in an Apollinian world of images." Friedrich. Nietzsche *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner,* trans.Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, inc., 1967), 65.

[174] This kind of unconscious generosity foreshadows the mythic image of Poros, the sleeping divinity, drunk on nectar, who, according to Diotima, fathers Eros unknowingly. Strangely, she will say that Eros inherits the ingenuity and resourcefulness of his father even though it is Penia, his impoverished mother, who 'plots' to conceive a child. In essence, Diotima's myth, which she reads in one way, invites a wholly contrary interpretation, which would read the slumbering deity as a kind of lack or failure to know oneself (after all, he is drunk and unconscious!) rather than 'resourcefulness' as Diotima would have it.

[175] This 'liminal' character of knowledge is itself erotic; in this way, *eros* takes on a self-overflowing character which is consistent with the intoxicating experience of wine.

further in this reading, these philosophic problems take on a subversive tone when we consider how they are 'soberly' addressed within a Dionysian atmosphere of play and seduction and that, among all of the guests present at the banquet, it is Socrates, the wisest man in Athens, who gives the most seductive performance.

4.4 Poetics of Hybris: Going to the Drinking-Party Uninvited

We now arrive at Aristodemus's eye-witness account, transmitted to us by Apollodorus. In keeping with the 'disoriented/disorienting' character of Apollodorus's speech, Aristodemus's prologue (via Apollodorus) greets us somewhere spatially and temporally indeterminate. Once again, *we do not know where we are.* We only learn, by means of a seemingly innocuous exchange between Aristodemus and his beloved Socrates, that we are somewhere *on the way* to the drinking-party. By this we learn that in order to *arrive at this 'telos'*, we must once again *stop in our tracks* in order to *follow* the course of a yet another conversation**,** nestled—Chinese-box style—within a spatially and temporally inchoate exchange that occurs among Apollodorus, his unnamed companion, and by implication, the reader.

Aristodemus's report concerning the erotic speeches that take place at the drinking-party (and in particular, Socrates'!) opens with some erotically charged banter between himself and his beautifully 'made-over' love interest, Socrates. Noting the uncustomary splendor of a freshly-bathed, sandal-wearing Socrates, he is *desirous* to know where he was heading—"looking so beautiful" (174 a). In reply to his question ("where are you going"), Socrates responds in his usual playful manner:

> To dinner at Agathon's. Yesterday I avoided him, at the victory party, because I was afraid of the crowds; but I agreed that I would be there

> today. So I've beautified myself like this, so that my beauty matches his when I get there (174a-b).

Socrates' ironic concern for the crowd' subtly pokes fun at people, such as his devout follower Aristodemus, who care so much for the opinions of others (especially Socrates') that they can neither think nor live creatively. In particular his question "how do *you* feel about—maybe—being willing to go to the dinner, without an invitation?" anticipates Aristodemus's unimaginative idolatry ("whatever you say" 174b) while at the same time paving the way for his own *creative iconoclasm* (174b-c) which I will address shortly.

As I have mentioned before, Aristodemus goes to the Agathon's party uninvited (by the host) for the simple reason that he loves Socrates and wants to follow *barefoot* in his footsteps (Socrates was known to go barefoot). His "devotion" to following Socrates is such that it appears trangressive, since it shows little to no regard for breaking with social decorum. Nevertheless while Aristodemus's disregard for social etiquette might tempt us to extol him as a kind of 'rebel'—an 'inspired' forerunner of the party-crashing Alcibiades—his speech contains a 'contractual clause' which quickly dissuades us from doing so. Aristodemus, too embarrassed by his self-declared inferiority (174 c6-c8), agrees to go on the sole condition that Socrates makes the *artful* initiative of devising for him an excuse (174d). According to Aristodemus, since it is Socrates who proposes that he join him without an invitation, it is only fair that Socrates take the rap for his social ineptitude. A blind imitator of the 'beautiful' Socrates to the point of lacking all social grace, Aristodemus is too concerned with appearances to be held accountable his own

deficiency![176] In reply to Aristodemus's mindless mimesis, Socrates mindfully follows the path of the poets—though not *exactly*:

> Well then…follow me, and we'll make a mess of the proverb by changing it: now it'll turn out to be good men's fests, too, that "good men go to of their own accord." That's one better than Homer: it looks as if he didn't just make a mess of this proverb, but did criminal damage to it[…]" (174 c).

Socrates' reply is crucial for an appreciation of the dialogue as a literary drama. For it casts a critical gaze backward and forward—*backward* at the mimetic framework through which we have access to his conversation with Aristodemus in the first place and *forward* to the elusive 'dialogue' we are so eager to get to. In so doing, it forces us to think critically about language and its vital and often 'messy' relationship to desire, knowledge and creativity.

In *opting* to 'mess up' the axiom as did Homer (ever so 'criminally' [*hybris*] or hubristically) *yet without copying him,* Socrates consciously indicates that going towards the good and the beautiful (in this case the house of Agathon, whose name signifies

[176] Compare with Alcibiades, who not only has no qualms about crashing the party but who poignantly—yet not without a touch of malice—owns up to his failures vis à vis the teachings of Socrates.

'good') is marked by a spirit of *poetic creativity* or by a language that breaks bread with an already uncertain past while moving beyond it, that is to say, *transgressing* it. His statement thus brings into relief two wholly different conceptions of speech: on the one hand, the purely mimetic, what would be considered necrophilic preoccupation with the science of 'reality,' and on the other, the genuinely inspired speech, a speech that is divinely possessed or intoxicated, such as poetry.[177] As Socrates declares in his second 'daemonic' praise of *eros* in the *Phaedrus*, "…the man who arrives at the doors of poetry without madnenss from the Muses, convinced that after all expertise [*technê*] will make him a good poet, both he and his poetry—the poetry of the sane—are eclipsed by that of the mad, remaining imperfect and unfulfilled"(*Phaed*., 245a). In other words, a poetic language that presumes to produce, by means of its 'craft', a representation or *image* of reality (as does Apollodorus) fails exceedingly. This is true insofar as it makes no room for the unseen, *unknown* or unknowable character of our existence (which only communion with the divine render knowable). As we have seen in the case of Apollodorus's mimetic prologue, a language which claims to lay hold to 'truth' will, *in spite of its intent*, lead astray from the truth. Inspired speech, by contrast, is a speech

[177] See Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 28-33 for a detailed interpretation of this intricate scene. In their view, the conversation between Aristodemus and Socrates "introduces us to the complex role of *hybris* in the dialogues and to the problem of intertextuality that indirectly juxtaposes, first, the *hybris* of mimetic epic poetry; second, that of the tyrant; and third, that of Socrates." Throughout the dialogue, Socrates is referred to as *hybristês*, or 'criminal' (or a person who is in some measure, transgressive), namely because he masks his wisdom by feigning ignorance. See 175e9 and 215 b7. In the latter passage, Alcibiades angrily compares Socrates' hubristic façade to that of a satyr. A classic example of Socrates' infamous posturing can be found in his own speech, where he 'plays' the role of the naïve student whose unreasoned assumptions are subject to the reprimand of his teacher, Diotima. Nevertheless and in light of Anderson's definition of hybris as "the failure of self-knowledge" (see Anderson, *Masks*, 9), Socrates bears no resemblance whatsoever to the tyrant or the tragic poet of the *Republic*, whom Socrates accuses precisely for their failure to know themselves. On the other hand, there is a degree to which Socrates himself wishes to indicate that the process of knowing oneself *has no limit*; this is the view taken by Anderson, who, by his approach to reading the dialogue as a drama of masks that continually unmasks itself, describes "true self-realization" as "a pursuit, not a discovery… grounded in the realization that one cannot know even that there is a self to be known. All one can discover—either in oneself or in another—is a mask." Anderson, *Masks*, 10-11.

possessed by the divine and thereby *dispossessed* of its desire to domesticate or 'make sense' of experience. Hence and in contrast to Apollodorus's all-too-confident claim to 'know' for the simple fact that he cautiously verified some 'facts,' Socrates' iconoclastic retort (he *does destroy* the axiom) subversively attests to the *unknowable* or poetic character of reality and therefore of logos as the vehicle by which we attain knowledge of 'reality. As Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan observe, we never know the 'original' form of this proverb; it eludes completely.[178] This utterly significant detail, which easily escapes scrutiny, compels us to look back at the mimetic framework of the dialogue and ask once again, *what really happened at the banquet?* Can we really know the 'original blue-print' (that is, the 'reality' of what occurred) by means of Apollodorus's and Aristodemus's slavishly scientific mimesis? Can mimetic speech, however technical and conscientious, be immune to the 'poetic memory' of drunkenness, hang-overs, erotic desire and the editorial whim of the person who is speaking? By the same token, we are forced to recall that if we have access to Socrates' speech at all, it is by virtue of the mimetic framework. As readers, what are we to make of all this contrary, *mixed* and as Socrates calls it, *'messed' up* logoi? It appears that the 'truth' of how we should interpret both the form and content of the dialogue is as suspect as Homer's 'criminal' (*hybristês*) altering of an already absent proverb, or as we shall see, as Socrates' uncanny ability to drink and never get drunk.

This leads to the second point: since it is by means of a *poetic or rhetorical hybris* that Socrates sanctions going to the drinking party *without an invitation*, we may infer that this 'drinking-party' to which he, Aristodemus and the reader are headed is a

[178] "…the striking feature of this initial exchange is that the original form of the proverb is not present anywhere in the dialogue or *that it disappears already unsaid in the course of the conversation*." Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 30.

quintessentially Dionysian space. This is true when we consider that uninvited appearances and more importantly masked appearances are the sphere of the Dionysus, who was not only a stranger to Greek civilization but who is known for his dramatic appearances under manifold guises. In light of this, one might consider Socrates' uncustomary beauty—his sandals, his attire—as a signal that we are entering a theatrical domain where the distinctly poetic spirit of transgression (both in body and in speech) is the 'order' of things.

4.5 Erotics of Wisdom: *Not* like Water.

It is not before manifold detours and digressions, stoppings and goings of body and speech alike that we finally arrive at the drinking-party—*uninvited*. After graciously hosting the uninvited and wholly embarrassed Aristodemus, who had been abandoned by Socrates on the way to the banquet without the benefit of his artful excuse, Agathon insists that his slaves persuade Socrates to attend the feast. Against Agathon's repeated invitations, Aristodemus maintains that they leave Socrates alone, as he has *been stopped his tracks* in deep contemplation of something. The two continue to go at it until Socrates finally does arrive. Thus our first taste of this party is most adequately summed by the clamorous coming and going of slaves eager to serve their master, the generous, convivial spirit of a host eager to make everyone feel welcome, and amidst all this, a difference of opinion between two 'inferior' men who erotically desire Socrates.[179]

No sooner does Socrates recover from his 'drunken' trance and attend the remainder of the feast that a curious conversation unfolds between a generous host and

[179] The two share much in common: Aristodemus is a self-confessed inferior, and Agathon, despite the fact that his name signifies 'good,' gives an inferior speech which Socrates challenges on the basis of its failure to recognize that Love lacks what is good; hence it is not a god. See Section 3.3 of Chapter 3.

his honored guest. The beautiful Agathon, reclining alone on the couch calls out to Socrates, in what is unmistakably a playfully erotic tone:

> Come here, Socrates, and recline beside me so that I can also have the benefit of contact with that bit of wisdom of yours, the bit that came to you in the porch. It's clear that you found what you were looking for, and have *it in your possession*; you wouldn't have come away before you had (175 c-d).

In Agathon's 'come hither,' there is the sense that he would like to be counted among Socrates' beautiful 'possessions,' or his beloved. After all and as he observes, Socrates' dedication to contemplating the invisible 'beauty' on his way to the party is evidence of his seeking nature or as we later find out via Diotima's description of Eros, his status as lover. Socrates, in his characteristically ironic way, answers him:

> It would be a good thing, Agathon, if wisdom were the kind of thing that flowed from what is fuller into what is emptier in our case, if only we touch each other, *like the water in cups which flows from the fuller into the emptier through the thread of wool* (175 d, emphasis added).

The simile which Socrates uses to describe the transference of wisdom is striking for *what it omits*: wisdom, Socrates tells Agathon, does not flow *like water*. It does not flow —progressively and *teleologically*—from the fuller cup to the emptier, from the lover/teacher to the beloved/student. Then, one might ask, what is wisdom like? How does one acquire wisdom? Curiously, Socrates never gives Agathon (or the reader) a figure for what wisdom is like—or at least and as I will show, not until he gives his speech.

Socrates' omission of what might be a more appropriate figure for wisdom—*wine*—strikes when we consider the name of the dialogue we are reading, which from Greek translates as 'Drinking-Party.' For the Greeks, there can be no drinking party without honoring the god of wine, Dionysus. Moreover, we know that this drinking-party

is held in honor of Agathon's victory as a tragic poet; as tragedian, his art pays homage to the god of wine and masks, Dionysius. Perhaps it is for reasons of his vocation as tragedian that Agathon is the first guest to refer to the wine god by his name and the only guest to refer to him in a deliberate or thoughtful way: "You're a downright criminal (hubristês), Socrates…On this, we'll take our rival claims to wisdom to court a bit later on, with Dionysus as judge" (175e, parenthetical added). By Agathon's reply to Socrates, it is clear that the symposium is a *Dionysian festivity*. According to our tragedian, Dionysus will be the judge of what it means to be wise as Agathon's playful characterization of Socrates as "hubristês" appears to confirm. After all, we learn from Aristodemus via Apollodorus that Socrates has attended the party in the beautiful costume of one who cares about his appearance, when in fact it is common knowledge that Socrates, much like Diotima's portrait of Eros, walked around barefoot and cared nothing about physical beauty. In essence, Socrates goes to the festival of the god of tragedy 'masked.' Not only this, but he consecrates the action of going 'uninvited' to this victorious celebration of tragic art by means of a distinctly *poetic* hybris, that is, by means of subverting proverbial wisdom. Lastly and just prior to arriving at the banquet, Socrates experiences a strange sort of philosophic intoxication. That is, he is *drunk o*n some kind of wisdom and this drunken moment transfixes him such that it *interrupts* his movement towards his destination, forcing his companion Aristodemus to go *uninvited* and worse, without the benefit of the crafty excuse that Socrates would have devised on his behalf. Thus and especially in light of the *hubristic* behavior of the dressed-up, erotically transfixed Socrates: *wisdom might very well be like wine*. If Dionysus, as the

tragedian claims, is the judge of what wisdom is, then we should anticipate that *wisdom* is 'much more' than what might be 'contained' within a philosophic dialogue.

