

## PLUTARCH'S *AMATORIUS*: A COMMENTARY ON PLATO'S THEORIES OF LOVE?

Plutarch's *Amatorius*, a Platonizing dialogue with an unusual theme (but with unfortunately significant gaps in its middle), is usually dated to the near the end of its author's life, that is to shortly before A.D. 120.<sup>1</sup> At the level of quasi-historical narration it is an account by Plutarch's son, Autobulus, of some rather unusual events in the Boeotian town of Thespieae that occurred,<sup>2</sup> it is said, when the newly married Plutarch and his young bride were visiting the town so that she could make prayers and sacrifices (not least in view of quarrels between the two sets of parents) at the festival of Eros, god of erotic desire. These unusual events centred round the love (*ἔρως*) and marriage-proposal of a 'quite good looking', rich, well-born, and respectable (*ἀνευ ψόγου*, 749D: that note is sounded repeatedly<sup>3</sup>) thirty-year-old widow, Ismenodora, for an approximately eighteen-year-old ephebe whom she eventually 'kidnapped' and married.

At another level the *Amatorius* is a debate, firstly, on the comparative merit of *ἔρως* for boys and *ἔρως* for women,<sup>4</sup> especially *ἔρως* of a husband for his wife; secondly on

<sup>1</sup> For chronology, see especially C. P. Jones, 'Towards a chronology of Plutarch's works', *JRS* 56 (1966), 61–74.

<sup>2</sup> For the significance of Thespieae, and in particular of its connections with Isis (to whom I shall return), see F. E. Brenk, 'The Boiotia of Plutarch's *Erotikos*. Beyond the shadow of Athens', in A. C. Cristopoulou (ed.), *Annual of the Society of Boeotian Studies*, (Athens, 1995), 1109–17 = *Relighting the Souls* (Stuttgart, 1998), 50–8.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *εὐράκτως* (749D), *κοσμίως* (753B, cf. 755B), *σώφρων* (753B). From the start Ismenodora thinks of marriage, not of an 'ignoble' affair (749D). But are we already looking forward to expanding and correcting the Epicurean version of the distinction between 'sane' and 'crazed' lovers? See further below on 'Act Two'.

<sup>4</sup> After Plutarch the topic occurs (with or without irony, a tool more appropriate to the novelists than to the philosophical Plutarch) quite frequently: in Favorinus, Maximus of Tyre (*Discourses* 24, 25), Ps.-Lucian, *Erotes* 36 (perhaps early fourth century A.D.) and in novels (see Achilles Tatius, 2.35ff.). See generally D. Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry* (Princeton, 1994) who claims (13, cf. 29, n. 16) that in contradistinction to the Greek novelistic tradition 'not even those texts in which *ἔρως* is valorized as the basis of the conjugal bond, notably Plutarch's dialogue on love called *Erotikos* . . . succeed in celebrating a fully symmetrical conception of passionate love'. Unfortunately in coming to grips with this Konstan has virtually no comment on the strictly philosophical tradition. Cf. R. L. Hunter, *A Study of Daphnis and Chloe* (Cambridge, 1983), 71, 121.

A comparative lack of attention to philosophy, as distinct from the real or imagined morals of philosophers, also marks S. Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1995), 144–61. Foucault himself, in his *Histoire de la sexualité III. Le souci de soi* (Paris, 1984), esp. 222–42, regards the *Amatorius* as a turning point in the development of a modern (unified) concept of sexual desire both for women and for boys, but without the 'dualistic' distinctions both between their respective institutions and between their 'higher' and 'lower' manifestations; but with this proper emphasis on originality goes insufficient attention to Plutarch's position as a Platonist (commentator).

Our subject (boys against girls) should be distinguished from the not-unrelated commonplace (in some quarters) by Plutarch's time that in marriage there should be a certain equality between the partners: so Aeschines of Sphettus, Musonius Rufus, etc.; for details see F. E. Brenk, 'All for love: the rhetoric of exaggeration in Plutarch's *Erotikos*', in L. van der Stockt (ed.), *Rhetorical Theory and Praxis in Plutarch* (Louvain, 2000), 50, n. 15. Plutarch's real originality, as we shall see, lies in his combination of the older (and often Stoic) concern with equality in certain aspects of marriage with the peculiarly Platonic understanding of Eros as the way to the Good and the Beautiful.

the more striking (and socially disruptive) question of whether a man should marry a female ἐραστής, that is, a woman older, richer, more experienced, socially and perhaps intellectually superior—not to say more determined—than he is; thirdly on whether σώφρων women (if they form an homogeneous group), as distinct from ἐταῖραι and others, should themselves have ἔρως for their husbands; and finally—most surprisingly of all—on the place of married (heterosexual) sexuality in the pursuit of (Platonic) Beauty. As such, it is a most unusual document, shedding light not only on ancient social mores, but very specifically on how Plutarch blended and interpreted Plato's various accounts of ἔρως—whether to be found in whole dialogues or in more limited texts. Current discussions of the dialogue suggest that it has more than antiquarian interest.<sup>5</sup>

So much for the barest bones of the *Amatorius*. But could it really be a *commentary* on Plato's theories of love? Russell clearly did not think so: 'Here is Plutarch', he wrote, 'pleading an anti-Platonic, almost anti-philosophical cause.'<sup>6</sup> Let me defend my title first by saying that I am thinking about Platonic theories (plural). Plato may offer us variants on the theme of ἔρως, but this is not primarily a paper about Plato, and Plutarch certainly seems to assume, as we should expect of a writer of his day, that Plato has only one (true) theory of love, so that if the *Amatorius* is a commentary—of course it is not a line-by-line commentary—it is a commentary on what Plutarch takes to be a more or less single and systematic Platonic thesis. In securing that appearance of singularity, Plutarch will amalgamate not only the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* (as well as parts of the *Republic*), but material from other dialogues; in particular—if he is to compare the love of boys with the love of women—we should expect reference to those sections of the *Laws* about boy-loving recently subjected to the misguided attentions of Nussbaum.<sup>7</sup>

If Plutarch's *Amatorius* is somehow a commentary on Plato's theories of love, we might expect it to be primarily a commentary on the *Symposium*, and above all on the ascent passage in Diotima's speech, for we (and others) often assume the *Symposium* to be the basic 'Platonic' text on ἔρως. And perhaps such assumptions are not only ours: as Porphyry said of Plotinus, whose first essay (1.6) *On Beauty* he had in mind: 'That godlike man raised himself, according to the ways Plato teaches in the *Symposium*, to the first transcendent god.' But in the *Amatorius* Plutarch makes only limited direct allusion to Diotima's speech, though there are frequent echoes of the *Symposium* and we eventually reach an interesting variant on Plato's ascent to the intelligible world through beauty (764–6). In the *Amatorius*, however, the seminal Platonic dialogue—as normally elsewhere in Greek Neoplatonism—is the *Phaedrus*:<sup>8</sup> almost at its opening

<sup>5</sup> Such interest has been especially tapped and stimulated by Foucault and Goldhill (n. 4).

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Russell, *Plutarch* (London, 1973), 92.

<sup>7</sup> For further comment, see J. M. Rist, 'Plato and Professor Nussbaum on acts "Contrary to nature"', in M. Joyal (ed.), *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition: Essays Presented to John Whittaker* (Aldershot, 1997), 65–79.

<sup>8</sup> The reasons for this are complex and can only be surmised: that the *Phaedrus*, unlike the *Symposium*, offers a tripartite soul—and thus the possibility (foreshadowed in *Republic* 9 and 10) of enriching Diotima's tendency towards a purely 'intellectual creativity' (E. Asmis, 'Plato on poetic creativity', in R. Kraut [ed.], *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* [Cambridge, 1992], 360); that the phenomenology of a 'counter-desire', for pleasure—which is an 'accident' of the good—rather than for the good itself, is given more scope; that the *Phaedrus* suggests (250B) that physical beauty is not a poor but a rather clear image of real Beauty: it shines most clearly through the clearest of our senses; that Plato moves towards a condemnation of homosexual acts; perhaps even that recollection *through madness* is of present Forms rather than of a past condition. (Note the present journeys of the gods to the *ὑπερουράνιος τόπος*.)

we find an ambiguously dismissive reference to Plato's famous description of the Ilissus (749A)—as well as an advance billing of the assimilation of the boy-lovers of the *Amatorius* (749F) to the egotistical lovers of the *Phaedrus* (240A), and after the refutation of Pemptides we reach the Plain of Truth (765A) led, we are told in a striking piece of Platonizing homogenization, by Eros, now given Egyptian associations and compared to the Sun of the *Republic* (764D). To which we shall return.

