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Socrate et Alcibiade
Socrates and Alcibiades

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ABSTRACT

In Plato's Symposium eros and paideia draw the fabric of dramatic and rhetorical speeches and, especially, the picture of the relation between Socrates and Alcibiades. This paper will focus, firstly, on two important facts, which are essential for the correct understanding of the dialogue, both of which appear at the beginning. First, it is said that Socrates, Alcibiades and the others (172 b) were present at the famous banquet, and second, that the banquet and the erotic speeches of the participants were so celebrated as to attract the attention for several decades to come. So, the memory of that symposium is thus the memory, far beyond the other symposiasts, and through the erotic speeches, of something precise: that is, a particularly significant relationship, that between Socrates and Alcibiades. What matters most for the aim of this paper is the fact that Alcibiades is considered one of the major reasons for the defeat of Athens and the main cause of the crisis into which the city was plunged during the last years of 5th century BC. Due to the distrust of the city towards the groups of ‘philosophers’ that remitted to Alcibiades’ group, it is no surprise that the so-called Socratics committed themselves to refuting the accusation of Socrates having been Alcibiades’ mentor, to the point of reversing the charge. In the same way as the others Plato, also a Socratic, concerns himself with what might be called the ‘Alcibiades’ Connection’. Realizing there obviously was no way to deny the deep connection between Socrates and Alcibiades, he uses a clever dramatic construction with the intention of operating a political intervention upon the memory of this relationship, that is, of rewriting history, with the intent of relieving him of a more precise charge, which must have especially weighed upon Plato and upon Socrates’ memory: of him having been Alcibiades’ lover/mentor. This Platonic apology is based, ultimately, in a clever rhetorical strategy, which emphasizes the now traditional sexual paranomia of Alcibiades, in order to make him guilty of an attempted excessive and outrageous seduction not only of Socrates, but of the polis itself. Reusing comic and oratorical/rhetorical motifs of his time, therefore, Plato deepens the J’accuse against Alcibiades, trying to withdraw him from the orbit of Socrates and the Socratics.

Key-words: Plato, Symposium, Alcibiades, Socrates.

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