

# *'Our mind went to the Platonic Charmides': the reception of Plato's Charmides in Wilde, Cavafy and Plutarch*

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## CHAPTER 7

### ‘OUR MIND WENT TO THE PLATONIC *CHARMIDES*’: THE RECEPTION OF PLATO’S *CHARMIDES* IN WILDE, CAVAFY, AND PLUTARCH

TIMOTHY DUFF

The *Charmides* was in antiquity one of the least well-known works of Plato. Scholars acknowledge only one allusion to it across the whole of Plutarch’s corpus.<sup>1</sup> But while not particularly heavyweight in terms of its philosophical content, it is notable as being the only Platonic text in which Socrates admits to feeling sexual desire for a young man. While other texts frequently use the language of *erōs* to describe Socrates’ attitude to the young men with whom he converses, or play with notions of *erōs* as a metaphor for the attitude of the philosopher to a pupil, only in the *Charmides* is Socrates so unambiguously presented as sexually attracted to a young man.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I wish to examine three examples of the reception of Plato’s *Charmides* by later authors: two modern authors, Cavafy and Oscar Wilde, and one ancient, Plutarch, who lived half a millennium after Plato. I will focus on two aspects of their reception. The first focus will be the way in which the three authors respond to the erotic and philosophical elements in the *Charmides*. As we shall see, all three exploit Plato’s emphasis on the youthful beauty of Charmides and his presentation of Charmides as the object of erotic desire. In Wilde, the philosophical element of Plato’s text is entirely absent, as is the person of Socrates, and the homoerotic content is merely hinted at, within a largely heterosexual storyline. In Cavafy, it is the reference to *Charmides*

<sup>1</sup> *De E* 392a (*Chrm.* 164d–e): Helmbold and O’Neil 1959: 56; Jones 1916: 118; Giavatto 2010: 133. Contrast the frequent citation in Plutarch of e.g. the *Republic*, *Laws*, and especially *Timaeus*: references in Jones 1916: 107–53; Helmbold and O’Neill 1959: 56–63; Giavatto 2010. See also Ferrari 2004. The reference to *Chrm.* 512b in Giavatto 2010: 139, in relation to *De stoic. repugn.* 1039d seems to be incorrect.

<sup>2</sup> On this aspect of the *Charmides*, see Blanshard 2010: 101; Tuozzo 2011: 101–10. See also Blyth 2012.

which serves to clarify the homoerotic tone. Plutarch, on the other hand, in alluding to the *Charmides*, takes for granted its homoerotic context, but rejects entirely the claim that Socrates was motivated by sexual desire; in Plutarch, Socrates' *erōs* is solely a desire to educate and protect. In that way, as we shall see, Plutarch both draws on the reader's knowledge of the *Charmides*, but tacitly 'corrects' it and brings its presentation of Socrates into line with that in other Platonic texts.

The second focus will be the different means by which each of these three writers engages with the *Charmides*: in particular, the extent to which these texts depend on and exploit, for their proper appreciation, a detailed knowledge of the Platonic text on the part of the reader. As we shall see, although explicit engagement with Plato's *Charmides* is stronger in the two modern texts, Plutarch's engagement relies more heavily on the reader's familiarity with Plato and expects the reader to recognize a series of detailed verbal echoes. Furthermore, whereas the allusions to the *Charmides* in Wilde and Cavafy stand alone, Plutarch's allusions to the *Charmides* are integrated into a much wider dialogue with the other Platonic texts.

### Plato's *Charmides*

Plato's *Charmides* purports to dramatize a conversation at a wrestling school between the philosopher Socrates and a handsome and well-connected young man, Charmides.<sup>3</sup> Socrates, who narrates the dialogue in the first person, has just returned from several years of military service abroad and, eager to resume his old habits, visits the wrestling school of Taureas, where he comes across many of his friends. Socrates proceeds to ask his interlocutors whether any of today's young men were particularly distinguished for beauty, or wisdom, or both, and is told about Charmides, whom he remembers as a child but who is now an extremely handsome youth. At this moment, Charmides himself enters and Socrates records his reaction, and that of other spectators:

<sup>3</sup> On Plato's *Charmides*, see e.g. Tuckey 1951; Santas 1973; Hyland 1981; van der Ben 1985; Schmid 1998; Press 2001; Dorion 2004; Bowery 2007; McCabe 2007; Charalabopoulos 2008; Politis 2008; Tuozzo 2011; Danzig 2013; Moore and Raymond 2019.