4. 6 Doctor's Order: '*Every Drink'* in Moderation?

The question of 'much more' or excess is explicitly entertained when, after eating dinner and pouring libations to the wine god, the guests agree about how to proceed with drinking (176a). As previously mentioned, the wine god's name is mentioned only twice and in haphazard manner throughout the entire dialogue. Appropriately enough, it is the tragedian host Agathon who mentions Dionysus for the first time in the context of his erotic conversation with Socrates. The second time his name is mentioned is by Socrates himself (177e)—a point to which I will return further in this discussion. The only other time that any reference is made to Dionysus is by the forgetful eye-witness, Aristodemus, who makes but careless mention of the god: "they poured libations and, after a song to the god and the *other usual things*, turned towards drinking" (176a; emphasis added). It may strike the reader as odd that the question of *how to drink* overshadows specific mention of the god, as if somehow, drinking were not a strictly Dionysian affair but rather an activity which can be 'predetermined,' and approached organizationally. But for Pausanias, the majority of the guests' excessive drinking the previous night certainly calls for some rehabilitation. What might this rehabilitation involve? What is the prescription for a hang-over?

One might expect that, after a drinking binge, abstaining from drink is the most logical solution. The comic poet Aristophanes admits that, insomuch as he got thoroughly intoxicated the night before, drinking in excess would be a bad idea; Agathon,

our 'good' host and tragedian, seconds this: he simply has no strength left to drink (at least, not in a compulsory manner). Upon hearing their complaints, Eryximachus, the medical doctor, declares that it would be best if the 'best drinkers among us' gave up since he, Aristodemus, Phaedrus and some other guest would never be able to keep up with them (176c1-c4). Here Eryximachus divides the drinkers into at least two camps: the hardy ones (Agathon and Aristophanes) and the majority of the guests, himself and Aristodemus included, who are light-weights. It is noteworthy that the two guests who were drunk the night before and whom Eryximachus considers to be the hardiest of drinkers also happen to be a comic and tragic poet respectively.[180] Socrates he considers to be an exception, since, as we learn later from Alcibiades, he has the uncanny ability to drink to his heart's delight without experiencing the effects of intoxication (176 c4-5). What do we make of this passing detail? Does this make Socrates a figure of excess or a Dionysian figure, as Alcibiades will later claim, or excessively 'philosophical' as if he were somehow immune to insobriety?[181] This is a special point which I will address further in my analysis.

[180]Eryximachus's casual comment takes on special significance when we consider the dialogue's close: according to our light-weight eye-witness Aristodemus, these are the very same personages who share a drinking bowl with Socrates at the close of the drinking party as he forces them to agree that the same man can create both a comedy and a tragedy. In other words, in a context wherein drunken revelers crash the symposium, forcing everyone to guzzle down excessive quantities of wine, how strange indeed that the comic and tragic poets share a drinking bowl with a most philosophical man who never gets drunk and who 'persuades' them of a 'truth' which most fifth century Greeks—including himself (see *Republic* 395 a)—would regard as false: that the same poet can produce a comedy and a tragedy.

[181] "This, in terms of the symbolism, would imply either that Sokrates' behavior does not change because, drunk or sober, he is always possessed by the Dionysos, or that drinking does not affect him because he is immune to such possession. The former would imply that he is a creature of Dionysos; the latter presumably, since Dionysos' traditional rival is Apollo, that he is a creature of Apollo, who protects him from Dionysian possession." Anderson, *Masks*, 11.

In the spirit of Apollonian judiciousness and in stark contrast to the lack thereof of the hardy-drinking men of theatre, our medical doctor then proposes to tell the "truth" about drunkenness:[182]

> What I believe I have discovered from my own practice as a doctor is that being drunk is a bad thing for people generally; and I wouldn't either want to drink a lot myself, if I had the choice, or advice anyone else to do so, especially if they're still suffering from a hangover from the day before (176d).

Following his firm admonition against getting drunk, everyone agrees to drink "simply for the enjoyment of it."[183] It is remarkable that the doctor's attempt to dissuade the guests from drinking too much wine does not culminate in the proscription of drunkenness but rather, in the unanimous decision to drink in a non-compulsory manner or to *each person's delight*. Certainly this is a paradox which forces the reader to confront the problem of limits: if each person's *desire* is the measuring stick for limits, what then is *the limit of sobriety*? Already as it stands, we know that the majority of the guests are still tipsy from the night before. That is, even before the drinking-party has begun, they are at varying degrees of insobriety. What happens when they proceed to drink? Would not 'moderate' drinking be an oxymoron, as no one could truly measure the onset of tipsiness? Hence and in this critical dramatic context, Plato draws our attention to the

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[182] "Eryximakhos, however, as a physician should also come under the protection of Apollo, and Apollo seems clearly to be unable to protect him. Eryximakhos in fact admits his inability to handle wine, branding himself as a 'known weakling' (176c)…Thus, Plato seems to be suggesting that Socrates is a creature of Dionysos." Anderson, *Masks*, 11. Here it is interesting to compare the doctor's Apollonian cautioning against drunkenness (based on the harm it causes to mankind) with Alcibiades' Dionysian imperative to drink and his further claim that wine is a vehicle of truth—a scene which I will address at the conclusion of this chapter.

[183] "…the guests move almost immediately to deprive Dionysos of his role of judge when they agree "not to make their present meeting a tipsy affair, but to drink just as it might serve their pleasure" (176e)" Anderson, *Masks*, 11. While this interpretation is plausible, I suggest that drinking to one's pleasure already surpasses the 'limit of sobriety. See Chapter 2 of my dissertation; in the pivotal 'wine praise' moment in which the gift of intoxication is clearly exalted, the Dionysian figure of the Cup-bearer pours drink to reveling youths who drink wine *as much as it pleases them*, suggesting excessive drinking.

treacherously *erotic liminality* of what would ordinarily be diametrically opposed philosophic concepts: judiciousness (*sophrôsunê*) and excess (*hubris*). Given this fact, it seems that Apollo, the god of moderation, fails to protect the guests from the dangers of drunkenness; Dionysus and therefore the intoxicating experience of wine is elusively at play.

Nevertheless, Eryximachus disdainfully dismisses the flute-girl so that the men may talk with one another at ease: "I propose that what we should do next is to let the *aulos*-girl who came in just now go off and play her instrument to herself, or, if she likes, to the women in their quarters, and that for today we should entertain each other with talk" (176e). As Anderson observes, the god is 'banished' from his own festivity in the moment in which Eryxmachus cautions the drinkers against drinking in excess and sends off the flute girl in favor of a homogenously masculine, 'sober' and 'orderly' setting.[184]

Yet we discover, as the dialogue unfolds, that the god's larger-than-life, theatrical persona is everywhere manifest, albeit in an elusive sort of way. Far from banished, Dionysus, the god of masks, makes his carnal presence known in the form of the god of sexual love, Eros. This is true insofar as the guests, shortly after agreeing about how to proceed with drinking (177e), consent to Eryximachus's proposal to lend praise to Eros, the 'god of sexual love' to whom the masked god is mythically identified.[185] The association between Dionysus and all matters erotic is explicitly attested by Socrates, the only person who drinks without ever getting drunk and the last person to mention the wine god by name:

[184] Anderson, *Masks*, 11.

[185] "An Orphic creation myth tells of the birth of a god from the cosmic egg. This god was Phanes who… was called Eros—but who…was also called Dionysos. Whether this traditional identification of Eros with Dionysos is accurate or not, Plato seems to have intended some such identification." Anderson, *Masks*, 7.

> No one will vote against you, Eryximachus…It's not likely that either I would say no, seeing that I claim not to know about anything except things erotic, or, I imagine, that Agathon and Pausanias would; nor indeed Aristophanes, since his whole business is with *Dionysus and Aphrodite*… (177e, Emphasis added)

Here Socrates makes two inter-related points which have subversive implications for this 'philosophic' dialogue. First, his declaration that *erotics* is the only thing he knows anything about is striking in view of his reputed claim to know nothing. Is his remark hubristic? Or is this a case of Socratic irony? It almost seems as if Socrates were seducing his listeners with his claim to know in the same way that Apollodorus seduces by his claim to know the 'answer' to an absent question. The parallel between Socrates' claim to know the truth about love and Apollodorus's excessive self-confidence is certainly cause for questioning the merits of what Socrates knows and will present in his famous speech about Eros. Second, Socrates' casual reference to the comic poet's art (that honors both Dionysus and Aphrodite) presages the distinctly *bacchic-poetic* way in which he will relate the 'philosophic truth' about Eros by way of Diotima. As I will show in my reading of his speech, the 'logos' Socrates uses to tell the 'truth' about *eros* undermines the conventional notion that his speech is 'true' to the degree that it is quintessentially 'philosophic' or 'sober.' This latter point is especially crucial to an appreciation of the dialogue as *drama*: for, in keeping with the fluctuating and variegated 'nature' of eros and by extension, logos, each of the speakers offers up a praise to Eros which both masks and unmasks the 'truth' about love and what it means to love; that is to say, each 'logos' reflects a subjective 'truth' about love wholly different from and even diametrically opposed to the 'truths' of other guests such that the reader is forced to piece together his or her own 'image' of what love and consequently, philosophy actually is. It is precisely

this *erotic vicissitude* of the knowledge and experience (of love) communicated by each guest that bespeaks the dramatic, excessive and therefore elusive 'presence' of the wine god.

4. 7 The 'Order' of Excess: Hiccups.

After Phaedrus and Pausanias give their speeches, it is Aristophanes' turn to speak. Yet a sudden bout of hiccups keeps him from doing so. The explanation given for Aristophanes' bodily mishap strikes for what it omits: **"**but he happened to be having a fit of the hiccups, brought on either by overeating, or *by some other cause*, and wasn't able to make a speech…"(185c). By the careless mention of some other 'cause' unknown to us, the reader is left to infer that the allegedly 'banished' god is still in our midst in the form of wine.[186] The vague reference to Aristophanes' tipsy condition brings to mind Socrates' earlier conversation with Agathon, in which he enigmatically invites our speculation as to what wisdom may be like, if it is not like water. As I will show, Socrates' negative analogy provides a clue as to how to interpret the 'accident' of Aristophanes' hiccups.

Much speculation has been made as to why Plato concocted this 'accident.'[187] While one can never really arrive at a conclusive interpretation—which is perhaps Plato's point—the event is crucial. One is struck by Plato's stroke of comic genius in allowing

[186] As Anderson observes, "The combination of a hangover and a few sips of wine (or any other alcoholic beverage) resulting in hiccoughs is common enough not to need further comment." He moreover argues that this is evidence that the god is "taking a hand even in the ordering of the speeches,' especially in view of the fact of Aristophanes' trade as dramatist, which places him in "Dionysos' train." Anderson, *Masks*, 12.

[187] See Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, Plato's Dialectic, 62, who read the hiccups as introducing the erotic force of "disorder" into the scene. Compare Diskin Clay, "The Tragic and Comic Poet of the Symposium," 188; Anderson, *Masks*, 12.

the spatial, temporal, thematic and physiological (they agree to only drink in moderation) 'order' of a so-called 'sober' philosophical setting to be disrupted by a mere 'accident' of the body. The irony does not stop there. For whom does Plato choose but a comic poet, a satirist, to experience these bodily eruptions? The timing of this comic relief is impeccable, for as Anderson observes, speaking after Eryximachus provides the comedian with ample material for satire, not only in the form of the speech he will give after Eryximachus, but more importantly, in the form of a symphony of bodily dysfunctions which together form a burlesque backdrop for the doctor's lofty speech.[188]

In an effort to cure this embarrassing bodily mishap, Aristophanes turns to the expertise of our doctor: "Eryximachus, it's your business either to put a stop to my hiccups or to speak for me, until I stop it myself" (185d). In reply to this, our benevolent doctor volunteers to do both: he will not only switch places with the comic playwright and speak in his place until he has stopped hiccupping, but he will prescribe for him a series of bodily remedies: "…your hiccups may stop if you hold your breath for a long time; if not, gargle with water. But if after all they turn out to be really severe, get hold of something to tickle your nose with, and sneeze; and if you do this once or twice, (…), they'll stop"(185d-e). Aristophanes agrees to follow doctor's orders. Certainly the irony does not escape that 'Doctor Moderation' (and in fact, this is how he will portray Eros in his speech) prescribes *bodily dysfunction as the cure for bodily dysfunction.*[189] We have now entered Plato's theatre of the absurd: we are to imagine an unforgettable scene in

[188] Anderson brings to light the sheer absurdity of a situation in which Eryximachus is "discussing Love as the binding force of the cosmos, bringing peace, and introducing harmony (…) into all levels of existence" while in the meantime "Aristophanes' is holding his breath (sputtering, no doubt, and belching), hiccoughing, gargling and finally sneezing, generally disrupting the harmony (…) of the discussion—as might be expected of Dionysos." Anderson, *Masks*, 12.