Plutarch's dialogue is in part a contribution to an ongoing debate, largely inaugurated by the *Phaedrus* and especially of concern to Epicureans, about the nature of 'real' love (750C) and the proper 'philosophical' attitude towards it. The *Amatorius*, that is, is less concerned with what we are *ultimately* in love with—though, as I have noted, after clearing away hedonist and sceptical objections, Plutarch reaches that primary theme of the *Symposium*—but with whether real love should be immediately directed towards boys or virgins and women, with whether love is an obsession, with who can properly be said to be in love, and with the proper emotional behaviour in that condition. The *Amatorius*, then, offers a 'Platonic' evaluation of human experiences available to most of us, not just to the self-conscious followers of the Diotima of the *Symposium* or to the philosophical lovers and kings of the *Republic*.

The *Amatorius* is a dialogue concerned with the interrelations between two themes, even two institutions: (Platonic) *ἔρως* and marriage; but such a description conceals the problem of whether Plutarch is trying to improve on Plato rather than write a moral and spiritual 'commentary' on Platonic texts. For perhaps to treat of *ἔρως* and women would be a Platonic possibility—there were women in the Academy and there is, after all, Diotima—but to relate *ἔρως* and marriage may seem more difficult: except perhaps in the case of the rather unusual communal 'marriages' recommended for the guardians of the *Republic*. For Socrates, after discussing the training of the female guardian-cadets, remarks that the cadets in general 'because of their being all mixed up together both in their naked athletics and in the rest of their regular life, will be led by natural necessity—don't you think?—towards intercourse with one another'. To which Glaucon's reply is that 'the necessity will be that of *ἔρως*, not of mathematical deduction, and most people find *ἔρως* the more compelling' (5.458CD).

Yet that too might be grist to Plutarch's mill, in that it shows that guardian women, like the Alcestis of the *Symposium* who 'excelled in friendship through *ἔρως*' and thus gets slipped into Phaedrus' speech in favour of pederasty (179BC), are erotic not only philosophically but also physically—insofar as the two can be separated. This will look less peripheral to Plutarch's concerns if we consider the philosophical and sub-philosophical views about *ἔρως*, women, and marriage that he wants to combat, occasionally even to deconstruct, in the *Amatorius*.

Interwoven with the 'storia di amore' of the thirty-year-old widow and the eighteen-year-old youth, at least six 'Platonic' questions can be discerned: What is the relationship between *ἔρως* and friendship? What is the relationship between *ἔρως* and philosophy—and, more broadly, virtue? What is the relationship between *ἔρως* and marriage? What is the relationship between *ἔρως* and genital acts? What is the relationship between marriage and friendship? Can women be divided into two necessary but unattractive classes: 'nice girls' and whores? Most of these questions—not the last explicitly, though it lurks beneath the sociological surface and is essential both for Plutarch's philosophical claims and for the literary form of the *Amatorius*—had been the concern of Plato himself, but a 'casual' reader of his dialogues might

suppose him to have offered alternative or puzzling responses. That suggests an argument in favour of seeing Plutarch as a commentator, an argument such as would be offered, at least implicitly, by such an Aristotelian 'commentator' as Simplicius: 'This doctrine which I am proposing is true; Aristotle is a good philosopher; therefore Aristotle held this doctrine, or at least would have held it if he had lived long enough to recognize the logical ramifications of what he had already said.' But a commentator of this sort not merely manipulates his material; he is himself manipulated by it.

Let us reframe our questions as they might have presented themselves to Plutarch: What is the relationship between the *φιλία* of the *Lysis* and the *ἔρως* of the *Symposium*? Is Socrates a *friend* of Alcibiades? Why does the philosopher, according to both Diotima and Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, have to be an *ἐρωτικός*? But why does Socrates decline a genital relationship as proffered by Alcibiades? Why do Socratic interlocutors claim, with or without self-indulgence, that such relationships between men and boys promote virtue, while between men and women they do not? What does Plato mean to suggest in the *Laws* when he not only condemns homosexual acts (though not affections) as 'contrary to nature', but at least under the thin disguise of the Athenian Stranger proposes the following:

1. that males should abstain from all relations with males and with women whom they would not wish (or at least not accept) to make pregnant (838E, 839A);
2. that men and women should abstain from sexual acts except with their legally wedded spouses (841D) and that after union they should 'live in a way that is holy and just, abiding constantly by their first contracts of *φιλία*' (840E);
3. that such restraint would make men close and friendly (*οἰκείους καὶ φίλους*) with their own wives/women (839A)?<sup>9</sup>

These three proposals follow an attempt, however casual, to relate *φιλία* to *ἔρως* (837Aff.): there are two kinds of *φιλία*, we read, that between equals or similars with reference to virtue, and that which arises between the rich and those who are in need. When either of these forms of friendship becomes intense (*σφοδρόν*) we call it *ἔρως*.

Like modern commentators, whether Platonist or not, ancient Platonists are concerned with the 'correct' reading of Plato. But the ancient attitude is apparently different in one important respect: Plato is in agreement, they think, both with himself and with themselves. Tarrant, in an imaginative and helpful study of Thrasyllus (Pythagorean, astrologer to the Emperor Tiberius, editor of Plato's text and perhaps—even probably—author of 'Plato's' influential *Second Letter*), described this well:<sup>10</sup>

Thrasyllus' judgment on this [the authenticity of Platonic texts] was not the impartial judgment of an Alexandrian scholar, but the inevitably coloured judgment of a philosopher with his own convictions. . . . The reading order was intimately connected with Thrasyllus' own view of Platonic philosophy.

We should expect, and we find, comparable attitudes in Plutarch. Since Aristotle says rather little about *ἔρως*,<sup>11</sup> though a great deal about *φιλία*, he is hardly a player in

<sup>9</sup> I made some preliminary comment on Plutarch's concern with all this in *Eros and Psyche* (Toronto, 1964), 102.

<sup>10</sup> H. Tarrant, *Thrasyllan Platonism* (Ithaca, 1993), 178, 179.

<sup>11</sup> But he wrote an *Erotikos*, and note *E.E.* 1245A25ff. *ἔρως* has some resemblance to friendship. The lover desires to share the life, but not as is most proper, only through the senses (*κατ' αἰσθησιν*).

the *Amatorius*, though his distinction between three types of friendship (for virtue, for utility, and for pleasure) is part of the wider intellectual air that Plutarch's characters breathe. But no ancient commentator on Plato's 'view' of *ἔρως* and related matters—especially one as learned as Plutarch—could entirely avoid treating of the views of both the Stoics—they could be largely appropriated—and the Epicureans who must be repudiated.<sup>12</sup> Plutarch would feel obliged to bring the Platonic position up to date, to show how other schools should either be rejected—if unassimilable with Plato's view—or incorporated, even confirmed, if they offer ideas not only compatible with what Plato said—even if what he rarely said—but which could be useful for an explanation of what he really meant, or would have meant if pressed. Invariably Epicureans fall into the class of those whose anti-Platonism (not least about *ἔρως*) must be rejected, while the Stoics, at least in ethics, can be more readily appropriated in the service of Platonism. And so it turns out in Plutarch's *Amatorius*, though in the case of the Stoics it should be added that their own material, now reappropriated into Platonism, may itself at times have been an appropriation of Platonism. But I shall largely, though not entirely, leave the Stoics aside as peripheral to the progress of the dialogue itself, despite the fact that Antipater of Tarsus wrote an influential treatise *On Marriage* and that Plutarch certainly uses Stoic sources—perhaps including Musonius or Epictetus—not least about marital union (e.g. at 767A).

Ismenodora's desire for Bacchon in marriage has confused its target, and he consults with an older relative, Anthemion, who thinks there would be upward-mobility in the match, and Pisas, the most 'serious', 'buttoned up' of his lovers (749F), who is opposed to it, in part for less than disinterested reasons. They take their disagreements to Plutarch and a group of his friends, who have assembled at the shrine of the Muses, on Mount Helicon, outside Thespieae, hoping to come to a resolution. Among these friends are a more cold-blooded pederast, Protogenes of Tarsus,<sup>13</sup> who acts as advocate for Pisas, and Daphnaeus—a fellow Thespian in love and likely to succeed as bridegroom with the local beauty Lysandra—who urges Bacchon to go with Ismenodora. Plutarch himself also becomes involved in the debate, largely supporting Daphnaeus, not least (as a young husband and man of religion) feeling himself obliged to repudiate the anti-marriage tirades of Protogenes and Pisas. This first part of the dialogue is thus concerned first to reject homosexual attacks on women and love for women in general, then on marriage in particular, and finally, more unusually, to defend, at least to a degree and in the context of marriage or intended marriage, the expression of female sexual desire. Apart from various hints, however, about 'philosophical' attitudes on these matters, there is as yet no strictly philosophical debate; in a sense Plutarch is Platonic in allowing his more basic and philosophical concerns only gradually to be revealed.