[189] In essence, this man of science and moderation is, without realizing it, engaging in a circular, seductive logic that brings to mind Abū Nuwās's "Cure me with that which ails me."

which a lofty speech in praise of harmony and moderation is punctuated by the boorish sounds of gargling and sneezing (among other noises). Could this be Plato's commentary on the inefficacy of Eryxhimachus's philosophy of 'everything in moderation'?

This answer to this may be found in the comic poet's veiled assault on Eryximachus's wholly self-validating conception of *Eros*: "They [hiccups] certainly have stopped, though not until I applied the sneezing remedy, which leaves me amazed that the orderly element of the body desires the sort of noise and tickling that sneezing really is; for they stopped at exactly the moment I applied the sneezing" (189a). Most befittingly for a poet and a comedian, Aristophanes points to the *poetic paradox* that one bodily dysfunction (in this case, sneezing) should provide the antidote for another (hiccups). His comment is a direct attack upon Eryximachus's puffed up claim that "medical expertise…is knowledge of the erotic affairs of the body in relation to filling up and emptying"(186c); more specifically, Aristophanes critiques the medical doctor's expertise which states that the doctor "favor only the good and healthy things in each body" while 'disfavoring' the "bad and diseased"(186c). Hence and as only a poet of the train of Dionysos can make clear, a diseased or disorderly state may prove to cure another disorderly state much in the same way that drinking more wine is the only effective cure for a hang-over. Aristophanes' poetic irony takes on special significance when we consider how, at the end of his own speech, Erixymachus asks the poet to fill in the holes of his own speech: "If I've left anything out, it's up to you, Aristophanes to fill in the gaps; or if you mean to give the god a different sort of encomium, then go ahead, since your hiccups have stopped"(188e). How ironic indeed that the medical doctor who claims expertise in the erotics of the body looks to his patient to potentially 'cure' the 'ill' or

deficiencies of his speech; put otherwise, the 'judicious' physician turns to the comic poet to complete speech, thereby indicating that art—and in particular, that art affiliated with the wine god—functions as a remedy for the deficiencies of science.

It is also ironic that while Erixymachus preludes his speech with the confident claim to fill in the gaps of Pausanias' speech, he closes it with an open invitation to fill the holes of his own language (188e2-e4). This notion of filling and emptying, wholeness and deficiency is expressive of the dialogue's underlying philosophic-erotic theme: eros as a lack constantly in flux as it strives, against all odds, to fill itself by means of the permanent possession of its 'object.' According to Diotima, the desire to attain permanent satisfaction (by means of attaining knowledge) is a movement or process characterized by constant flux, constant instability. In light of this central theme, the reader is invited to wonder whether or not any deficiency of knowledge (via speech) can be 'filled' definitively. As Socrates tells Agathon just before pouring libations to the wine god, wisdom is not like water dripping from the emptier vessel into the fuller. Rather, as he suggests, wisdom is wholly different than what one might expect, reaching us in the most sudden and illicit of ways. In light of this, it is most certainly significant that the physician who claims mastery over bodily erotics turns to his hung-over, hardy-drinking, hiccupping patient for the 'antidote' to his own speech's potential deficiency. Does Aristophanes have what it takes to fill in what is missing? Can the effects of excess be the prescription needed to 'cure' a potentially misguided dialogue?

As Anderson observes, Aristophanes' hiccups have the ultimate consequence of re-ordering the speeches such that the comic and tragic poets—who also happen to be the hardiest drinkers of the bunch—are juxtaposed. Only after the two poets successively

'fill' the gaps of the previous speeches by means of *images* and *figures* does Socrates offer up his famous encomium to love. The effect is to draw attention to this newly *disordere*d sequence which indicates the coalescence of the erotic, bacchic and poetic. For at the close of dialogue, Aristophanes, newly awakened from a foggy, drunken haze, manages to recollect a rather extraordinary (out of place or *atopos*) scene in which Socrates, Agathon and Aristophanes share a drinking bowl just as our philosopher persuades them of a paradox that few Greeks would have found convincing: that one man can produce both a comedy and a tragedy.[190] Hence, the hiccups episode functions so as to draw attention to the quintessentially drunken, inchoate, extraordinarily strange (atopos) and therefore *poetic* character of speech and knowledge. More precisely, it presages, on multiple levels, what turns out to be the oddly *bacchic-poetic* character of Socrates' own 'philosophic' paradigm, one which, as I have shown in Chapter 3, ultimately fails to 'see' the irrational grounds for some its own claims and which also fails to give a reply to tragic poetry's insidious objections against Diotima's paradigm in the form of wine.

4.8 From the Lips of a Woman Dressed as a Man (Dressed in Fine Slippers): Wine of *Eros.*

We now arrive at the 'holy grail,' the 'telos' of Apollodorus's digressive and amorously fanatical narrative: the speech of the wisest man in Athens, what has been long regarded as a 'revelation' that stands at the 'apex' of a ladder of 'inferior' speeches. Earlier during the banquet, just before each guest was to offer up an encomium, Socrates had declared himself the master of erotics (177e1); indeed since it is the only thing he

[190] Clay, "Tragic and Comic," 199.

claims to actually know everything about, presumably all are eager to hear what he has to say.

In Chapter 3, I have addressed, in a preliminary way, a few of the philosophic challenges one encounters in Socrates' paradigm of Eros. These are namely the problem of 'fulfillment,' the problem of flux and vicissitude, and the problem of creative imagination (the role it plays in determining 'object'). In this section of my reading, it is my aim to examine two key features of Socrates speech: the first concerns the curious fact of Diotima's 'presence' in the banquet, and the second concerns the even stranger 'presence' of myth-making and/or *poiêsis* in her philosophic attempt to persuade Socrates that Eros is not a god but rather an in-between or a relation between poles of lack and abundance. As I will show, these two features of Socrates' via Diotima's speech bring into relief the distinctly bacchic and *poetic* character of what has been read as a uniquely 'philosophic' dialogue on love.

Socrates' speech about Eros is both foregrounded within and occasioned by a dialectic with Agathon who also happens to be the beloved-lover of Socrates. It is by means of this friendly conversation with an erotic partner that Socrates the lover-philosopher begins to speak the 'truth' about Eros (that is, if it can be called 'the truth'). Shortly after Agathon confesses to his ignorance concerning Eros (201 d), Socrates admits that he had been in Agathon's position before. He too had believed that Love was a god, happy beloved by all and beautiful, until a certain *woman*, a *stranger* from Mantinea, a *prophetess* and master of erotics, a certain Diotima persuaded him to the contrary. It is this 'truth' that he and Agathon could not refute, says Socrates (201c7). Who is this Diotima—this voice of philosophic reasoning, this 'author of the most

significant theory of love in the European philosophic tradition? The answer to this question continually eludes. Socrates says that she is a wise woman, a prophetess, a teacher who taught him all he knows about erotics:

> **…**and I'm going to turn to the account of Love that I once heard from a woman of Mantinea, Diotima who was wise both in these things and in much else, and once, before the plague, brought about a ten-year postponement of the disease for the Athenians when they had performed the sacrifices—she's the very person who taught me too about erotics. So it's the account she gave that I'm going to try to describe to all of you (…) in whatever way I can manage it. (201 d)

The information Socrates gives about his mentor is sparse; what we do learn of her seems oddly out of place (*atopos*) considering that the setting is predominantly male and the mood homoerotic. One wonders what place seers and prophets have in a playful climate in which bi-erotic activity, speech-making, dancing and drinking binges are the 'order' of things. Moreover, Eryximachus had dismissed all traces of feminine influence (specifically in the form of body) when he disdainfully told the flute-girl go off and entertain herself.[191]

Nevertheless, while Diotima's clearly out-of-place feminine gender has stirred up a lot of debate among scholars concerning its possible significance for the dialogue in general and Socrates' speech in particular, I believe that we learn the most from what Socrates *does not say* about her (and this encompasses the fact of her femininity). Indeed among the most striking thing we know about Diotima is a fact which Socrates omits: she is placeless (atopos). The most literal manifestation of this 'placelessness' is her physical *absence* from the banquet, her 'bodilessness.' Diotima has no 'place' here at the banquet. Thus and from a visual perspective, she may be counted among the other

[191] Anderson, *Masks*, 11.

'missing' guests who have been silenced by Aristodemus's foggy and/or selective memory.

The philosophic implications of Diotima's placelessness or 'out-of-placeness' are weighty enough to merit some pause, for it harkens us back to the larger narrative framework, which we *know* to be suspect and which nonetheless provides everything known to be 'true' about the speeches given. In the first place, her absence echoes the glaring absence of our narrator Apollodorus from the party about which he speaks with sparkling confidence and through which we learn all that we do about Socrates' speech in the first place. Her absence further reminds us that our very own eye-witness Aristodemus, by whose tipsy and rather dubious attendance we are granted access to the symposium, is in his own way 'absent.' After all, he freely admits to having forgotten many details regarding the speeches and to having fallen asleep for some time towards the end of the party, after a band of revelers forced all the guests to chug down large quantities of wine (223b-d). His 'absent' memory, which is largely suggested by his inability to 'contain' his liquor (he is after all a light-weight), is the reason for which the reader visualizes the seating order of the banquet with great difficulty, for we learn from Aristodemus himself that his recitation is wrought with *absences*: missing persons, missing logoi, missing 'truths.' As I have emphasized before, there is little reason to trust the veracity or historicity of what Apollodorus tells us and even more, what Aristodemus told him and yet, in a sense, we are compelled to believe him, as we have no other means of knowing what speeches were given at the celebration or what Socrates indeed said about love.

By the literary echoes discussed above, Plato incites the reader to question the 'philosophic' integrity of Socrates' claims about Diotima (either as a memory or a fiction) and her 'wisdom' and consequently, Socrates' claim *to know everything* about erotics. Indeed, why should we believe anything Socrates says about Diotima in the first place? It seems we must take Socrates' word for it, just as our Socrates-obsessed narrators take for granted that whatever Socrates says or does must be true.[192] Yet in order to be logically convinced of the truth of Diotima's existence and by extension, of her wisdom, we must make certain assumptions: first, we must trust that Diotima actually existed. Once we have determined the 'correctness of this belief,'[193] we must then be convinced that Socrates is telling the truth when he claims that he learned everything he knows from her. Finally and in the case where we are convinced of his truthfulness, we must believe that Socrates' memory is perfect enough to recollect a dialectical conversation whose every detail is crucial for arriving at its 'truth.' In view both of Diotima's remark that knowledge, once it is remembered, is never in the same form that it is when it was first acquired (208 a3), and given the difficulties that Apollodorus and Aristodemus encounter in remembering details, the reader is compelled to question the integrity of Socrates' recollection, if indeed, it is a recollection. Essentially, those who hear Socrates—and by extension the readers of the *Symposium*—must decide whether Socrates indeed convinces us that Diotima's truth is the Truth.

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[192] Apollodorus makes a point of saying that he verified some facts about the speeches with Socrates, and Aristodemus decides to follow Socrates to the banquet for the simple fact that Socrates incites him to go.

[193] See *Symposium* 202a5-a9. See also my critique of the passage at the conclusion of Chapter 3. In this passage, Diotima tells Socrates that knowledge of the truth or 'correct belief' may be determined rationally (by giving a logical account) or irrationally, since it is in-between absolute values.

Yet as it stands, the text gives us fertile ground for questioning the empirical existence of Diotima and consequently, the truth of Socrates' claim that she even existed. While there is much speculation surrounding a plausibly historic Diotima, most scholars agree that she is a myth or fiction, a product of Socrates' via Plato's imagination.[194] As evidence of this, one may observe the anachronistic quality of her speech. Indeed and oddly enough for a conversation that has occurred some number of years prior to the banquet, her speech manages to critique some aspects of some earlier speeches given at the banquet.[195] Moreover, Socrates' account of his conversation with Diotima is self-contradictory: first he says that he had a conversation only once (201d1) but in a later passage implies that he has met with her numerous times, thereby indicating that this 'conversation' we are privy to is a kind of pastiche of multiple conversations (if they occurred at all): "All these things she taught me…whenever she talked about matters to do with love; and on one occasion she asked me…"(207a4-5).

The difficulty of proving Diotima's historicity coupled with her placeless, 'absent' body thus lends to her a mythic quality which 'places' her *beyond* the confines of the temporal and spatial 'order' of the dinner banquet**.** How strange indeed that the most eagerly awaited speech about erotics, a speech given by the wisest man in Athens who is moreover a self-declared expert in erotics, 'arrives' in the form of a myth. Even stranger is the fact that Socrates invites this feminine myth, this 'holy grail' of erotic wisdom to speak through his lips, despite the fact that her feminine gender clearly disqualifies her from attendance at the all-male drinking-party. In fact, Socrates refers to

[194] See Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 111; Rowe, *Symposium*, 173; Anderson, *Masks*, 51. For a differing opinion see Andrea Nye, "Irigary and Diotima at Plato's *Symposium*," in *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, ed. Nancy Tuana, (University Park: Penn State Press, 1994), 197-216.

[195] See 205d10-e1 for a very clear allusion to Aristophanes' speech.

her as the Mantinean Stranger (*xenê*), indicating that she may be counted among the other uninvited visitors to this banquet. Diotima's 'presence' at the banquet is thus wholly illicit, out of place and excessive.