In what we might call Act Two of the dialogue,<sup>14</sup> two further speakers, Pemptides of

<sup>12</sup> Plutarch's anti-Epicureanism is of course well-known; for a recent survey (though with little mention of the *Amatorius*), see J. P. Hershbell, 'Plutarch and Epicureanism', *ANRW* 2.36.5 (Berlin, New York, 1992), 3353–83. See also A. Barigazzi, 'Il tema dell'amore: Plutarco contro Epicuro', in G. Gallo (ed.), *Temi e aspetti dello stoicismo e dell'epicureismo in Plutarco (Quaderni del Giornale Filologico Ferrarese 9)* (Ferrara, 1988), 89–108.

<sup>13</sup> He appears elsewhere in the *Moralia*, and in the bad company of Thespesius of Soli takes a prominent role in the *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* (563B).

<sup>14</sup> The dramatic aspects of the *Amatorius*—including messengers' speeches, history 'as' myth, the 'Menandrian' ending and much Euripidean content—have often been noticed (see L. Goessler, *Plutarch's Gedanken über die Ehe* [Zurich, 1962], 27; F. E. Brenk, 'Plutarch's *Erotikos*:

Thebes and Zeuxippus of Sparta, carry the hostility to ἔρως and to marriage to a more seriously philosophical level, being each, in varying degrees, eager to defend the anti-erotic theories of Epicurus. But, as we shall see, the move to theoretical hedonism is not entirely unprepared, for it seems to be the intent of Plutarch in the first act, especially through Daphnaeus, to expose the 'virtuous' pederasty of Pisas, and particularly of Protogenes, as a pretext (752A) for nothing less than the unabashed hedonism (varied only by their more restricted personal tastes) which had been advocated by Aristippus, perhaps a precursor of Epicurus and certainly a most unorthodox follower of Socrates, whose name is brought into the debate—via a favourable reference—by Protogenes himself.

Before the final act of the drama, however, in which the intended marriage of Ismenodora and Bacchon is formally announced, Plutarch himself, in the course of a long discourse refuting the Epicureans, offers the highly controversial thesis (at least for his own times) that heterosexuality as played out in marriage forms part of a world in which the Platonic ascent to Beauty can (eventually) be achieved, in this, of course, beating the homosexuals at their own game, for, he thinks, we can see in a marriage relationship a genuine aid to that virtue and philosophy to which the pederasts alleged their own activities are ordained. And all this, in Plutarch's opinion, is what we get if we assemble and blend Plato's writings on ἔρως, and develop their implications.

In both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* Plato has problematized ἔρως, not least because at least one of the early speeches in both dialogues can safely be described as a philosophical rationalization of pederastic acts,<sup>15</sup> the morality of which might be challenged both within then-current assumptions and in more philosophical debate. Turning to Plutarch and, for the moment, synthesizing the philo-pederastic tactics of Pisas and his advocate Protogenes, we find that the defence of boy-love has a positive and a negative side: the positive side is the claim that boy-lovers are interested in the soul rather than the body, that in such loves friendship between the parties leads to virtue and the philosophical life, and that it flourishes in the free and manly open-air world of the gymnasium, the wrestling school, and the schools of philosophy (751BE, cf. 757E); the negative side—introduced as a new line of attack by Pisas (752C)—is that 'decent' (σώφρων) women should have nothing to do with erotic desire, either with loving or with thus being loved, and that men who are interested in erotic relations with women are only interested in their bodies—what else is there to be concerned with?—and with a feminizing physical pleasure for its own sake, and that they must pursue such pleasures—since decent women keep clear of them—in backdoor intrigues or in brothels: the dark world, according to Pisas, of drugs, magic, and 'slappers' who shave their pubic hair (752C). Reversing the line taken by Plato in the *Laws*, Protogenes (ironically mocked by Daphnaeus, citing the satirist

the drag down pulled up', in M. Marcovitch et al. [edd.], *Plutarch, ICS* 13.2 [1988], 457); indeed Plutarch himself alludes to them (749A), and an earlier version of this essay presented the dialogue as a play (complete with *dramatis personae*, etc.). But Plutarch also remarks elsewhere that it was only a recent and vulgar Roman habit to have Plato's dialogues recited (*Quaest. Conviv.* 7.8.1–2 [711BD]). The more dramatic action of Plutarch's dialogue has often been supposed to reflect, *inter alia*, the *Symposium* of Xenophon (the final scene of which has a maritally erotic content, but very different from that of Plutarch: the voice of the soldier rather than that of the priest).

<sup>15</sup> Note how by a linguistic echo in 753B (παυσαμένον δὲ τοῦ πρωτογενοῦς) Plutarch assimilates Protogenes to the pederast Pausanias of the *Symposium* (185C): παυσανίου δὲ παυσαμένου.

Archilochus, as having travelled, though more rapidly—a bit like Laius the originator of pederastic love and the first pederastic rapist [750B, cf. *Laws* 836B]—from Cilicia to Athens ‘to look over the beautiful young men and hang out with them’) had already argued that any physical love of men for women is a ‘feminized’ and bastard version of the higher homosexual experience (750F).

According to Protogenes, intercourse between the sexes, if more than a search for pleasure and ‘satisfaction’, finds its only, if regrettable, justification in the need to keep the human race going: that is why the legislators get pompous about it and laud it to *hoi polloi*; it is suitable for the masses, satisfies their ‘natural need for pleasure’ (750D), and may take on considerable emotional intensity (*σφοδρότης*), but this is not *ἔρως* (750D), except perhaps in some extended and parasitic sense (750F).<sup>16</sup> It is simply sex (‘the works of Aphrodite’), the being genitally locked-together, as Pisiās later phrases it in what may be another trailer for the ‘Epicurean’ Act Two (752B),<sup>17</sup> like dogs. Most important of all, however, it has nothing to do with friendship. Men have no more love for women than bees have for honey or cooks have fine feelings for the calves or fowls they ‘fatten in the dark’ (750C). As the philosopher Aristippus had put it, ‘I don’t think Lais loves me any more than does my wine or fish, but I’m happy to enjoy them all’ (750D). But the appeal by self-styled lovers of virtue to Aristippus (who was avowedly quite willing to exploit both boys and girls<sup>18</sup>) may show Plutarch the author tipping his hand, and Lais, as those who read on in the *Amatorius* will discover, became a reformed character when she fell genuinely in love (767F).

Much of this rather intemperate material is directed at heterosexual relations in general, but it is the attacks specifically on marriage which most anger Daphnaeus and eventually draw Plutarch himself into the debate (752C). Against the claims of the boy-lovers, Daphnaeus, and later Plutarch, accuse their opponents of three kinds of misleading assumptions: about women, about the nature of homosexual desire, about marriage.

The underlying assumption about women, as we have already intimated, is roughly that still to be found in debased manifestations of ‘Mediterranean’ and other cultures, that women come in two kinds: ‘nice girls’ (the *σώφρονες*) and whores (*ἀκολάστον γυναικῶν*: Pisiās at 752C). In his *Coniugalia Praecepta* (142A) Plutarch, too, had been more conventional about ‘nice girls’, there called ‘prudish’ or ‘buttoned-up’ (*αὐστηροί*):<sup>19</sup> they should never take sexual initiatives (though they can, *pace* Pisiās, welcome them: cf. 140C); in any case a married man can console himself with the thought that he cannot have the same woman as wife and mistress (142C). In the view of the boy-lovers of the *Amatorius*, as we have seen, ‘nice girls’—Plutarch himself again (753C) allows that they have a reputation for being ‘prudish’ and ‘disagreeable’—do indeed neither offer nor accept *ἔρως* (752C). If we ask ‘Why not?’, the answer is provided by the *Amatorius* itself. An *ἐρωτικός* is necessarily active and takes initiatives: thus ‘nice girls’, even in the ambit of marriage, do not like sexual acts.

We can now see how the story of Ismenodora relates to the theoretical debate. She is well-born, has no scandal attached to her in her widowhood, is rich, beautiful (753C,

<sup>16</sup> But note that even Protogenes suggests a ‘mutual’ need for pleasure: reciprocity is thus introduced (750D) by the pederast later to be accused of desiring an ‘unequal’ homosexual exchange: the technique of the ‘bad guy’ introducing the good idea is Platonic.

<sup>17</sup> The image seems to have been used, if more neutrally, by Epicureans, as in Lucretius 4.1203–5.

<sup>18</sup> Though a Socratic he was not present, for no clear reason, at Socrates’ death: some have wickedly suggested sex-tourism in Aegina.

<sup>19</sup> The word, we have seen, had been applied to Pisiās himself.

recall 749D), and is in the prime of life, not too old to have children (754C). All these conditions might indicate that she would be an ideal bride—objections by Pisia to her wealth and high birth being summarily rejected by Plutarch himself: rich women need not be intolerable, and Plutarch also brushes off the age-difference (753C, 754CE), said by Protogenes (753A) to reverse Hesiod's ideal.<sup>20</sup> We are Boeotian, she observes wryly, and remember Iolaus (son of Heracles) and Megara! But Protogenes has mounted a more serious challenge (753B)—just at the right time for Plutarch as author to profit from its 'literary' effects with the 'peripeteia' to follow:

If Ismenodora is in love with him, why does she not go round to his house, sing a *paraclausithuron* in front of his door, give up her aristocratic ways and her comfortable life, and put on the garb of those afflicted with passion? But if she's ashamed to do that and is *σώφρων*, let her sit at home and await serious and honourable proposals. . . . For if a woman tells a man she is in love with him he would take to his heels in disgust, let alone making that sort of intemperance (*ἀκρασίαν*) the basis of a marriage.

But soon enter a messenger (754E), whose news leaves Pisia (and Protogenes) reeling in shocked disbelief (though the Epicurean Zeuxippus of Sparta, in his first intervention, prefers to quote Euripides, and soon Pemptides of Thebes begins to rationalize about parallel cases he has met in Egypt). It is audacious (note the usual ambiguity of *τετολμημένον*, 754E; it depends on one's point of view). Women are in charge—note the fear of social subversion; it's really Lemnian stuff. Ismenodora has overturned the law of nature, shouts Pisia (755C): the pederasts, already accused by Daphnaeus (751C) of being unnatural, are ironically given the benefit of this phrase, before Pisia rushes off in a fury, followed by Protogenes. And the more controlled Anthemion agrees that it is audacious (*τόλμημα*) and Lemnian, squashing as unworthy the comment of Soclarus, an old Thespian friend of Plutarch, who in his first intervention suggests with a wry smile that perhaps the whole thing has been fixed up with the connivance of Bacchon (who is no fool!), glad to bolt from the embraces of his suitors to the arms of a rich and beautiful woman.

It all shows, continues Anthemion, that it is not anger, as Heraclitus said (*DK B85*), but *ἔρως* which is hard to conquer. A divine inspiration (*θεῖα ἐπίπνοια*, cf. Plato, *Laws* 811C) has blown the poor female (*τὴν ἀνθρωπον*) away, liable to rob her of her reputation. Ugly stories and suspicions have never circulated about her before! Was anything more respectable! Ismenodora's actions have certainly trumped Protogenes' apparent ace that if she were really 'erotic', she would be singing a lament outside Bacchon's door. For convinced that Bacchon is not uninclined to marry her, but that he is embarrassed about it by his entourage (which includes his lovers), Ismenodora has

<sup>20</sup> Brenk ([n. 4], 49)—presumably under the influence of Goldhill ([n. 4], 159–61)—wonders whether Plutarch is not indulging in rhetorical hyperbole—not least with the dubious *exempla* of Semiramis (753D) and various, often Ptolemaic, courtesans—or 'leaving it up to the reader to decide what sort of paradigm Ismenodora is really supposed to be, "illustrative, symbolic, undercutting"'. A decision would depend on how radical we are prepared to allow Plutarch to be as a commentator in the *Amatorius*—how many men would be 'comfortable' with a Platonic female guardian?—or perhaps on the degree to which contemporary perspectivist considerations would appeal to him. Apart from Ismenodora's superior intelligence, 'dominating' character, and greater age, the claims Plutarch is going to make about joint 'heterosexual' progress towards Platonic Beauty might seem to a Platonist of the day far more strange. In any case Plutarch says that with honest women such problems do not apply: a good man can profit from his wife's tutelage and raise himself to her level, while she herself will be quite able to accept the necessary proprieties (754A). Brenk himself 'seems' to undercut his own argument (*à la* Nietzsche) with his note 37 (p. 60) on Hillary Clinton.



pulled off an extraordinary (not to say masculine) coup, organizing a group of male and female friends to kidnap Bacchon—after she touches his cloak—as he respectfully (*κοσμίως*)<sup>21</sup>—passes her door on his way back from the wrestling-school. The men seize Bacchon, push him into Ismenodora's house, and lock the doors; the women rip off his cloak, put a wedding garment on him, wreath the doors of the two houses to be united with garlands, and send a flute-girl out to pipe an announcement of the impending union (754E–755A).

So there is no doubt that Ismenodora is 'erotic'—very much so, says Anthemion, (755C)—at least insofar as *ἔρως* is an active and initiating desire. The question remains, however, 'Is she a "nice" girl?' (or now perhaps, how many sorts of 'nice girls' are there?), and most of Thespiae, including various officials, crowd around her house to argue it out. And then a second messenger recalls Anthemion (756A): officialdom has failed to rule; the gymnasiarchs are divided, one on each side. But in the *Amatorius* itself the resolution of the social dispute will have to wait till further religious and philosophical questions about *ἔρως* and marriage have been answered. The claim of the semi-Epicurean Pemptides that Ismenodora is suffering from something like the 'sacred disease' of epilepsy is the signal for Act Two of the dialogue to begin.

Ismenodora herself is a paradigm case, but the defenders of heterosexual love have already counterattacked on the wider questions, both challenging the pederasts' claim to be concerned with virtue and friendship and defending not only heterosexuality as such but specifically the institution of marriage, seen as an honourable, and religiously grounded, means to secure immortality for the human race. And it certainly promotes friendship.

The pederasts had admitted, as we have seen, that marriage is necessary for procreation, but insisted that it has nothing to do with friendship, let alone philosophy. It is a demographic necessity that gives a legal sanction to lust. The friends of marriage reply both positively and negatively: boy-love itself has no necessary connection with friendship; it is usually exploitative and a misuse of the genuine attractiveness of the (naked) male body. On the other hand love between the sexes, properly leading to the benefits and pleasures of marital intercourse, really does aim—not least via its physical manifestations (cf. *Laws* 839–840)—at a deep friendship between the parties.

Daphnaeus, suitor of the beautiful Lysandra, had been immediately concerned to defend marriage as a religious institution: 'When you use the term "foulest" (*αἰσχίστα*),' he asks (750BC), 'are you referring to marriage and the coming together of husband and wife, the most sacred conjunction that has ever been?' And Plutarch himself comments (752C) that it is the extremism of Pisas over this which induces him to join forces with Daphnaeus: marriage is a holy yoke (751F); it is outrageous to claim that it is a partnership without *ἔρως* and god-filled friendship.

Neither Plutarch nor even Daphnaeus wants to claim that there is never a legitimate *ἔρως* for boys: that would be impossibly unplatonic. What is at stake is the nature of genuine pederastic and heterosexual *ἔρως*, as well as the specific significance of the marital context in an evaluation of love between the sexes. Plutarch would not want to say 'God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve',<sup>22</sup> but he is certainly going to

<sup>21</sup> Does the word indicate role-reversal? Some would cite this in favour of an ironic reading. The overall seriousness of the Platonism (in contrast with the attitudes of the novelists) militates against that.

<sup>22</sup> According to P. H. Stadter, "'Subject to the erotic", male sexual behaviour in Plutarch', in D. Innes, H. Hine, and C. Pelling (edd.), *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for Donald Russell*

argue that as an ἐρωτικός Adam should treat Steve and Eve in very different ways, and that Eve has a philosophically erotic role to play in the marriage relationship. He put it less subtly and more conventionally in the *Conjugalia Praecepta*: If you teach her geometry, she will be ashamed of dancing (145C). (The translators often gloss this sentence to make Plutarch seem less of a stuffed-shirt, thus missing the point that he is speaking for an age in which 'the marriage chamber is to be "a school of orderly behaviour"' <sup>23</sup>)

Daphnaeus' principal charge against the boy-lovers—backed by texts of the *Phaedrus* (751E = 250E)—is that their talk of teaching the beloved philosophy, or more generally virtue and friendship, is a mere excuse (752A). And even if intercourse is not the real and virtually only goal of the older lover's pleas, it may be an unfriendly act, an act which gives pleasure to one party but degrades the other: a view widely held in Greek society.<sup>24</sup> If so, it can hardly be conducive to the good of friendship. Boy-love (752AB), if it is not a passing crush, typically aims at sexual acts; it is thus mere pleasure-seeking by the lover. Such behaviour becomes a grotesque joke in bad taste when you hear of Solon and Aeschylus urging lovers to stare at thighs and buttocks like priests about to offer an animal sacrifice (751C); it is an unlovely favour (ἄχαρις χάρις), if the emendation and the allusion to Sappho is right, χάρις being the traditional word for a woman's (and a boy's) 'yielding' (751B, again at 768E) and an ugly affront to Aphrodite (751E). Such consummation—Plutarch himself later quotes from an unknown tragic poet (768E)—is not Kupris but Hubris, not loving but breaking and entering: a criminal offence.