Precisely insofar as she is a bodiless, placeless, uninvited *mythos* who transgresses the confines of time, space and gender difference and who therefore eludes the 'grasp' of metaphysical knowledge, Diotima's 'presence' via Socrates is in its own way *iconoclastic*, much like the 'negative theophany' of the pure beauty which forms the climax of her speech. At the same time, it has a transgressive register: her 'presence' resonates powerfully with the Bacchic mood of play and seduction within which the dialogue is foregrounded. More precisely, this presumable voice of *philosophic* truth casts a Dionysian shadow.[196] Firstly, her status as an uninvited stranger who arrives at the banquet by means of a sudden or unexpected turn in Socrates' dialectical speech finds its echo in Dionysus' own sudden and unwelcome visit (or rather, invasion of) to Athenian civilization. Secondly, since it is from the lips of Socrates that Diotima speaks as the quintessential teacher/seer/mystic and expert on erotics, Socrates becomes a kind of erotic ventriloquist or better, a transvestite—a *woman dressed as a man* on the level of logos.[197] This 'cross-dressing speech' of Diotima via Socrates takes on a special significance when we consider Dionysus's rather blurry sexuality. That Socrates is already 'dressed' in uncustomary fashion, that is, in a manner that *masks* his genuine lack

[196] Could it be a coincidence that her name and the wine god's begin with common letters?

[197] I am largely indebted to Dr. Corrigan for this observation. It is noteworthy, mainly for the irony, that one of the key criticisms that Socrates gives of tragic poetry in the *Republic* is the blurring of the identity of the poet who sings and the heroes who speak through him. Yet this is precisely what we encounter in Socrates mimetic channeling of Diotima. Concerning his status as 'transvestite': I have shown in my reading of the arcane figure of the Cup-bearer in Chapter 2 that the transvestite is a supremely poetic figure insofar as it is effectively intoxicated and seduced by the imaginary impossibility of the hermaphrodite. The transvestite is a figure of seduction. That Socrates via Diotima might appear to signify this seductive quality is not surprising when we consider Alcibiades' comparison of Socrates to the monstrously seductive figure of the Silenus.

of concern for beautiful appearances is in keeping with the *dramatic* or theatrical context over which the wine god presides. Not only does Socrates go to the drinking-party 'dressed for the occasion' but a sudden moment of philosophic *intoxication* stops him in his tracks just prior to arriving at his *intended* destination. By this point in the dialogue, the reader is tempted to infer that there is a seductive, haphazard, fluctuating, excessive and illicit character to knowledge (or wisdom) which renders it analogous to the erotically intoxicating experience of wine.

Another look at the playful *literary* echoes between Socrates' 'illicit' invocation and/or fabrication of Diotima and the suspect 'origins' of the narrative framework is disquieting enough to provoke the kind of creative, dialogical thinking which I believe Plato's Socrates appears to advocate. For the reader is reminded that he or she would *know nothing* about this philosophic banquet and, consequently about Socrates' via Diotima's 'truth,' were it not for Aristodemus's tipsy, haphazard and all-together *illicit* (he was not invited) attendance of the banquet. By Aristodemus's out-of-place or excessive behavior we learn that, contrary to the philosophic notion that one attains knowledge by means of a methodical, deliberative process, knowledge 'visits' us in the most illicit of ways and in *spite of our intent*. That Aristodemus goes to the banquet only after his beloved Socrates tempts him to do so in the *creative* spirit of breaking proverbs (an iconoclastic gesture) is significant insofar as it points to the powerful way in which poetic language can 'possess' or 'intoxicate' individuals, causing them to do what they would not have ordinarily have done and go where they would not ordinarily go. In the same way, had Socrates not taken the *poetic* liberty of invoking or fabricating Diotima's presence such that his *logos* was 'possessed' or 'intoxicated' by her *logos*, neither the

guests nor you nor I would be acquainted with Socrates' 'truth' about eros. Hence, Diotima's illicit poetic 'presence' in the symposium brings into relief two subversive notions that were first introduced by the narrative frame of the *Symposium:* first, the powerfully *creative* hold that desire (eros) has over speech and thought (logos) (the way in which it intoxicates, shapes and determines speech) and consequently over knowledge; second and insomuch as speech is an *erotic*, *creative, intoxicated* and *intoxicating* vehicle of experience, the fundamentally *elusive* or ungraspable character of knowledge.

In view of the above, Socrates' own *figurative intoxication* by means of the absent, elusive and more likely mythic Diotima strongly indicates that there is an unknowable character to knowledge that only the seductive, intoxicated figures of myth and *poetry* can render 'palpable.' For when it is his turn to speak about love, Socrates speaks *not as himself*, but as one possessed or *intoxicated* by myth's *creative* power to convey, in *images*, what philosophic speech or dialectic fails to convey. As I will show by means of a close reading of Diotima's own peculiar myth concerning the conception of *Eros*, Socrates' most eagerly awaited philosophic speech on love suggests a surprising identification among erotic experience, the inebriating experience of wine and its rhetorical correlate, poetry.

As I have shown in Section 3.3 of Chapter 3, Socrates-Diotima introduces this myth at the critical point when, by way of dialectical reasoning, Socrates forces the tragic poet Agathon to relinquish all claims to knowledge concerning Eros (201c5). It is at this point that Socrates introduces Diotima as the 'philosophic' yet no less *poetic* voice through which the guests and the reader gain access to the 'truth' about this non-divinity called Eros. Significantly, Agathon and Socrates virtually *disappear* from the narrative

setting as Socrates' mythic dramatization of a 'past' conversation between his former self and his female teacher takes over and even *consumes* the space of the narrative. Socrates' dramatization of this past conversation continues the very same dialectic that had occurred between himself and Agathon at the very point where he and Agathon left off. Within this more likely fictional philosophic dialectic 'proper,' Diotima makes a radical out of place poetic detour in order to better illustrate a point which Socrates-the-student has trouble grasping: Eros is in-between, a point which is fundamental to her exposition of desire as a relation between the lover who lacks and the beautiful object which he seeks to possess in the hope that it will fulfill him or provide him with eternal happiness (i.e. immortality). More precisely, Diotima resorts to poetic allegory as perhaps a more effective means of illustrating the complexity, even paradoxical character of love which she will lay bare afterwards, when she gives a portrait of Eros (203b1-204c5). This is not at all surprising when one considers the great emphasis she places on role that poetic activity or 'making' (*poiêsis*) plays in the distinctly erotic pursuit of wisdom or the Beautiful as Such (205b8-c3) Her use of the term *poiêsis* to describe the lover's philosophic activity of making and inventing, both in body and more importantly in speech is thought-provoking: why is philosophic dialectic, an activity which Diotima aligns with the experience of Eros, abandoned in favor of a form of knowledge, poetry, which has been viewed by Socrates with suspicion in the *Republic*?

In Chapter 3, I attempt to illustrate the 'philosophic' logic behind Diotima's paradigm of Eros. Yet in this reading I will show give an alternative interpretation in order to show that Diotima's myth-making has subversive implications for the dialogue as a whole. At face value, Diotima's allegory seems simple enough; she tells of a

seduction-rape scheme according to which an impoverished mortal woman desperately plots to take sexual advantage of abundantly rich, divine being who happens to be asleep after drinking too much (nectar).

> When Aphrodite was born, the gods held a feast; and among them was Resource, son of Craftiness. Their dinner over, Poverty came begging, as one might expect with festivities going on, and placed herself around the doors. Well, Resource had got drunk with nectar (wine, you see, did not yet exist), and gone out into Zeus' garden; now, weighed down with drink, he was sleeping. So Poverty plotted, because of her own resourcelessness, to have a baby from Resource, and she lay down beside him and became pregnant with Love. This is why it was Aphrodite whose follower and attendant he became, because he was conceived during her birthday party, and also because he is by nature a lover in relation to what is beautiful, and Aphrodite is beautiful. (203b1-c6)

Diotima's interpretation, taken in light of her ladder paradigm, reads the myth as indicated Eros's fundamentally divine or resourceful nature, which drives him 'upward' in pursuit of the intelligible form of virtue. Yet as I have shown at the conclusion of Chapter 3, this is a pure matter of *interpretation*. For Diotima's myth invites an alternative reading which sees Eros as the *inebriating* progeny of tragicomic coupling. Eros's mother may be an erotic predator, but she nonetheless elicits *some degree of pity* insofar as her situation is tragic: she is a beggar, a vagabond, always in need. Are we to blame her for making the most out of a *tragic* situation? And while Resource is a divinity, there is something *laughable* about him: he is a happy drunk who happens to have everything Poverty could only dream of having but who is too naïve or oblivious of his surroundings to protect his 'seed' or his own integrity.[198] Eros is thus the 'dramatic' child of a tragic and comic encounter. What's more, he signifies the dramatic art of

[198] By contrast to Eros's father, Eros's mother seems incredibly shrewd and resourceful. Yet Diotima, in her subsequent exegesis of this allegory, ascribes Eros's wisdom to his father and his ignorance to his mother. Already, her own myth is revealing far more than she intends.

poetry itself—its *figures*, since he is the offspring of the union between loss or failure on the one hand and imaginative resource or a self-overflowing of meaning on the other.

Moreover and regarding Resource's drunken oblivion, Diotima indicates, by means of a seeming parenthesis, a special point meriting serious contemplation and which has weighty consequences for interpreting the dialogue as a whole: "Well, Resource had got drunk with nectar (wine, you see, did not yet exist), and gone out into Zeus' garden; now, weighed down with drink, he was sleeping" (203 b6-7) What do we make of this haphazard mention of wine? Why is it significant that wine had not yet been invented? Here one might pause to consider the previous incidents in the dialogue where Dionysus only gets haphazard mention, even while it is clear that the entire philosophic dialogue is fore grounded within a Dionysian festivity. In order to appreciate the significance of this aside, one must consider how Poverty's mortal status differentiates her from Resource's divine one.

As I have illustrated in Chapter 3, the most fundamental difference between Poverty and Resource is the fact that she is mortal while he is divine or immortal. It is this difference between Poverty and Resource which results in the *poiêsis* of Eros. For as Diotima explains further in her speech, human beings and even animals, will do anything to ensure their immortality (207d1-2). It is immortality which is the true 'object' of our *desire*, even if we are not consciously aware of it. As Diotima explains, humans seek to attain immortality by means of various forms of 'making' or *poiêsis***:** the most rudimentary of these is heterosexual reproduction. Reproduction is a way of extending one's life span. The same is true for Poverty, who insofar as she is mortal, can be called a victim of Time. For insomuch as erotic existence is measured by Time, Time is the

archenemy of our desires (and its fulfillment). More precisely, and if we take what Diotima says later to be true, Time is what inevitably prevents us from fulfilling the desire for immortality. Time explains why we are not gods and why gods do not experience desire. It is the lack of immortality that attracts Poverty to Resource who is characterized by his overabundance or *his transcendence of Time*.

Now to return to the significance of Diotima's parenthesis concerning wine: what happens when a mortal being defined and impoverished by Time couples with one who transcends Time and who is moreover *drunk on nectar*? Is not *wine* the miraculous 'offspring' of this mythic coupling? For one must consider that what separates nectar from wine is Time itself; it is the passage of time that causes nectar to ferment and ultimately transform into wine. By this poetic allegory, Diotima powerfully achieves a stunning identification between the experiences of Eros (which she will define as both philosophical and poetic) and wine. What might be the meaning of this strange and subversive identification?

An appreciation of the significance of this *poetic* identification invites a brief look at the nature and idea of wine and its *erotic relation to the drinker.* Wine, for which time is no enemy, is an existential paradox; its maturation, its coming of age—the defining trait of its goodness—implies the *undoing* or the dissolution of the sobering 'logic' (Time) that restricts and organizes human experience (or desire). But wine is also the 'drink' of civilization. The whole reason for its 'invention' and/or 'cultivation' is so that it may be 'consumed.' Its experience, its antiquity exists for the 'moment' of its consumption. Yet this 'consumption' of wine is itself a paradox which repeats, physiologically and psychologically, the paradox of wine's own 'cultivation.' In

partaking of the experience of wine, the drinker partakes of an experience that 'unravels' him just as wine's own maturation implies the 'unraveling' of the linearity of Time, which opposes itself to human ambition. In the instant in which wine is consumed, it ceases to be an 'object' (something to be possessed) and in turn *possesses* and *consumes*. In desiring wine, the drinker desires *that he cannot possess his object*. The drinker moreover desires that he become *consumed*, knowing that wine *imparts the unrestricted experience that its making implies*. The desire for wine thus implies the desire to be *seduced* rather than 'fulfilled' or 'satiated.' Or rather, it implies that 'fulfillment' cannot be achieved without a fundamental violation of the 'civilized,' integral self—a counter-logic that opposes itself to the metaphysical paradigm proposed by Socrates-Diotima.

Diotima's mythic account of philosophic love surely has something of the irrational in it, as her own 'presence' in the dialogue suggests. If Eros is like wine, he is the seducer and the seduced or like Dionysos, the hunter and the hunted. He overflows with meanings that can no more be contained than the bubbles of wine in the vessel. He in turn intoxicates and seduces those around him, causing them to overflow with a desire that cannot be satisfied. If Eros is like wine, he is an 'undrinkable' figure that cannot be deciphered by means of a linear, temporal speech. He is the *poet and the poem*: he weaves wonderful myths that reveal strange and 'mixed' realities that are otherwise difficult to put into words. He is strange, hubristic, even monstrous, taking the 'impossible' shapes of the chimeras he weaves.[199]

[199] At least one fascinating point of similarity between Abū Nuwās's wine song and *Symposium* is the erotically 'impossible' figure of the hermaphrodite: compare the erotically ambivalent Cup-bearer who, as I have argued in Chapter 2, is the ultimate iconoclastic figure with that of Socrates-Diotima; not only is the Socrates-Diotima 'figure' an impossible figure insofar as it is the site of a confusion between gender poles and poles of knowledge (she is after all a seer) but Diotima herself is 'iconoclastic' insofar as she is, like wine, an unintelligible, feminine 'image' that is also mysteriously 'omnipresent.' Diotima's meanings overflow, even taking up the space not only of her dialogue with Socrates (which is already suspect) but the predominantly masculine space of the banquet.