Daphnaeus is prepared to allow an ἔρως for both boys and women (751E), and that occasionally ἔρως παιδικῶν may neither destroy or injure erotic goodwill—does this also echo the caution of the *Phaedrus*?—but he insists that it is very different from a heterosexual relationship which 'will be conducive to friendship precisely in respect of the sexual favours which a woman will offer' (751D). Plutarch himself picks up the same theme: 'If a marriage loses erotic courtship and "favours", it will hardly be kept together even by shame and fear' (752C).<sup>25</sup>

In considering Plutarch's unwillingness to reject boy-love outright, and prescinding from the need to remain 'Platonic', we should remember that in recognizing the young male body as beautiful and inspiring to other males, especially if nude—but if inspiring, then tempting—he is following a set of cultural conventions going back well into the pre-philosophical period of Greek society. Male gods were sculpted nude well before the likes of Praxiteles, lover of his famous 'model' Phryne (alluded to twice in the *Amatorius* [753F, 759F]: appropriately since Thespiae was her home-town and her statue adorned its temple of Eros, as also at Plutarch's Delphi), began to represent the naked beauty of the goddesses. And such admiration persisted, thus encouraging homosexual acts, as not only hostile critics such as Jews were well aware, but the

on his *Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Oxford, 1995), 221–36, Plutarch often condemns homosexual acts in the *Lives*, though not in the case of the Sacred Band in the (early) *Pelopidas*.

<sup>23</sup> P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), 21, citing Plutarch, *Con. Praec.* 144F.

<sup>24</sup> See recently Goldhill (n. 4), 61; Konstan (n. 4), 35, with further references at note 31.

<sup>25</sup> He returns to the same theme later (767E): ἔρως brings with it mutual and voluntary self-restraint. Note here too a different type of σωφροσύνη, since those under the inspiration of true ἔρως—remember that Ismenodora is such—will grasp what Plato meant in the *Republic* when he spoke of what is 'mine' and 'not-mine' in terms of mutual good-will (εὐνοία); cf. *Con. Praec.* 140E. Such ἔρως distinguishes those who, in the language of the Aristophanes of the *Symposium* (192E), want forcibly to unite and fuse their souls.

Greeks themselves, not least Plato and his follower Plutarch. Here is Plato in the *Laws* (636BC, cf. Thucydides 1.6.5)

So these common meals and gymnastics, while they are beneficial to the cities in many other respects . . . are thought to have corrupted the pleasures of love-making which are natural not only among men but also among animals. And people blame your [Dorian] cities for this in the first instance, and all other cities which are especially given to (naked) gymnastic exercise.

And now Daphnaeus in the *Amatorius* (751F), picking up the argument about which form of *ἔρως* is 'illegitimate':

It was only yesterday, my friend, because of young men stripping naked that [boy-love] slipped into the gymnasium . . . now it can no longer be restrained but it reviles and insults that married *ἔρως* . . . which wins immortality for the human race.

And Anthemion had already indicated that some of the objections to a marriage between Bacchon and Ismenodora were from people who wanted to keep him 'as long as possible as a youth stripping off his clothes in the wrestling-school' (749F).

By Plutarch's time the human body, both male and female, is beautiful and hence the object of an *ἔρως τοῦ καλοῦ* (a love of what is beautiful). From the point of view of inspiration, the sex of the beloved may be irrelevant (766EF). Hence the Platonist's problem: What degree of intimacy is to be permitted by the beloved boy and honourably (and philosophically) sought by the lover? A hedonist in the play, we hear later (766F), has a smart answer. Asked whether he is more inclined to men or women, he replies, 'Where there is beauty, I'm ambidextrous.' That, as we shall see, is not good enough for Plutarch: it would suggest generalized lust,<sup>26</sup> not individual (reciprocal) inspiration. We see in the *Amatorius* how Ismenodora (as a reciprocal lover in the spirit of the *Phaedrus*, indeed beyond the *Phaedrus* but perhaps like a guardian female from the *Republic*) seeks a legitimate outcome for her love in marriage. Plutarch goes further, retailing stories of women rightly punished in foolishly rejecting such an outcome. In one case the lover died of grief, and the beloved, watching his funeral procession through her window, was turned to stone (766CD). But marriage, the legitimate objective of heterosexual love, involves physical consummation; while, for Plutarch, in the steps of the *Phaedrus* and *Laws*, homosexual affection, properly inspired by the beauty of the male body in the eyes of other males, should not be so consummated.

What reasons does he offer for this view? Most fundamentally he develops the argument from unnaturalness<sup>27</sup>—it is unclear whether the term is primarily descriptive or normative—offered much earlier by Daphnaeus (751CD, citing *Phaedrus* 250E): it is appropriate for the female, not for the male, to be penetrated: not that penetration as such is wrong or disgraceful (though many thought it marked an inferior submissiveness even in married women), but the penetration of men is disgraceful; and the reason it is disgraceful (which founds Plutarch's second argument, again based on the *Phaedrus*) is that it is non-reciprocal: there is no proper *ἀντίερως* (though Plutarch does not use the word itself); the male beloved gives a lot and gets nothing. It is thus an unequal and humiliating exchange, often, says Plutarch, resented as such by individuals, and despised as such in society. In other words, it is exploitation, and such behaviour also tends to encourage, as Plato had suggested, and as is borne out by the remarks of

<sup>26</sup> The manner is unromantically (or cynically) Ovidian: we all know about the next bit, as he has it, referring to intercourse itself. Cf. R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poem* (Oxford, 1980), 201–4.

<sup>27</sup> For novelistic parallels, see Goldhill (n. 4), 51–7.

Pisias and Protogenes, a hostility to marriage. Hence Plutarch's summary of the social and psychological situation:

We place those who enjoy the passive part in homosexual acts among the lowest class. . . . Young men, if not naturally evil, who have let themselves be forced or tricked into this situation have a particular hatred for those who have abused them. (768F)

He then retails two examples, one of which had already been used by Aristotle in the *Politics* (1311A39ff.): Periander, tyrant of Ambracia, asked his boyfriend, 'Are you pregnant yet?', and was promptly knifed. As for Solon, he may have been a testosterone-driven pederast in his youth, as the boy-lovers suggested—the description derives from Plato, *Laws* 839B—but he grew older and wiser, combining kupris with the joys of the Muses.

Pisias and Protogenes had argued that the word *ἔρως* is inappropriate for heterosexual acts, as being driven by pleasure and condoned by demography. Plutarch, after their departure and in reply to Pemptides, allows that while intercourse between the sexes without *ἔρως* is like satisfying an urge to eat and drink (756EF), it is precisely when *ἔρως* is present that the goddess (Aphrodite) takes away the cloying effect of pleasure and generates friendliness (*φιλότης*) and fusion (*σύγκρασις*—we shall notice such Stoic-sounding tones again). All this seems a distant echo of Plato's remark in the *Laws* (8.839B1) where he urges that if husbands have intercourse only with their legitimately married wives they will become close and friendly with them.<sup>28</sup>

It is ridiculous, Plutarch holds, to think that when sex (Aphrodite) accompanies erotic desire between the sexes, friendship cannot exist (768E). Aphrodite without *ἔρως* can, of course, be bought for a drachma (759E), though no one would put up with much pain or take many risks to get it; but when *ἔρως* (whether for boys or girls) is present, no lover would share his beloved with someone else—hence, by implication, heterosexual *ἔρως* would push towards friendly monogamy<sup>29</sup>—and there is a mass of literary and anecdotal evidence to show that this is widely recognized. Despots won't take risks in such cases: 'If you *don't* have *ἔρως* for your music-girl', Alexander writes to a certain Theodorus, 'send her to me for ten talents' (760C).

Part Two of the *Amatorius* begins, as we have seen, with some rationalizing comment by the semi-Epicurean Pemptides, which gives Plutarch the opportunity to introduce (or at least to develop) an approach to his theme both more religious and more philosophical. For with the two Epicureans, or at least Epicurean fellow-travellers, he must confront both scepticism and a different sort of philosophical hedonism, no longer a possibly veiled version of the views of the heterodox Socratic Aristippus, but a more sophisticated system. Indeed *ἔρως* himself may be debunked. What if there are no gods, or if *ἔρως* is not one of them? And what if *all* *ἔρως*, not least *ἔρως* in marriage, is an undesirable obsession? The last part of the *Amatorius* is devoted primarily to rejecting 'atheistic' suggestions of this kind offered first by Pemptides, a man of an uncritically sceptical bent, then more effectively by Zeuxippus, who has already appeared as an Epicurean sympathizer in the essay *That One Cannot Live Pleasantly as an Epicurean*, but whose remarks in the *Amatorius* are largely lost in

<sup>28</sup> A similar attitude appears at the end of *Con. Praec.* (144B), where the *Laws* is quoted.

<sup>29</sup> Plutarch had made a related point more crudely in the *Coniugalia Praecepta*—though there the double standard is still apparent: the wife should think herself lucky if her husband's affairs are all below stairs (140B). He advises the bridegroom (presumably assumed to be 'in love') that he should not upset his wife by smelling of other women (144D).

gaps in the text and must be reconstructed from Plutarch's response. But to illustrate the Platonic-Epicurean background—and to understand how the erotic Ismenodora fits into the revised debate in Act Two—we need some philosophical history.

Once upon a time there was Plato's *Phaedrus*. One of its many interlocking themes is the following puzzle: is it better for a beautiful boy to go with a lover (ἐρωτικός) or a non-lover? Or to put it in more contemporary language: is emotional commitment desirable or undesirable in a relationship? One answer, first given by Socrates on the basis of an earlier speech by Phaedrus and then repudiated by him, is that non-emotional arrangements are better because they are safer for all concerned. What one wants to go for, in these dangerous circumstances, is some kind of deal for maximizing advantages. Such common sense arrangements are imperilled by the madness (μανία) of ἔρως.

Epicurus, author—according to Diogenes Laertius (10.27)—of a treatise *On Eros*, also wrote a *Symposium* (unless just possibly the two are the same): in any case we know little more about it than what Plutarch tells us in his *Table Talk* (3.653F–654B), where we learn, *inter alia*, that it included a notorious discussion of whether, from the point of view of one's digestion, sexual acts should be performed before or after dinner. One of Epicurus' characters, according to Plutarch, gave the Pythagorean reply, 'Whenever you want to do yourself an injury' (654B). Now we know that although sexual pleasure, according to the Epicureans, is of the normally inferior 'kinetic' and unstable sort—it is the result of a natural but unnecessary desire—there will be occasions on which the wise man will break his normal rule, marry, and have children. (Unfortunately the key text of Diogenes Laertius is corrupt: there is a problem of whether a 'not' should be read at 10.119.) Nevertheless marriage was not infrequently the practice of Epicureans.

However, though sexual activity may be acceptable, the wise man should not fall in love: ἔρως is bad, and certainly not sent to us by the gods.<sup>30</sup> It has never done anyone any good and we are lucky if it does us no harm (D.L. 10.118). Epicurus' definition of it seems to have been 'an intense desire for sexual intercourse, accompanied by torment and anguish', and in the *Amatorius* (767C—note already the ἀνεραστία but only for women, of Pisias at 752E) Plutarch (as heir to a long anti-Epicurean tradition) refers to the views of ill-natured (δύσκολοι), unerotic people who think that ἔρως is an unstable desire (ἐπιθυμία ἀκατάστατος) which puts the soul out of control, that is, far from those katastematic, unruffled pleasures which are the Epicurean ideal. According to the unerotic Epicureans, not just the love for women (as supposed by Pisias and Protagenes), but all erotic desire is to be refused.

Our most detailed source for Epicurean anti-erotic theory is the latter part of Lucretius Book 4, and there is little reason to doubt that Lucretius' presentation, though probably less crudely reductionist, is generally orthodox Epicureanism. Here, following the distinctions made in the *Phaedrus*, and doubtless developed in specifically Epicurean sources, including Epicurus himself, we meet in detail the Epicurean solution to the problem of sexual desire, though we should notice that Lucretius himself speaks almost exclusively of the desire of men for women.

As in the *Phaedrus*, Lucretius distinguishes two kinds of desirers, whom he calls the *miseri* (these are roughly the erotic suitors of the *Phaedrus*) and the *sani*, and the aim of the wise man is to get the pleasures of the *sani* without the commitment or

<sup>30</sup> Much of the relevant material has been reassembled by Martha Nussbaum in *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton, 1994), 149–54, though in note 24 she seems to misrepresent Plato's classification of desires, the apparent basis for that of Epicurus.

psychological disturbance of the *miseri*. As Kleve put it,<sup>31</sup> 'The pleasure reserved for the *sani* is more unmixed than that of the *miseri*, for it is exempt from harmful consequences.' It will follow from this that, if the Epicurean marries, he will want an 'unerotic' marriage; that is the explanation of something which puzzles the Lucretian commentators, namely that, as Nussbaum put it, at 'the very end of the book [Lucretius] is preoccupied with marriage', and why, as she thinks, the last lines 'seem so terribly prosaic'.<sup>32</sup> These preoccupied and 'prosaic' last lines include the following, only partially translated, comments, certainly relevant to the discussion in the *Amatorius*:

Lascivious movements are of no use whatever to wives. For a woman prevents herself from conceiving . . . if she happily revives Venus by movements of her buttocks. . . . That is why prostitutes habitually make such movements, so that they may not get pregnant frequently . . . and at the same time so that Venus should be more satisfying to the men—something our wives seem to have no need of. (4.1268–76)

We must keep that Epicurean background in mind, and look for a tolerance of marriage combined with the ideal of the *sanus amator*, when we return to the *Amatorius*. Epicureans valued friendship, so any account they give of sexual relations and *ἔρως* should take the promotion of friendship into account. But we have already seen how the critics of boy-loving argue that most pederastic talk of friendship is hypocritical and deceitful: friendship is the pretext; pleasure, though admittedly not of the katastematic, Epicurean sort, is the goal. But if the anti-pederasts are right about the unfriendly nature of sexual manipulating, that in itself might pose difficulties for the Epicureans, even though good Epicureans would enter upon their deals for sexual pleasure with their eyes wide open. Nevertheless, problems about the wisdom of any kind of sexual activity would form part of the widely recognized more general difficulty within Epicureanism of how to reconcile the theory of pleasure with the high regard for 'friendship', not least because that friendship might occasionally take altruistic forms.

As for the evidence of Lucretius, Nussbaum is right in saying that 'The goal of Lucretian therapy is to make a good marriage possible', but she herself in effect admits<sup>33</sup> the anti-Epicurean point (developed by Plutarch in the *Amatorius*) that for all his spectacular demythologizing of obsession, Lucretius has missed the more compelling claim of the *Phaedrus* not about obsession but about genuine and Platonic *ἔρως*. Plutarch's position in the *Amatorius* is clear and anti-Epicurean: there is obsession with women and even more obsession with boys, but neither is *ἔρως* (769B). There is a distinction to be drawn between obsession (recognized as a perversion by the pederasts of *Amatorius*, Part One, but for the most part only in their simplistic misunderstanding of the range of heterosexual relationships) and the divine and inspirational madness of Platonic *ἔρως* (758D–759B).<sup>34</sup> We shall recognize the practical implications of this distinction in the case of the erotic Ismenodora: with reference to *ἔρως* it is wrong simply to identify 'good boys' and 'nice girls' (759A); there are *two* sorts of 'nice girls', some are appropriately erotic (while still *σώφρων*, 767E, cf. 765B), others are merely 'buttoned-up'.

When Pemptides hears of Ismenodora's 'manhandling' (cf. 755C) of Bacchon, and that it is being allowed that hers really is 'erotic' behaviour, he says that this confirms

<sup>31</sup> K. Kleve, 'Lucrèce, l'épicurisme et l'amour', *Association Guillaume Budé, Actes du VIII Congrès* (Paris, 1969), 376–83, esp. 379.

<sup>32</sup> Nussbaum (n. 30), 145.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 185, 190.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. H. Martin, 'Plutarch, Plato, and Eros', *CB* 60 (1984), 82–8.

his view that *ἔρως* is a disease—like the ‘sacred disease’ of epilepsy. To give that kind of physiological explanation is much more satisfactory than to suppose her impelled by some divine being. Indeed, he continues, why was anyone ever justified in calling Eros a god in the first place? We recall here that for *Socrates* in the *Symposium*, though not for *Phaedrus* (178D), *Aristophanes* (191E), and *Agathon* (197E), *ἔρως* is only a *δαίμων*, an intermediary power, not a god, though he is a god (242D9) or ‘something godlike’ (242E2) for the *Socrates* of the *Phaedrus* (which dialogue, I have claimed, generally dominates in Greek Platonism).