If in Diotima's myth, Eros is indeed a figure for the inebriating experience of wine and its rhetorical correlate, poetry, then it is all the more curious that Socrates, the wisest of Athenians, bears an uncanny resemblance to him.[200] On the one hand, such an identification would suggest that Socrates-Diotima's speech is not so different than the other speakers who, drunk on love and wine, paint love *in their own image,* perhaps a sign, among a plethora of others, that the reader should read his speech with caution. On the other hand and more importantly, it indicates that philosophic logos can no more 'contain' the 'signs' that it 'makes' (*poiêsis*) than a drunken man or a poet.[201] For the strangest 'offspring' of philosophy's illicit consorting with poetry (in the form of Diotima) is the ambivalent figure of Eros who is at one time a lover of wisdom and a weaver of myths, a dialectician and a coy banterer, a man of supreme moderation and a drunkard who lingers at doorways, leaving his uninvited companions in a quandary; this figure is Socrates.

As I will show in my reading of Alcibiades' speech, Plato draws special attention to the tenuousness of the opposition between philosophic desire and bacchic-poetic desire (and consequently, knowledge) by putting the praise of the quintessential lover of wisdom, who *closely resembles wine*, in the lips of a lover of wine. In making Socrates

[200] For purposes of brevity, it suffices to observe that Socrates' resemblance to Eros is well-noted. See 203c4-e1 for Diotima's description of Eros as barefoot, always at doorways, sleeping under stars, courageous, not beautiful but in relentless pursuit of what is beautiful; her description brings to mind Socrates, who is not beautiful and lingers at the doorway of Agathon's house in contemplation of the unseen beauty. Alcibiades' praise of Socrates also confirms some of the above, such as Socrates' uncanny ability to walk on ice barefoot (220b5-c1), his courage (220d5-221c1) and his ability to remain in a state of contemplation from dawn till dusk outside (presumably, under the stars). For a brilliant and complex reflection on the puzzling and no less perturbing figure of Socrates, see Pierre Hadot "La Figure de Socrate" in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Edited by A.I. Davidson. Translated by M. Chase from *Exercises* Spirituelles et Philosophie antique. Paris: 1987. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995.

[201] It is also important to note that Apollodorus's mimetic speech is the example of a speech which 'imagines' itself to be philosophical (in the sense that it copies reality as it really is) yet which ultimately fails to 'contain' the events of what occurred in the banquet.

the erotic 'object' of his drunken 'wine praise' and in claiming to tell the truth about him *in the name of wine*, Alcibiades' speech enacts a theatrical confrontation of the dialogue's integrally operative yet wholly unacknowledged theme: *erotic drunkenness* and its relation to language, knowledge, and ultimately, to philosophy. In this regard and taken in light of the larger framework of the dialogue, Alcibiades' speech functions like drunkenness in that it ""expands, unites, and says yes…It brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core. It makes him for the moment one with truth."[202] More specifically, Alcibiades' speech operates as a Dionysian drama, a tragic art, which 'unites us to the truth' about Eros inciting all to participate and identify with the rapturous suffering that Alcibiades endures at the hands of the dialectician. The 'tragic truth' that Alcibiades' wine song commemorates is one that is 'officially' left out by Socrates-Diotima while subversively at play within it: erotic experience and consequently, speech and knowledge as *seduction.* For Alcibiades, Eros is a flesh-biting, self-expropriating experience, and Socrates its hubristic 'figure.' In order to understand this, the guests at the party and, by implication, the reader of the dialogue must 'experience,' by way of a deluge of images, the pleasure and pain of Alcibiades' experience. In this way, Alcibiades' speech is a vindication of an erotic form of knowledge—tragic poetry—that is has been banished from the philosophic polis but, which, as I will show, conveys an 'experiential truth' that is vital in order to 'arrive' at an appreciation of the extraordinary beauty of Diotima-Socrates' 'revelation.'

4.9 Figuring Seduction: the 'truth' of Alcibiades' *Wine Song*

[202] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 1902, 377-8.

"Now this excitable character admits of many multicolored imitations. But a rational and quiet character, which always remains pretty well the same, is neither easy to imitate nor easy to understand when imitated, especially not by a crowd consisting of all sorts of people gathered together at a theatre festival…"—Socrates in the *Republic* 604e

It is not true that the more you love, the better you understand; all that the action of love obtains from me is merely this wisdom: that the other is not to be known… —Roland Barthes[203]

An appreciation of the significance of Alcibiades' anti-climactic arrival to the drinking party requires first that we return to the climactic scene in which Socrates concludes his 'philosophic' speech with a happy and rather *satisfied* eulogy of Eros: "since I am persuaded, I try to persuade everyone else too that for acquiring this possession one couldn't easily get a better coworker with human nature than Love is. That's why I declare that everyone must honor Love…" (212b2-b6).

Yet, as it turns out, not everyone is so persuaded. Having heard Socrates' implicit critique of his speech, the formerly hiccupping Aristophanes tries to object (212c5-6) when "Suddenly [*exaiphnês*], *there* was a loud banging from the door to the court, from what sounded like revelers; an *aulos*-girl's voice could be heard" (212c7-d1). It is not without irony that the comic poet's rather *sober* attempt to question his critic (in a manner perhaps more consistent with Socratic dialectic) is brutishly disrupted by the din of drunken mayhem mixed with flute-music. Just as Aristophanes' sudden hiccups signaled the presence of Dionysos in the form of a hang-over, so too does the riotous mixture of shouting, banging and flute-music harbinger the dramatic 'epiphany' of a nearly forgotten deity who, in his divine fury, will collapse the sober, deliberative effort of philosophy. The 'suddenness' (*exaiphnês*) of the banging which interrupts Aristophanes echoes the 'suddenness' (*exaiphnês*) with which the philosopher catches glimpse of the pure beauty (210e4) while at the same time foreshadowing the comic

[203] Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 135.

scene in which Alcibiades, startled by the sight of his beloved Socrates sitting beside Agathon, wrathfully accuses him of suddenly (*exaiphnês*) plotting to ambush him (213c1).[204] By this literary echoing, the reader is called to interpret Alcibiades' sudden appearance as both the eruption of the transcendent—for he is the 'epiphany' of the *mask* of the wine god—, and the collapse into the 'real,' even 'burlesque,' which is reminiscent of the masked carnival.[205]

In keeping with this theme of 'masks,' Alcibiades arrives to the drinking-party "Wreathed with a thick wreath of ivy and violets and with a mass of ribbons on his head" (212e1-e2); ivy is the symbol of the wine god, while violets are a symbol of Aphrodite, who is intimately linked to the wine god.[206] He is moreover attended by a flute-girl and a host of reveling attendants (212d8). The 'return' of the flute-girl signifies the return of the wine god who had been metaphorically banished by the advocate of harmony, balance, and all-male eroticism Erixymachus and who will now demonstrate the hubris of those who seek to banish him. Moreover, Alcibiades' "roaring" (*boôntos* [212d])[207] in the courtyard brings to mind the key figure of the bull, which stands for "the wildness which intoxication by wine evokes."[208]It also stands for the ritual violence of Dionysian experience: for in Greek myth, Dionysos stands at one time for the hunter (the one who sacrifices) and the hunted (he was torn apart by the Titans).[209] This last detail, which I will discuss further, has special significance for appreciating the way in which

[204] Rowe, *Symposium*, 203.

[205] Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 164.

[206] Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*.(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). 193.

[207] Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 164.

[208] Otto, *Dionysus*, 166.

[209] Otto, *Dionysus*, 167.

Alcibiades' characterizes his *erotic* relation to Socrates. Finally and most importantly, the 'roaring' stands for the epiphany of the god, who appearing in the form of the raging bull, signifies the violent disruption of 'civilized spaces.' In fact, this is precisely what occurs when Alcibiades disrupts this 'friendly' philosophic setting in which the guests unanimously agree to speak about love in an ordered sequence and drink only as much as they please.

Befittingly, Alcibiades enters the scene *drunk*: "'Greetings gentlemen; will you accept someone who's drunk, really drunk, as a drinking-companion…?"(212e1-e4). A tyrant 'masked' as a drunken deity, Alcibiades sees to it that everyone who is present partakes of this drinking binge, electing himself as the 'judge' over what will soon become a banquet that lives up to its name "drinking-party": "Well, gentlemen, what's this? You seem to me to be sober. I obviously can't leave it to you: what we must do is drink…so as person in charge of drinking…I elect—myself" (213e7-e11). In electing himself as the 'judge' over the contest of drinking, Alcibiades fulfills Agathon's earlier claim to Socrates that Dionysius will be the judge in the contest (between himself and Socrates) of what it means to be wise.

In keeping with his role as 'judge,' Alcibiades will tell the truth about Socrates, insisting that his listeners interrupt him if he fails to do so (214e7). Further in his account of Socrates, he makes it clear that he is telling the truth *in the name of wine*: "you wouldn't have heard it from me, if first of all—as the saying goes—the truth weren't in wine, whether without slaves present or with them"(217e3-e5). It is critical to note that, among all the speakers of the dialogue, he is the only one to do so. As I have discussed previously, both the mimetic structure of the dialogue and the 'dialogue' itself are

pervaded by the transgressive influence of wine, a 'truth' which is, up until this point, remains wholly unacknowledged. In linking truth to wine, Alcibiades indicates that the intoxicating experience of wine has indeed *everything to do with knowledge*, whether philosophy wishes to admit to it or not. More specifically and by his role as 'Dionysian judge,' Alcibiades seems to affirm that wisdom *does not flow like water*.

In fact, his drunken state is such that his mixture of love and hate for Socrates emerges with a lucidity that is at once perturbing and disarming, even farcical. Before giving his speech, he makes it very clear that he has a vendetta against Socrates and that to 'praise' him would mean humiliating him: "I'm not making peace with you…But for this I'll get my own back on you on another occasion"(213d8-9). Within the context of his 'praise,' he admits that he sometimes wishes Socrates dead (216c1). Yet clearly, the experience of wine grants access to a domain of paradox and vicissitude, where love and hate are two sides of the same page. At the end of his speech, everyone laughs at his candor, for despite his claim to do otherwise, he praises Socrates in the manner of a passionate, inspired lover (222c1-c4).

It is above all significant that when Alcibiades speaks truth about Socrates 'under the influence,' he does so "through images"(215a6), thereby indicating that poetic speech is a kind of intoxicated speech which, contrary to the claim of Socrates in the *Republic*, can tell the 'truth' about love and knowledge. His role as 'poet' is further suggested by his Dionysian 'mask': the crown of violets on his head is a 'sign' that he is possessed by the Muse.[210] Since violets are connected to Aphrodite, the crown indicates that he is

[210] Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 193. She also points out that the violets stand for the city of Athens which, in Alcibiades' time, is in danger of giving way to tyranny.

erotically intoxicated by an 'object' of great beauty which he will describe in poetic images.

Alcibiades' poetry is the erotic site where philosophic and Dionysian themes coalesce: a tyrant who is himself tyrannized by his passionate love for an individual, Alcibiades is the 'hunter and the hunted.' More than this, Alcibiades is tyrannized by love for an individual *who does not love him* and who has moreover transcended his love for individuals altogether. A self-confessed "slave" of love, Alcibiades' acts out his tyranny by putting Socrates on trial.[211] In one way, this 'trial' takes the form of a tragic art which calls its audience to experience, by way of images, the devastating and intoxicating 'effect' of Socrates' speech on those who hear him , or the effect of loving a man who cannot be 'possessed' erotically.

Alcibiades makes Socrates the ultimate figure for the intoxicating experience of wine by likening his speech to the enchanting flute-playing of the satyr Marsyas. He pays close attention to the rapturous 'effect' of this speech, which, like the experience of wine, causes him to lose control over his own body: "For whenever I hear them, I'm in the same state as the Corybantes, only much worse –heart leaping, tears pouring out under the impact of this man's words…"(215e1). For Alcibiades, loving Socrates is far from a satisfying experience, for his words have the power to unmask the true desires (lack) of the one who loves him: " He forces me to admit that although there's much I lack in myself, it's myself I neglect…"(216a4-5). So powerful is Socrates' rhetoric that it causes him to feel emotions that he otherwise would not feel, such as shame at his own ignorance (216 b2). But the unbearable weight of knowing his lack only leads him to

[211] For a full exposition of how Alcibiades' praise is at once a test and trial of Socrates and his method. 168-179, see Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic*, 168-179.

escape like a "runaway slave" (216c) further on the path of self-destruction: "I was frequently reduced to thinking that it wasn't worthy my living, in the condition I'm in" (216a1). Alcibiades goes on to characterize Socrates' speech as a terrible snake bite: "Well, as for me, bitten as I've been by something more painful, and in the most painful place one could be bitten—because is in my heart, or my soul…that I've been stricken and bitten by the words that philosophy bring with her, which bite into you more fiercely than a snake…"(218a3-7).

While Socrates has a mortally wounding effect on those who love him, forcing them to face the ugly truth of their inward deprivation, his own desire eludes their grasp —it remains *masked*. The figure of the sculpted silenus is a Dionysian mask which Alcibiades uses in order to signify the philosopher's own self-deprecating *mask* which is *iconoclastic*. Like the statue of the silenus, Socrates has an "outside covering" (216d6) that reveals him to be "in love with beautiful young men…ignorant of everything" (216d1-4). That is, he seems to be filled with desire (lack). That the silenus is itself a toy that can be opened up is critical for understanding the iconoclastic quality of Socrates, for Socrates appears like someone, who, can be 'taken apart,' or *known*. When the lover loves, he wants to 'know' the other by opening him up and taking him apart so that he *can see his desire*. In the words of Barthes, "Isn't *knowing someone* precisely that—knowing his desire?"[212] Yet Alcibiades' image indicates that when Socrates is 'opened up,' one does not see desire (lack) but one 'sees' only *another figure*, which stands for that which cannot be apprehended, an 'excess of moderation': "when he's opened up, you just couldn't image how completely full he is…of moderation"(216d6-7). Here there is a paradox: while Alcibiades points to the hidden divinity within Socrates—he

[212] Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 134.

knows that he is 'filled with moderation' in spite of his appearance—he cannot apprehend or reconcile how one man with such a divine soul can have such a monstrous façade. That is to say, he knows that Socrates wears a mask (for this the very point of his imagery), but he cannot see that the mask is itself the 'dialectical sign' of his overflowing virtue (his interior) and vice versa. Alcibiades fails to understand that Socrates masks his own wisdom, not for the sake of it, but with an ethical intent: he wants to motivate the student to see that wisdom can only be attained by *first returning to one's own desire or lack*. Alcibiades' Dionysian imagery reveals his failure to apprehend—both in body and mind—the erotic, or dialectical character of Socrates (that he is Eros), and how this failure in turn makes him desire more intensely the experience of being seduced. In his imagination, Socrates, who is Eros, takes on the wine-like character of seduction; he becomes a figure for amor amoris. Thus and in the imagination of unrequited love, the figure of the beloved is the tragic, seductive mask of the lover's own desire to be seduced.

In his narrative of failed seduction, Alcibiades affirms, *experientially*, that erotic love is this experience of seduction. His narrative takes the form of a recollected drama, one which echoes that of Socrates-Diotima, but which differs from it in that Alcibiades appears *as if* to report *a real-life experience* with *real life characters* (i.e., Alcibiades and Socrates) who are moreover present to defend themselves, in case he (Alcibiades) doesn't tell the truth.[213] It also differs from Socrates' narrative in that in recounting this humiliation at the hands of the one he loves, Alcibiades actually *relives* his tragic suffering, calling on the audience to identify with him by means of *pathos*: "I'm feeling

[213] While Alcibiades' recollection appears more staked in 'reality' than Socrates' in the sense that his 'protagonists' (himself and Socrates) are actual historical characters, it is nonetheless true that it too may be a fiction of the text, given the fact that the dialogue as a whole is framed by Apollodorus' rather suspect narrative.

what people feel when they've been bitten by the snake. I think they say that someone who's had this experience won't say what it was like except to others who've been bitten, because only they will understand and be forgiving if in fact the pain caused them to lose any inhibition about what they said or did …"(218a1-3).

Yet it is also important to note that this 'tragic drama' which, ultimately aims at showing that Socrates is an erotic *criminal* (hybristês [215b7]), takes a comic turn, one which allows us to see another 'truth' about Eros. Alcibiades begins his narrative with a candid affirmation of his own arrogance and pride: "I was amazingly proud of the way I looked"(217a6). *Knowing* himself to be physically appealing, Alcibiades thought that he, the 'beautiful one' could gratify Socrates, 'the lover of beauty' in exchange for wisdom (217a5-6; 218c8-d5). After repeated failures at seducing him with his charm, he makes his intentions known. Socrates, in his typically self-deprecating fashion, indicates that such an exchange would be "'gold for bronze'" (219a2), thereby indicting *he* (Socrates) does not possess any wisdom and that it is Alcibiades(the inferior one) who is wise; yet he cautions Alcibiades by telling him, "The sight of the mind…first sees sharply when the sight of the eyes starts [?] to fade from its prime; and you're still far away from that"(219a4-6). *Failing to see* that this is a pedagogical ploy to force him to re-examine his true desires and thereby *see that he is fixated on physical beauty*, Alcibiades believes that he has 'hit' Socrates with his arrows (219b4).[214] But the arrow misses once again: in instead of satisfying his desire, the pair end up sleeping beside one another like father and son (219d1-3). The narrative thus concludes on a note of reversal: whereas Alcibiades had wanted to be Socrates' beloved—the beautiful one—he ends up in the farcical

[214] Earlier in his narrative, Alcibiades states that he prides himself on his good looks (217a6).

situation of shooting arrows that continually miss their target. Alcibiades is the *lover who lacks.* It is precisely this kind of reversal which makes Alcibiades wish Socrates dead, for he forces people to lose their privileged places as 'beloveds' and instead usurps their place (222b4).

There is a comic way in which Alcibiades affirms his desire to remain seduced: "I put my himation around him (it was winter), lay down under the short cloak he—this person here— had over him, threw my arms around this truly superhuman and amazing man, lay there all night long…Well when I'd done all that, this man so much got the better of me, looked down on me, laughed…" Concerning this scene, Carson observes the following:

> There are two garments in this scene and the way Alkibiades uses them is a concrete symbol of his own contradictory desire: first he wraps Sokrates up in his own cloak…then throws Socrates old coat over himself and lies on the bed, embracing this bundled-up object of his desire…Both the gesture of embrace and the gesture of separation are Alkibiades' own. Eros is lack: Alkibiades reifies the lover's guiding principle almost as self-consciously as Tristan, who places a drawn sword between himself and Iseult…"[215]

In a way, lovers would not exist without the boundaries that separate them from their 'objects.' Alcibiades' wine song attests to this *tragicomic* truth. In one way, it is the account of what happens to our souls when everything another person does or does not do bites into our soul as if our soul were flesh. It is about love as expropriation; a part of the lover is missing when he is in love, as the comic poet Aristophanes had said. Yet his speech also draws out the humor of how unrequited love makes people loses their 'places' (atopos), turning them into hunters with arrows. Alcibiades tries to make Socrates the culprit for this 'crime' of love, by making him into a snake who bites the

[215] Carson, *Eros*, 23.

soul, a derisive mask and a beguiling satyr. In one way, this is how Alcibiades achieves his vendetta against him for forcing him to be in the position of the one who lacks. Just as Apollo did with Satyr Marsyas, Alcibiades punishes Socrates for his hubristic 'flute-playing' by way of his rhetoric. He calls on the audience to identify with this terrible love-bite of philosophy, as if rallying them against Socrates: "you've all shared in the madness and Bacchic frenzy of philosophy. That's why I'm going to tell you my story."(218b4-5). But by his attempt to flail Socrates, there occurs yet another reversal: a 'pure and unmixed' *revelation* of Socrates' virtue shines through his speech (219 d3-c2). Alcibiades' final account of Socrates' extraordinary 'self-control and bravery' confirms him to be the figure of love who has reached the pinnacle of the ladder and sipped the wine of the pure unmixed beauty. In this regard, Alcibiades' Dionysian 'wine praise' is the praise of the 'wine' of philosophic virtue. It is the praise of Eros the philosopher, who is the child of Time and the unripened vine.

Yet, if Alcibiades' wine song celebrates the 'moderation' of this erotic bacchant —in spite of its intent—the question that remains is: where does this leave poetry and philosophy? Is it true, then, that poets and drunkards know nothing of which they speak? In my reading, I have emphasized that Alcibiades does not truly 'know' the object of his desire, since he points to yet cannot interpret or 'makes sense out of' the paradox of Socrates. The 'sign' of his failure to makes sense of him is precisely that he uses Dionysian masks to signify Socrates. In this regard, Socrates' claim in the *Republic* that poetry does not 'know' its object *is true*.

Yet, at the same time that the images fail to 'unravel' or 'disassemble' the paradox of this man who is 'brimming with moderation' (and his logos), the images

communicate a 'negative truth' about love that is wholly absent from Socrates-Diotima's philosophic speech: the *unknowable* character of the 'object' of our love. As Barthes observes, "It is not true that the more you love, the better you understand; all that the action of love obtains from me is merely this wisdom: that the other is not to be known…" [216] As Alcibiades himself declares, those who have been bitten know what it feels like. Failure, loss, and seduction are an integral part of the experience of desire. As I have shown in Chapter 3, Diotima briefly acknowledges this fact *only to move beyond* it; philosophic desire moves from a place of lack towards the plenitude of heavenly wisdom.

But the 'truth' that poetry tells *does not presume* to move progressively from a position of lack to that of divine alterity. Poetry is just the opposite: it *proceeds from a position of 'alterity' and aims at lack*, or *desire*. Lack is the tragic topos of poetry and the 'home' of its wisdom. In the case of Alcibiades: he is possessed by the self-unraveling potency of wine (symbolized by the god) which in turn allows him to signify *his desire* or lack. While his speech does not aim at self-knowledge—precisely the opposite, for it is *immoral*—it does allow us to 'know ourselves' by intercepting the boundary that separates the reader from the poet and unraveling it, forcing us to recognize our desire (lack) in the strange intimacy of the other's desire. Alcibiades' wine song compels us to step outside of ourselves and be united to his experience, which is pure desiring: "…you've all shared in the madness and Bacchic frenzy of philosophy. That's why I'm going to tell you my story"(218b4-5).

By identifying with the myriad images of his suffering, his delight, his failures, his embarrassment we commune with the 'truth' of Eros in the vicissitude of its dimensions. One the one hand, we feel what it is like to be fiercely bitten in the soul by a

[216] Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 135.

person we believe is truly outstanding and irreplaceable; we feel the pangs of being seduced and the delight of repeating the seduction in words. Desire here is the paradox of our nature that continually affirms itself. On the other hand and *through this dissolute lens of drunken desire*, we have a taste of what philosophy does to souls who practice it. Alcibiades presumes to put Socrates on trial and flail him in front of all the guests, but in fact, the meanings of his speech far exceed the intention of the his craft, such that we gain access to the amazing, daemonic beauty of the philosophic life. Whereas in Diotima's speech, the form of virtue is but a 'fluffy' cloud of abstraction, an intangible cloud nine, in Alcibiades' speech, virtue has 'flesh' and this flesh moves through time and space, showing humility and grace when he is not rewarded for his courage in battle (220a), enduring frost bite in winter (220b1-c1), drinking without ever getting drunk (220a6) and countless other feats that even Alcibiades does not have time to name. Thus and by its *experiential* language, Alcibiades' speech allows us to contrast the insatiable experience of erotic slavery (and tyranny) which results only in shame and humiliation, with the sheer *grace* of being totally freed from the clutches of sexual passion. Alcibiades' bodily fixation thus allows Socrates' transcendence to shine most brilliantly.

The wine poem of Alcibiades thus 'teaches' that there is no surrogate for experience when it comes to education. He tells Agathon to learn from his words, not as the proverbs say: "So Agathon, I warn you too not to be deceived in this way by this man, but to take care, learning from our sufferings, not – as the proverb runs – to learn like a fool, by suffering"(222b4-7). So it seems and in keeping with the philosophic-poetic mood of *breaking-proverbs*, Plato—in the mask of Alcibiades—incites Agathon—and you and me along with him—to learn a thing or two from poetry.

4.10 Epilogue: Philosophic Bacchanalia?

The ending to our Symposium is remarkably inchoate for a presumably 'philosophic' dialogue, or a dialogue which must soberly address the 'truth' about love: drunken intruders raid the party and people are getting thoroughly drunk. We have confirmation in this scene that our eye witness and narrator, Aristodemus, might have indeed been drunk. For he tells us that he slipped into a deep sleep and awakens at the precise moment that Socrates, sharing a bowl of wine with two poets (a comedian and a tragedian), persuades them of a paradox that no fifth-century Greek would take seriously and that Socrates himself denies in the *Republic*: that the same man who produces comedy can produce tragedy. What do we make of this 'ending'—if we may so call it? Why is the conclusion to this philosophic drinking-party centered on the paradoxical *poiêsis* of drama? More precisely, why isn't the final word of our most philosophical of men about *philosophy*?

Conclusion of Part II

Through a close analysis of the philosophic and literary registers of Plato's *Symposium*, Part II of my study has challenged the antipathy between philosophy and poetry put forth by Socrates in the *Republic*. First, and by a close examination of Socrates-Diotima's 'philosophic' paradigm on Eros, my study has problematized the notion that philosophic desire and by extension, philosophic logos, is a purely intentional, teleological, rational and methodical ascent that can lead to a permanent state of

satisfaction (immortality or self-realization), or the condition of being wise. Rather, and through a close textual analysis of Socrates-Diotima's 'philosophic' speech concerning the nature and orientation of Eros (and logos), I have illustrated the subliminal way in which the 'logic' of the ascent collapses or *unravels itself* such that the 'irreconcilable divide' that would separate bacchic-poetic experience from philosophic experience is dangerously blurred.