To *Pemptides*’ knowing reductionism, *Plutarch* himself reacts strongly, donning, at least in the first instance, those robes of a Delphic priest he had already assumed in his initial defence of the sanctity of marriage: this, he retorts, is a dangerous suggestion (756B). If you ask for a demonstration and an account of the gods rather than ‘our ancestral and ancient faith’, you undermine the self-evident foundations of religion. ‘If that confidence is undermined at a single point, then the whole edifice becomes rocky and suspect.’

This might seem less the approach of a Platonic philosopher than of those to whom *Galen* referred with contempt: ‘If I were one of the followers of *Moses* or *Christ*, I would not have offered my pupils a demonstration but said “Just believe”.’<sup>35</sup> Perhaps *Plutarch* simply cannot be bothered with smart-ass reductionism, since *Pemptides* goes on to reveal that he thinks the only alternative to the ‘impious’ suggestion that the gods are merely our ‘passions’ is that our passions themselves are gods (757C). That approach too is seen off as incoherent, for in reply to further probing by *Plutarch*, who raises the spectre of an ‘abyss of atheism’ (757C), *Pemptides* says that he thinks that *Ares* is the god who ‘arranges’ the ‘spirited element’ (*θυμοειδές*) within us. If we compare this pathetic performance with the spectacular power of *Lucretius*’ *haec Venus est nobis: hinc autemst nomen amoris* (This is our *Venus*; but from this we get the name [he might have added the worship] of human love) (4.1058), itself the culmination of an intense demythologization of the phenomenology of desire which simultaneously offers a rich description of human experience, we can see why *Pemptides* is quickly dismissed in the *Amatorius*: pop-Epicureanism has been met with an apparently crude and impatient conservatism.

*Pemptides* has been described as ‘a sceptic, probably an Epicurean’,<sup>36</sup> but in view of his low-level performance, his place in the structure of the *Amatorius* as a whole is difficult to discern, except insofar as he provides *Plutarch* with the chance to present an unexpectedly extended theologico-philosophical eulogy of (the real) *Ἔρως* as a god. This eulogy extends via a long literary display (757E–763F), punctuated with just a few comments from others, into an account of the eventual ascent of the souls of lovers under the guidance of true *Ἔρως* to the Plain of Truth (764A–766B, cf. *Phaedrus* 248B). And the display, we should notice, makes a point of attending—among its many references to noble examples of boy-loving—to the ‘beautiful’ *Sappho* (763A)—the epithet is traditional, as in *Phaedrus* 235B—perhaps to suggest that a similar nobility may attach to similar relations with unmarried girls.<sup>37</sup>

But a more immediate aim of the reply is to insist, in apparent contradiction to *Diotima*–*Socrates*, but in agreement with other characters in the *Symposium* and with

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *R. Walzer, Galen on Jews and Christians* (Oxford, 1949), 15.

<sup>36</sup> *R. Flacelière, Plutarque: Dialogue sur l'Amour* (Paris, 1980), 17.

<sup>37</sup> Notice that one of the very few references to ‘lesbianism’ in *Plato* (cf. *Laws* 636C) is to be found in *Aristophanes*’ myth in the *Symposium* (191E), where it is implied that female–female relationships are parallel to those between males.

the *Phaedrus*, that *'Eρως* is a god. Logically, of course, it is right that the divinity of *'Eρως* take precedence over the specific question of *marital ερως* —which is another reason why boy-love in its well-documented nobler manifestations is still prominent in this section of the *Amatorius*. The definitive reply about marriage is left for the argument with Zeuxippus, though in the elevated passage about the ascent to Beauty heterosexuality and heterosexual language are very much in evidence. And in reading Plutarch's defence of *'Eρως* as a god, we can also learn more about his attitude as a commentator on Plato. If a non-Socratic character in a dialogue says something 'true', his views can be adopted (particularly if they are 'Socratic' elsewhere); and *'Eρως* as god and *ερως* as *δαίμων* may not be quite so incompatible as would appear.

But perhaps it is the fact that Pemptides' initial explanation of *ερως* as comparable with the 'sacred disease' (epilepsy) leads him on to speak of religious phenomena he has come across in *Egypt* which is the 'structural' clue we need (755E): it gives Plutarch's readers the first indication of an up-coming assimilation (which remains only sketched in the *Amatorius*) of Egyptian myth to the erotic theories of the *Phaedrus*. Plutarch alludes to the Egyptian connection twice in his lengthy eulogy of *'Eρως*: first (762A), to observe that small bits of Platonic truth had filtered down into Egyptian mythology, though they are very hard to decipher; second, to cite Xenophanes' complaint that the Egyptians contradict themselves about Osiris (763D). But when he comes to an end it is Soclarus in his second intervention (he had suspected Bacchon's collusion in the kidnapping earlier) who presses Plutarch to pursue the Egyptian connection further: after all it is a 'holy account' (764A).

I have accepted the *communis opinio* that the *Amatorius* is one of the latest of Plutarch's works, but later still, though probably already on its author's mind, was *On Isis and Osiris*.<sup>38</sup> Roughly speaking, among other fascinating novelties, Plutarch here (as in *Amatorius* 764A, though in the *Amatorius* Osiris and Isis are not specifically mentioned in this connection<sup>39</sup>) sees *'Eρως* (= Osiris) as like the Sun (thus necessarily *'Eρως* is a god: the intelligible Sun of the *Republic*, both target and guide), and Aphrodite (= Isis) as like the Moon who seeks him out and revives him. Isis-Moon, then, like Ismenodora, is in active pursuit of her desire, and somehow she is also (at *De Iside* 351E) 'practical sense' (*φρόνησις*): she is the 'place' where the mortal and the immortal, the earthly and the heavenly, meet (764B, cf. *De Isid.* 372CE): thus somehow (and in popular devotion) signifying women in general. Thus she is not only erotic but as 'place' she is also to be identified by Platonists, at least according to Plutarch's (dualist and confused) view of the *Timaeus*, as the *active matter/receptacle*<sup>40</sup> (and perhaps also as the human soul in general in love with the [male] form, as in Apuleius' *Eros and Psyche*).

At *Amatorius* 764A Plutarch introduces the two Aphrodites (and the two Erotes) of

<sup>38</sup> For discussion, see J. M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), 200–8; Brenk (n.14), 462–6. But Brenk probably exaggerates in claiming originality for Plutarch's identification of God and Form (Beauty). What may be original, however, is the identification of God as *Eros* (rather than as Mind) with Beauty. Brenk's discussion (465–7) of the erotic terminology (and its links with *Symp.* 204C)—and not least of the neologism (for Platonists) *ἀγαπητός* (765D)—as now applied to the Form-God, is very helpful.

<sup>39</sup> But we have noticed that Osiris is named at 763D.

<sup>40</sup> If Plutarch was seeing Ismenodora–Bacchon as analogous to Isis–Osiris (= Aphrodite–Dionysus), he had famous Egyptian precedents, not least Cleopatra (the new Isis)–Antony (the new Dionysus), though perhaps it would have been politically incorrect to introduce that couple into the *Amatorius*: less ill-omened to stick to such as Belestiche, mistress of Ptolemy II (753E), to whom as Aphrodite–Belestiche a temple had been dedicated. For Cleopatra/Isis and Antony recently, see C. B. R. Pelling, *Plutarch, Life of Antony* (Cambridge, 1988), 251–2, 319.



the *Symposium*: the Earthly and the Heavenly; there are, he says, similar ideas in Egypt. But now there are in effect not two but three: for there are two forms of the Heavenly *Ἔρως* (that imaged by the Sun but superior to it—this is the god—and the (? *δαίμων*) *ἔρως* which transforms the ascending Heavenly Aphrodite (imaged by the Moon), who otherwise would be disorderly but like Poverty in the *Symposium* is always searching for the God (*De Isid.* 374). Thus there would in theory be also two versions of the Heavenly Aphrodite, that fully linked with the Form of Beauty (and thus the Mother of Becoming) and that in search of it. But Plutarch, who thinks that the complete vision of Beauty is not possible in this life (766AB), is only concerned with the erotic searcher. Her parallel on earth would be the ‘nice girl’ who is also truly erotic, like Ismenodora: no longer ‘buttoned up’; and perhaps in her final reformed state, like Lais (767F), in some ways a better example because she was originally disorderly.