Taking the 'telos' of the philosopher's ascent as the point of departure for my critique, I have argued, first, that the 'revelation' of the pure beauty is *inapprehensible* 'as such' given its *non-relational* character and given the erotic or *relational* character of logos. In other words, the pure beauty sought after by the philosopher is marked by a non-representational or iconoclastic quality which breaks the limit of what language can 'copy,' reproduce, represent or 'know.' Consequently, the philosopher who 'thinks' his being in 'speech' can neither possess the pure beauty nor himself become beautiful or wise. Thus, I have argued, the very nature of philosophic desire and speech are such that they do not and cannot culminate in a condition of perpetual satisfaction, happiness or immortality, as Socrates-Diotima claim. Secondly, I have argued that desire and therefore language has an unstable or volatile character which renders it as a rather suspect vehicle for 'containing' or 'capturing' 'truth' as it exists in time and space. Due to this fluctuating character of language, any 'object' that language represents or 'imitates' cannot be rendered uniformly (as it exists in reality, in its true empirical dimensions) but only in bits and pieces. Hence, 'truth'—if it can be at all rendered—can only be represented as vicissitude and multiplicity. By this logic, my argument has challenged Socrates' critical claim in the *Republic* that poetry is a distortive mimesis

while philosophy's imitation is credible or authentic. Lastly, I have challenged the critical claim put forth by Socrates-Diotima that Eros and consequently philosophic logos can reach its 'object' by means of a purely rational, dialectical or dialogical process. Rather, I have emphasized that the poetic imagination plays a decisive role in Eros's and therefore logos's pursuit of happiness. More specifically, the erotic pursuit of happiness is, by its very essence, a *poetic leap* since the desiring subject cannot truly know an 'object' that he does not already possess and consequently, he cannot know whether or not it will give him happiness. What's more, the desiring subject is *more likely to desire the 'object' if he cannot possess it.* Thus, I have argued that philosophic desire (and speech) is no less an experience of enchantment or seduction than poetic desire and speech, since both forms of knowledge share the same 'nature,' or they are fundamentally *erotic*. That philosophy consorts with the inebriating experience of poetic activity is a 'truth' that is underscored by Socrates-Diotima's flagrant dependence on the 'making' or *poiêsis* of metaphor. Not only does the text indicate that Diotima herself is a product of a philosopher's poetic imagination, her own characterization of Eros is metaphorical and even more, a metaphor *about metaphor*. Thus and on the basis of Socrates-Diotima's own *poetic* paradigm concerning Eros, I have argued that philosophy cannot banish what lies within its own nature: poetry and philosophy share the same bloodline, that of desire.

Taking the paradox of Socrates-Diotima's paradigm as the critical lens through which to navigate the text of the *Symposium*, my study has introduced a new interpretation which unshackles the latently operative bacchic-poetic themes within it. More precisely and through a close analysis of the key episodes of the dialogue, I have illuminated the subversive way in which the coalescent themes of the erotic, bacchic and

the *poetic* frame, punctuate, pervade and 'intoxicate' the language of the text such that the 'truth' of what Plato wishes to convey concerning *eros* and its relation to language is discerned with great difficulty, if at all discerned. The *Symposium* is thus a dramatic bacchanalia which 'opens' and 'closes' on a note of erotic insatiation or seduction.

Through a close analysis of the mimetic framework of the dialogue, I have shown how, from the outset, the reader is *seduce*d by a question which was never posed but wishes to know the answer to and how, ultimately, the language of the text indicates that this 'answer' is either elusive or unknowable. Moreover, I have shown how the mimetic structure of the dialogue (Apollodorus's speech about the event of the 'banquet') enacts the failure of the metaphysical function of language (i.e., linear, temporal, mimetic) to domesticate the proliferation and vicissitude of meanings it produces; that is to say, Apollodorus's 'report' signifies much more than what he intends, so much so, that his speech only undermines the credibility of his report. More specifically, and in spite of his 'intent' to do otherwise, Apollodorus signals to his audience that his narrative is a drunken speech, a speech inebriated by erotic passion and the dissolute experience of wine. Not only is his own speech wrought with dangerous spatial, temporal and logical incongruities that undermine the 'truth' of his report, but it functions as the 'Apollinian' vehicle of a Dionysian drama which is itself 'intoxicated' by the experiences of eros, wine, and poetry and which in turn seduces the reader by its vertiginous overflow, its 'disorder' of meaning.

Most importantly, I have shown how Socrates speech via Diotima is, of all the speeches of the dialogue, the most seductive of all. Not only is the 'figure' of Socrates-Diotima (a woman dressed as a man or the reverse?) a bacchic-poetic monstrosity,

reminiscent of the hermaphroditic Cup-bearer of Abū Nuwās, but Socrates-Diotima's speech identifies Eros to the intoxicating experiences of wine and poetry. Even stranger, this wine-like or seductive 'figure' of Eros bears striking resemblance to its 'philosophic' author, leading us to question the validity of Socrates' claim in the *Republic* that poetry and philosophy—and accordingly, drunkenness and sobriety—are antithetical to one another. Indeed, one wonders, what is the limit of sobriety or what is the limit of philosophy? My reading of Socrates-Diotima's speech has shown that poetry is the threshold where philosophy forgets its own erotic vulnerability and becomes, in spite of its best effort, poetic.

Finally, I have shown how Alcibiades' 'mixed' wine praise, offered in homage to a wine-like philosopher, functions as a powerful and poignant vindication of poetic language as a legitimate form of knowledge. That is to say, poetry *can tell the truth*. My reading has emphasized how Alcibiades' speech is a quintessentially erotic speech that communicates experiential truths that would otherwise elude a linear, temporal, dialectical or teleological language. By exalting his pain and pleasure at the cost of what is good, true, or beautiful, Alcibiades' poetic speech communicates enacts a double-edged 'revelation,' one which attests to the glory of poetry and philosophy both. On the one hand, his speech vividly enacts a 'truth' that is absent from Socrates-Diotima's paradigm: that knowledge is gained by way of erotic failure, dispossession and 'possession,' rather than by way of an intentional, teleological, and metaphysical ascent. More importantly, his speech shows that poetic language is the dramatic reenactment of this erotic failure, or the failure to know or apprehend the 'object' of desire (seduction). Precisely insomuch as it imitates seduction (it exalts the volatility of desire), poetry tells a

'truth' about Eros that philosophy might fail to imitate or circumscribe, unless it chooses to turn against itself and allow erotic desire to roam free and unharnessed by any ethical motivation. On the other hand, Alcibiades' praise of Socrates offers a vivid, poignant 'revelation' of the extraordinary beauty of philosophic virtue, seen from the eyes of a lover. More specifically, the sensuous nature of his images function so as to render palpable certain ethical truths that Socrates stands for: the need to transcend slavish love for the individual. The fact that poetry is an intoxicated logos that does not 'know' the true nature of the objects it represents; and finally, the fact that poetry exalts and conflates pain and pleasure rather than differentiate between what is good and evil, harmful and beneficial. By inciting his audience to partake in the drama of erotic failure, dissolution and therefore of seduction, Alcibiades not only allows his audience to gain insight into a negative erotic truth that is merely 'brushed under the rug' by Socrates-Diotima, it allows them to experience for themselves and contrast the flesh-rending experience of Dionysian intoxication with its diametric opposite, philosophic intoxication. It is thus that Plato 'concludes' his dramatic work on a note of drunken wisdom, which is to say, no conclusion at all. It is up to the reader to decide what the 'truth' about love is and whether or not Alcibiades' gesture of crowning of his beloved Socrates is ultimately the feat of poetic drunkenness or the feat of philosophic drunkenness, and if it be one or the other, how we can tell the difference.

Conclusion

My study has introduced a new topic of comparative study which stages a colorful and potentially controversial dialogue between two of the key figures of the Eastern and

Western hemispheres and correspondingly two forms of knowledge which are thought to be mutually exclusive: Abū Nuwās, one of the finest and most widely cited poets of the Arab tradition, and Plato, the great patriarch of Western metaphysics whose philosophic legacy is palpable in the tradition of Islamic thought. The unifying force and topic of this comparative study is wine, a 'drink' and a 'figure' that, throughout the annals of literature, has brought two 'opposed' forms of knowledge— poetry and philosophy—into assembly with one another, intoxicating them with its overflowing semantic registers. Yet, strangely, the intoxicating experience of wine has been banished, along with poetry, by the tradition of metaphysics (Islamic and Greek alike), as if the desire for drunkenness and its rhetorical correlate, poetry, had no part to play in its quest for knowledge. Through a close study of the figure and function of wine in the wine song of Abū Nuwās and the erotic dialogue of the *Symposium*, my study has both constructed a dialogue between two intellectual traditions and challenged the premise for this age-old 'quarrel' (between poetry and philosophy) by illuminating the playful way in which Plato's 'philosophic' work consorts with the very forms of desire that the tradition of metaphysics considers as a moral danger.

In Part I of my study, I have shown how two of the most celebrated wine songs of Abū Nuwās exalt wine as the ultimate 'figure' for the intoxicating, seductive and ultimately liberating experience of poetry. In order to show how this is true, I have taken a new approach to reading his poetry, one which takes into account the following: first, the intoxicating nature of wine the 'drink' and the 'figure,' and second, what it 'means' to desire this experience of intoxication (i.e., the relation between the poet and wine). I have shown first how, in both poems, the primary relation of importance is the *erotic*

relation between the drinker (the poet) and his drink (wine). I have shown, more specifically, how the poet loves wine above all and how any other 'love object,' such as an enchanting youth, is but a pretext for indulging in and celebrating in its intoxicating experience. More importantly, I have illustrated how the poet desires wine insofar as it is *much more* than a 'drink' that is merely consumed. Unlike water, which slakes the thirst of the drinker, wine is a strange object of desire insofar as it cannot be 'digested' as such. More specifically, wine is an effervescent, excessive and 'self'-violating drink that, when imbibed by the drinking subject, ceases to be an 'object' that can be 'consumed' or 'digested' but in turn *consumes the one who presumably consumes it*. Precisely insomuch as it 'consumes' or 'unravels' the integrity of the desiring subject, wine exceeds its status as an 'erotic object' and instead assimilates the value of a desiring 'subject.' In this regard, wine is an erotically excessive and elusive substance which can be all at one time the 'subject,' 'object' and vehicle of desire. As such, the experience of wine can be best described as an experience of *seduction*, since, unlike water, wine does not satisfy desire, but instead *acts as desire*. In his rebuke of the theologian who rebukes him (in "Censure me Not"), the poet indicates that he desires wine precisely for its seductive or erotically transgressive potency (it is a disease and a medicine) which simultaneously debilitates him and liberates him, allowing him to experience desire in all its manifestations, unfettered by the begrudging imperatives of religious doctrine and the cares of quotidian existence. That is to say, the poet celebrates wine as a creative-destructive life-force which permits a sacred kind of 'transcendence' by way of its integrally profane violation of the 'civilized' self.

Most importantly, I have shown that the poet desires wine insofar as it is an erotically intoxicating or seductive 'figure' which also stands for the seductive experience of poetry itself. In his poetic defense of wine-drinking ("Censure Me Not"), the poet indicates wine's status as 'seductive figure' by means of a word play ('disease' and 'cure' derive from the same root), which ultimately points to wine's semantically overflowing registers. More than a figure of duality which can signify one value and its opposite (i.e., disease and cure), wine is a figure for the fluid and volatile *passage* among contrary values, a bouleversement of sense and signification which is, ultimately, nonsense. In "You with the Magic Gaze," the experience of wine takes the form of a dynamic and tumultuous rhetorical '*movement*' that 'bubbles' with a plethora of poetic images and that both separates and unites the contrary experiences of chaste erotic languor (erotic victimization) and saturnalian appetite (predatory love). More than a passage, wine is the agent of an unexplainable metamorphosis; it can transform one reality into its opposite. The poet's invocation to wine unleashes a fluid, transgressive, and ultimately 'poetic' space that is ultimately responsible for 'reversing' the poet's undesirable fate as erotic victim. Such a 'figure' cannot be contained or domesticated within the narrow confines of an image; wine is an 'iconoclastic icon.' In "Censure Me Not," the erotically vertiginous figure of the ever-circling, cross-dressing Cup-bearer, who is the 'erotic image' of wine, is precisely this kind of poetic monstrosity which breaks its own figuration; an 'image' exceeding and eluding 'sense' and 'signification,' the Cup-bearer, and therefore wine, stand for poetic seduction, or that which violates, unravels and dissolves the productive, teleological and ethical function of language.

Through a close study of the form and logic of the poems, I have also shown that the poet's love for this strange and intoxicating figure (wine) both enacts and unleashes a dialectic of *rhetorical seduction* which pervades the space of entire poem. More precisely, the physiological 'dialectic' that occurs between the drinker and the drink (the experience of being sacrificed or consumed by a 'drink which one 'consumes') is enacted *rhetorical*ly (between the poet-lover and the beloved 'figure' of wine). The poet's desire to be 'consumed' or intoxicated by wine the 'drink' and the 'figure'—his desire to be seduced—is what allows him to seduce erotically and more importantly, *poetically*. Essentially, the poet's love for this excessive and inapprehensible 'figure' of wine is *what makes him a poet.* This is clearly indicated in the opening line of "Censure Me Not," where the poet's poetic drunken subversion of the sober logic of Islamic decree *is coincident* with his ignoble imperative that the theologian give him more wine to drink. In "You with the Magic Gaze," this 'dialectic of seduction' is multi-layered and far more complex, so much so that the entire poem is the malleable and volatile site of an unstoppable seduction game, a erotic-bacchic-poetic 'drama' into which the poet, his interlocutor, and finally, his readers are subsumed as players and participants. Wine the 'poetic figure' is the excessive-elusive, present-absent, creative-destructive impetus of an ever-metamorphosing rhetorical seduction, one in which the poet is at one time a victim and a seducer and in which the 'target' of the seduction includes the poet, his erotic love interest, and his readers.

Thus and through my reading of the erotic-bacchic imagery and 'rationale' of Abū Nuwās's wine songs, I have demonstrated that wine is the quintessentially poetic figure which stands for the seductive, dissolute and ultimately *immoral* experience of poetry.

Abū Nuwās's celebration of wine is thus a celebration of poetry's power to liberate the self (desire) from the rigid imperatives of ethical codes and doctrines. Just as wine the 'drink' implies an experience of self-undoing, one which dangerously collapses the ontological wall that separates the 'self' from the 'other,' the 'subject' from his 'object' and which therefore loosens desire from its metaphysical or ethical stronghold, poetic language too implies a sacrificing and unraveling of the metaphysical function of language. In "Censure Me Not," the poet's claim that 'prohibiting (desire) tempts (breeds more desire)' is a striking example of how intoxicated language of poetry 'unravels' the positivist logic of theological doctrine in such a way as to expose the false presupposition that language is somehow external to desire (i.e., it is 'metaphysical') or that it can 'know' or domesticate desire without participating in it. By indicating that the contrary significations of 'cure' and 'disease' derive from the same root letters, the poet points to the erotically excessive and therefore seductive character of language: it *means more* than its speaker or author 'intends; which is to say, language is not, as Socrates suggests in the *Republic*, faithfully mimetic, it is not an objective vehicle that can encapsulate or subsume experience or 'truth.' The truth is much 'bigger' than any text; language is deferential to 'truth' but cannot 'sum up' reality. The poet affirms this notion when he tells the sanctimonious theologian that although he's 'memorized' one form of knowledge, yet a *multiplicity* of 'truths' escape him. By this logic, the poet powerfully indicates that religious and/or philosophic knowledge is no more than a game of imitation, one that is premised upon a counterfeit assumption about language: that it is fundamentally transparent, temporal or linear, and that it can therefore 'imitate' the objects it 'sees' as it exists in reality, as if somehow language were an 'objective' lens

through which an exterior observer can screen reality rather than a subjective, erotic vehicle of the individual's unique perceptions. The 'multiplicity' which 'eludes' the theologian specifically hints at the notion that God is not greater than sin and that perhaps the theologian is the greater sinner (he is blasphemous, hubristic) in claiming that the poet does not merit the grace of the divine. At the same time, this 'multiplicity' that' eludes' also implies that there are 'truths' or perhaps experiences that cannot be transcribed, circumscribed, or gleaned by a rational, discursive process. The wisdom of the vine thus 'teaches' that there are some things which break apprehension and that poetry is the iconoclastic 'sign' for this inward collapse.

In Part II of my study, I reviewed the 'other side' of the infamous quarrel between poetic knowledge and philosophic knowledge by turning to the work of Plato, namely, the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. I have shown how, in the *Republic*, Socrates banishes tragic poets and their art from his polis on similar grounds for which Abū Nuwās praises and defends it: poetry is a morally dissolute 'game' which seduces people by exalting the suffering and delight of erotic experience without paying any heed to whether or not its representations are 'true' or morally edifying. Unlike the language of philosophy which studies the essence and meaning of existence such that it knows the true nature of the 'objects' of which it speaks, poetry is a kind of trickery which distorts the 'truth' by copying or representing it at third-hand. In my study, I have illustrated how Socrates' description of poetry clearly indicates that it is an intoxicated logos, a language that is seduced, possessed and disoriented by erotic desire in all its manifestations and which, for this reason, has the power to seduce, tyrannize and corrupt the souls of those who participate in it. Poetry is thus a language that stands for delinquency, self-

unraveling, dispossession, dissolution; rather than satisfying the desire for knowledge, it only affirms and perpetuates the pain and pleasure of erotic experience. For this reason, Socrates warns, poetry is a dangerous form of desire which even 'the best of us' cannot escape except by practicing (falling in love with) philosophy.

In order to better understand how philosophic language is erotic and more importantly, an erotic vehicle that permits us to transcend the irrational, insatiable and ultimately self-debilitating appetite for tyranny, I proceeded to a careful examination of Socrates-Diotima's paradigm of philosophic *eros* in the *Symposium*, a 'vision' that modern scholars have uprooted from the playfully bacchic-erotic context of the dialogue and 'confined' to a doctrinal interpretation that wrongly identifies Diotima to Socrates and worse, Socrates to Plato. Through my discussion of Socrates-Diotima's paradigm, I have problematized the notion that philosophic desire (and therefore language) is a purely intentional, teleological, rational and methodical ascent that can lead to a permanent state of satisfaction (immortality or self-realization), or the condition of being wise. On the basis of the *poetic* paradigm which Socrates-Diotima introduce in order to better illustrate the true nature of desire and language, I have shown how Socrates-Diotima define Eros, and therefore the activity of philosophic language, in a way that unravels, even collapses their upward-oriented paradigm. I have shown how, in the first place, the 'telos' of philosophic language (the revelation of the pure virtue) has an excessive, negative and therefore non-representational character or it is iconoclastic; hence, the philosopher cannot possible 'apprehend' such an experience in language, for it is bound to elude him. Moreover and insomuch as it is the vehicle of a desiring subject whose very being is punctuated and thwarted by the imperative of flux, language has an unstable or volatile

character which renders it a suspect vehicle for 'containing' or 'capturing' the truth. Thus, I have shown that philosophic logos is not intrinsically 'above' the experience of loss and failure or *seduction*, since logos is *by definition* erotic and Eros is subject to ongoing flux, failure and disenchantment. On the basis of this argument, philosophic language, and by extension the philosopher who speaks, are not invulnerable to the subjective pleasure and pain that poetic and drunken experience exalt. Lastly, I have shown how philosophic language is an erotic vehicle that aims towards a 'telos' (the pure image of virtue) which it does not and *cannot* 'know' to exist on scientific grounds; essentially, the unknowable character of the 'objects' we desire is largely 'surmounted' by the 'ascending' activity of the lover-philosopher' s imagination. That Socrates speaks from the lips of mythic or fictional character who is herself a 'mythologue' is a powerful indicator that philosophic logos is neither immune to nor transcendent of the erotically inebriated and inebriating imagination of poetic activity. That is to say, philosophy participates in poetic seduction.

Through a new literary reading of narrative structure and key episodes of the *Symposium*, I have argued that the language of philosophy (the philosophic dialogue proper) is like wine in that it exceeds the confines of a purely philosophic 'vision.' Situated within the context of a Dionysian festivity, the dialogue is an erotic drama which from the very outset, seduces or elicits our illicit participation. The very structure of the dialogue—Apollodorus's speech—takes the form of a rather digressive 'answer' to a question that is never posed and that is addressed to a silent interlocutor whom we never meet, but who may very well include you and me. Hence, and from the outset, the reader is *seduce*d by a question he does not 'know' but wishes to know the answer to and which,

ultimately, he can never be sure is 'knowable' in the first place. Moreover, the 'answer' we are given (in the form of the dialogue itself) can never truly satisfy us, since we never knew the question in the first place. More importantly, the mimetic structure of the dialogue enacts the subversive way in which metaphysical desire—its desire to capture and relay the 'truth' as it exists empirically—is far exceeded by the semantic overflow of the language it presumes to domesticate. While Apollodorus desires and intends to faithfully 'represent' the event of the banquet just as it occurred, his speech betrays the impossibility of such an endeavor, as it overflows with meanings and senses that further indicate the intoxicating character of desire, and therefore of the intoxicated quality of speech. It is the erotic obsession with Socrates that drives and propels the speech both of Apollodorus and his already tipsy source, Aristodemus. And while the narrative frame comprises an effort to convey 'truth' in a linear, methodical and teleological form, it is wrought with a plethora of spatial and temporal incongruities that together undermine its 'truth.' Perhaps the greatest paradox of the dialogue is the fact that the 'mimetic' speech of Apollodorus operates as the 'Apollinian' vehicle of Dionysian pandemonium, a drinking-party-turned-bacchanalia which overflows with a myriad of desires that never culminate in 'satisfaction': Agathon cannot attain wisdom by merely reclining beside the wisest man in Athens; Aristophanes cannot give his speech in order due to an unfortunate bout of hiccups caused by too much wine; the medical doctor Erixymachus thinks his speech can encompass the truth when in fact, he turns to the wisdom of a hiccupping poet in order to fill its missing parts; Erixymachus' desire to maintain a climate of order and sobriety is rent asunder by Alcibiades's Dionysian imperative to get soaked; Alcibiades'

desire to erotically possess the erotically unattainable Socrates leads him to desire even more.

Yet through my study of the dialogue I have shown that, of all these insatiable desires, it is the reader's desire to know the 'truth' about erotic love and its relation to philosophy that is the least satisfied of all. Not only is Socrates' 'philosophic' speech about philosophy *intoxicated* by the presence of myth (Diotima), it reveals Eros to be as intoxicating as he is sober, as poetic as he is philosophical, as hubristic as he is judicious; even more disturbingly, it reveals this strange and hybrid figure to be in his own likeness, forcing us to question whether or not anything Socrates says can be true and if it is, what this says about philosophy. If Socrates is like wine (as his language reveals), what separates philosophy from poetry? Does Socrates signify the point at which philosophy turns on itself, and becomes poetic? What is the limit of sobriety? Can insobriety lead to knowledge or truth?

In 'answer' to these questions, Plato puts truth in the lips of a man who *knows* what it feels like to fail at possessing the 'object' of desire (Socrates), and who, for having been seduced and debilitated, can speak as only a drunk or a poet can (or both). Alcibiades' wine song reveals that he is just as confused as the reader is, and that we have a right to feel duped, betrayed or simply mocked by this strange man who drinks but never gets drunk and who invites people to parties where they are uninvited only to abandon them at the doorway without the benefit of an excuse. Alcibiades' speech about Socrates is a wine song that tells 'truth' about a man who has wine-like qualities. By inviting us to participate in the tragic highs and comic lows of his erotic suffering at the hands of a man he failed to seduce (an unknowable 'telos'), Alcibiades, like a true wine

poet, exalts the pain and pleasure of erotic desire, which he signifies as a failure of knowledge or *seduction.* The wisdom of the vine, and accordingly, that of poetry, thus vividly communicates a truth that is missing from Socrates-Diotima's philosophic speech: that the desire to know another is never complete or fulfilled, that flesh-biting pain and titillating pleasure are an integral part of erotic experience, and that ultimately, we *know by failure (collapse)*, not only by ascent. Through Alcibiades we learn that while poetry does in fact indulge in erotic experience at the cost of what is 'good' (in this case, the virtue sought after by Socrates), it communicates experiential truths that cannot be 'captured' by a linear, temporal or dialectical speech; the experiences of ecstasy, expropriation, dispossession and humiliation are 'erotic failures' that can only be 'lived' and enacted by the *failure of mimesis*, or by poetic imagination. At the same time that Alcibiades' praise of Socrates enacts a 'revelation' of erotic seduction, it also 'reveals' the extraordinary beauty of philosophic virtue in the unique form of Socrates. Through Alcibiades, we have the living, breathing incarnation, the very 'flesh,' of virtue and what it means to approximate the wisdom of the gods.

Hence and ironically, Alcibiades' speech does confirm certain ethical truths that Socrates stands for: the need to transcend slavish love for the individual; the fact that poetry is like drunkenness in that it does not 'know' the true nature of the objects it represents; the fact that it exalts and conflates pain and pleasure rather than differentiate between what is good and evil, harmful and beneficial. Nevertheless, Alcibiades' speech is powerful indicator that Plato views poetry (as a kind of drunken logos) as a legitimate form of knowledge, that it can reveal 'truth.' Alcibiades makes clear himself that he would not be so candid about his shameful failure at the hands of Socrates were it not for

the influence of wine. By inciting his audience to experience (by way of pathos and catharsis) what it means to desire an unattainable object, what it means to fail, what it means to seduce and be seduced, Alcibiades not only allows us to gain insight into a negative erotic truth that is merely glossed over by Socrates-Diotima, it offers a palpable 'revelation' of what erotic corruption looks like and what philosophic virtue looks like, provided the latter can be attained. Plato thus 'concludes' his dramatic work on a note of drunken wisdom, which is to say, dissolution (no conclusion at all): a drunken man dressed as Dionysus offers up a wine song in praise of a philosopher whom he cannot truly 'known' but believes to be extraordinary—perhaps because he cannot know him, or perhaps because Socrates is just as poetic, seductive and in a sense, unknowable, as the poetry by which he is praised.

Through this comparative study, I have shown that Plato's *Symposium* is more than just a philosophic work; it is complex, dramatic and for this reason 'seductive' work that consorts with the dissolute desires that the medieval wine poet Abū Nuwās celebrates as the only kind of desire worth having: wine and poetry. In consorting with these dangerous, irrational desires, Plato calls upon his reader to reevaluate the nature of philosophic discourse and necessarily, its troubled relation to poetry. This comparative analysis has also illuminated a new way of approaching the poetry of Abū Nuwās, one which carefully examines the masterful and conscientious manner in which a poet 'thinks' about the craft of rhetoric. Just as Plato is part-philosopher, part-tragedian, Abū Nuwās may also regarded as a poet-sage, a subversive thinker or Dionysian philosopher. My study thus raises the following critical questions: Is poetry a form of knowledge that can convey 'truth'? Can it, moreover, play a formative role in moral education, or is it

strictly immoral? Is philosophy uniquely objective and/or ethical? Can there be a hybrid form of knowledge that is simultaneously philosophical and poetic?

My study thus sets the ground for various forms of comparative research. A future avenue of research, therefore, might consider a broadened and historiographical study of the anti-philosophic strains of Abū Nuwās's poetic corpus, one which situates his work within the intellectually vibrant and dynamic climate of his era. Another avenue of research might include an intertextual study of the figure and function of wine in the Islamic Sufi tradition, a tradition which is largely indebted to the legacy both of Abū Nuwās and Plato; such a study would explore the philosophic, poetic and mystic resonances of the figure of 'wine' by examining its hedonistic precursors (the licentious wine praise) as well as the neo-Platonic discourse which informs it.

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