The surprising culmination of the response by Plutarch to the apparently banal challenge of Pemptides—and in a sense the culmination of the whole of the *Amatorius*—is the ascent to the Plain of Truth (764A–766B), and here, as has often been noticed, the reciprocity of genuine *ἔρως*—in those cases where our mutual *ἔρως* is guided towards Beauty by *Ἔρως* the god—is fully maintained. It is also maintained in specifically anti-Epicurean language. At 765BC we read of the proper (*σώφρων*) and respectful (*μετ’ αἰδούς*) reasoning of the lovers, and that their mutual love takes them in a sustained heat far beyond the ‘earthquake’ of an Epicurean-style orgasm (the rubbing together of atomic parts, 765C) to the very character of the beloved, seen as the image of Beauty itself. In specifically heterosexual language male courtship (*εὐπείθεια*) and female tenderness (*φιλοφροσύνη*) lead the lovers on.<sup>41</sup> Whereas the physical Sun lights the beautiful and the ugly alike, Eros the beautiful *μυσταγωγός* shows only what is beautiful (764C). As for uninspired ‘lovers’ (766A), they are like Ixion (who raped a cloud instead of a goddess).

In a sense the last scene—or rather almost the last scene, since we must return to Ismenodora at the end—is almost an anticlimax, perhaps seeming rather more so because the speech of the Epicurean Zeuxippus (before 766E) has not survived, and we can only form a limited sense of his arguments from Plutarch’s rather strangely constructed reply, this itself being interrupted by an explanatory panegyric of the Galatian Camma and concluded by the story of the Gallic Empona. Perhaps Plutarch has attempted an impossible combination, following the *Symposium* in placing the high-notes of Diotima’s speech before the last scene of the dialogue, and at the same time closing the philosophical discussion with historical *exempla* in place of eschatological myths.

Nevertheless, the final defence of marriage against Zeuxippus is now based on a clearer notion of *ἔρως* itself, so that, after reiterating that both males and females are erotically attractive (766E), Plutarch can now confidently summon his more extreme supporter Daphnaeus to join him in rebutting the Epicurean view specifically of marriage, in particular that it should be devoid of *ἔρως* and hence of god-given friendship. For the Epicureans, as we have seen, marriage is a deal (*foedus*) for mutual advantage—but in Zeuxippus’ remarks about union without *ἔρως* we also hear a

<sup>41</sup> Note the normal word *φιλοφροσύνη* (cf. 769A and *Mulierum Virtutum* 244, *Con. Praec.* 139E), and the *εὐφροσύνη* of Solon at *Amat.* 751E. The theme is emphasized by Foucault (n. 4), 241–2.

rationalization of the earlier, less cold-blooded but also less philosophical tirades of Pisisas.

For the most part I need merely summarize Plutarch's learned and final defence, itself a characteristic mix of argument (some repeated from Act One) and more personal abuse of Epicureans: that the Epicureans want children *rather* than a wife (767D), whom in any case they frequently abuse and then divorce; that by physical union—prescribed by Solon at least three times a month (769A) though not in *direct* pursuit of pleasure (something very widely suspect in ancient thought)—couples should renew their marriage and by such tenderness (*φιλοφροσύνη* again) erase any accumulated bad feelings which may happen to arise; that it is ridiculous to suggest that women, though capable of other virtues, are incapable of friendship with men (769C); that their alluring physical charms, which give the dissolute among them so many splendid opportunities, can and should be used as favours by 'nice girls' to develop the goodwill and friendship of their husbands—a desideratum, also, of Plato's *Laws*—and prevent them being diverted to other women (769D). For while the union of those who merely live together is like a wandering contact and interlocking of Epicurean atoms (cf. 765CD), the marital bond between 'noble' men and women—a Stoic image which Plutarch uses elsewhere<sup>42</sup>—is a 'total blend' (*κρᾶσις δι' ὅλου* 769F, cf. 752E), a sharing in great mysteries, from which arise, as Plutarch has already suggested to Pemptides, a unity of honour, 'favours', respect for one another and loyalty. The physical 'wounds' of deflowering and pregnancy, to which Zeuxippus had apparently (and traditionally) alluded, are insignificant (769E).<sup>43</sup>

Beyond the details of Plutarch's reply to Zeuxippus, of course, lie the final pieces of the theory of genuine *ἔρως*; not only is desire for a woman in marriage honourable, and conducive, not least via the use of sexuality, to friendship; not only is desire in a marital context *by* a woman to be vindicated; but the marital relationship in and of itself can forward an advance on the wings of the soul (766E) via the god *Ἔρως* and an appreciation of the beauty of the other—first physically then spiritually—towards Beauty itself.<sup>44</sup> And while we can expect marital love to last a lifetime, few homosexual pairings are more than temporary (770C). Just as Plato told the otherwise admirable but too 'buttoned up' (*αὐστηρός*) Xenocrates to sacrifice to the Graces, so honourable and 'nice' girls should do the same: and we have seen that in the *Amatorius* (as normally) 'graces' is used to refer to sexual favours. Here then indeed we have a Platonic synthesis:<sup>45</sup> the reciprocity of lovers from the *Phaedrus* (and from the *Lysis*?); the friendship between men and their sexual partners in marriage from the *Laws*; the philosopher as lover of the Good, itself compared to the Sun, from the *Republic*.<sup>46</sup> What more could an ancient 'commentator' do?

Interesting too, from the point of view of Plutarch as a Platonist, is the way in which he anticipates and answers a modern query about the Master himself: scholars dispute as to whether in the Platonic search for Beauty the individual whose physical beauty

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Con. Praec.* 142F and *SVF* 3.63 (Antipater, cited earlier as a likely source of Plutarch).

<sup>43</sup> For the importance of the question of 'wounds' in ancient debate about the merits of various kinds of sexual behaviour, see Goldhill (n. 4), 36–9.

<sup>44</sup> Brenk (n. 14), 463.

<sup>45</sup> Brenk (n. 14), 464 remarks that 'Plato again was Plutarch's inspiration, but, as so often, the pupil outstripped the master': a Freudian slip? For Plutarch himself it would be a matter of 'commentating' rather than outstripping.

<sup>46</sup> Of course, in the *Republic* both male and female guardians are suitors of Lady Philosophy; the language is highly erotic: see Rist (n. 9), 203–4.

and beauty of soul may have sparked the quest is left behind as the ἐρωτικός ascends: Vlastos, for example, voiced concerns of this kind about the Platonic Socrates.<sup>47</sup> Plutarch believes he knows the answer: beauty in visible human individuals recalls and like the rainbow (765EF) refracts the beauty of Form—as in the *Phaedrus*—but only after death will the Form be truly encountered. Meanwhile we must also welcome and delight in the propaedeutic beauty in physical bodies (766A), especially among spouses.

In obvious imitation of Platonic myths, but now using history as myth, Plutarch—almost at the end of the *Amatorius*—recounts the story, familiar in part to readers of Tacitus' *Histories* (4.67), of Empona, heroic wife and in extraordinary circumstances mother of sons (one of whom Plutarch knew personally, 771C) to Sabinus, a leader in the rebellion of Civilis in Gaul put down by the emperor Vespasian. But that is not the end of the dialogue-drama, the last scene of which is enacted after Plutarch has come to the end of his reply to Zeuxippus. A final 'messenger', Diogenes, a friend of Pisas, comes running up from Thespieae. Ismenodora has prevailed and is publicly vindicated: she is the right kind of 'nice girl'.<sup>48</sup> 'Speak words of good omen', says Diogenes. There is going to be a marriage. The sacrifice is about to be performed. Pisas himself has been converted and has put on his wedding-gear. (But what about Protogenes?) And Plutarch, as the 'Menandrian' curtain falls, can miss neither a pious platitude nor the chance to crow over his former antagonist: 'Let us go', he says, 'to laugh at the man and to venerate the God.'<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See G. Vlastos, 'The individual as an object of love in Plato', in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, 1973), 3–34.

<sup>48</sup> Brenk (n. 4), 50, suggests that in the *Amatorius* 'the dispute is largely decided by an *exemplum*' (namely, first Ismenodora's 'kidnapping'—or should we say 'rape', as in Rape of the Sabines? [she certainly gets his cloak off pretty fast, 755A]—then the wedding itself). Thus, says Brenk, 'the living *exemplum* reaches out of the discourse not only to carry off the boy but also the argument'. But that fails to do justice to the philosophical progress of the *Amatorius*. There is no reason to think that, *exempla* apart, Plutarch's argued view (whatever its weaknesses) has not prevailed in both Acts of the dialogue. At the close, though dissenters may remain, Plutarch's more learned and philosophical skills have united with the sound judgement—she has Isis' good sense (φρόνησις)—of Ismenodora, even though the 'nice girl' always remains off-stage, leaving the men to debate about her.

<sup>49</sup> An unreconstructed version of this paper was read in Toronto in 1997: many thanks to those who contributed, as to a constructive reader for *CQ* who, in reining in some less-than-scholarly sloppiness and imprecision, also enticed me to expand the panorama.