## 7 The Reception of Plato's *Charmides* in Wilde, Cavafy, and Plutarch

Ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν, ὡς ἔταῖρε, οὐδὲν σταθμητόν ἀτεχνῶς γάρ λευκὴ στάθμη εἰμὶ πρὸς τοὺς καλούς – σχεδὸν γάρ τι μοι πάντες οἱ ἐν τῇ ἡλικίᾳ καλοὶ φαίνονται – ἀτάρ οὖν δὴ καὶ τότε ἐκεῖνος ἐμοὶ θαυμαστὸς ἐφάνη τό τε μέγεθος καὶ τὸ κάλλος, [154c] οἱ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι πάντες ἐρᾶν ἔμοιγε ἐδόκουν αὐτοῦ – οὔτως ἐκπεπληγμένοι τε καὶ τεθορυβημένοι ἥσαν, ἥνικ' εἰσήγει – πολλοὶ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι ἐρασταὶ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὅπισθεν εἴποντο. καὶ τὸ μὲν ἡμέτερον τὸ τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἥττον θαυμαστὸν ἦν· ὅλλ' ἐγὼ καὶ τοῖς παισὶ προσέσχον τὸν νοῦν, ὡς οὐδεὶς ἄλλοσ' ἐβλεπεν αὐτῶν, οὐδὲ ὅστις σμικρότατος ἦν, ἀλλὰ πάντες ὥσπερ ἄγαλμα ἐθεῶντο αὐτόν.

[154d] καὶ ὁ Χαιρεφῶν καλέσας με, Τί σοι φαίνεται ὁ νεανίσκος, ἔφη, ὡς Σώκρατες; οὐκ εὔπρόσωπος; Ὑπερφυῶς, ἦν δ' ἐγώ. Οὔτος μέντοι, ἔφη, εἰ ἐθέλοι ἀποδῦναι, δόξει σοι ἀπρόσωπος εἶναι· οὔτως τὸ εἶδος πάγκαλός ἐστιν. Συνέφασαν οὖν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ταῦτα ταῦτα τῷ Χαιρεφῶντι· καγώ, Ἡράκλεις, ἔφην, ὡς ἄμαχον λέγετε τὸν ἄνδρα, εἰ ἔτι αὐτῷ ἐν δὴ μόνον τυγχάνει προσὸν σμικρόν τι. Τί; ἔφη ὁ Κριτίας. [154e] Εἰ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, τυγχάνει εὖ πεφυκώς.

I am completely unreliable there, my good friend: I am a mere ‘white line’ in measuring beautiful people, for almost all young men appear beautiful to me. But at that moment the young man in question appeared to me amazing in stature and beauty; [154c] and all the rest seemed to me to be in love with him – they were so astonished and confused when he was coming in – and many other lovers were following in the rear. On the part of men like us, this was less surprising; but when I observed the boys I noticed that none of them, not even the smallest, was looking at anything else, but that they were all gazing at him as though he were a statue.

[154d] Chaerephon called me and said, ‘How does the youth strike you, Socrates? Isn’t his face beautiful?’ ‘Immensely so’, I replied. ‘Yet if he were to consent to strip off’, he said, ‘you would think him faceless, his body is so perfectly formed’. Well, all the others said exactly the same things as Chaerephon, and I said, ‘By Heracles, what an irresistible man you say he is, if he happens to have just one more quality too, a little thing’. ‘What?’, said Critias. [154e] ‘If he happens to be well-endowed in his soul’.

There is a strong emphasis here not only on Charmides’ physical beauty, but on the admiring, erotically charged gaze of the male onlookers.<sup>4</sup> Even the other boys of Charmides’ age, their eyes fixed on him alone, gazed at him ‘as though he were a statue’. The comparison of Charmides to a statue, and of his admirers to viewers of a work of art or witnesses of the epiphany of a god,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> On the importance of viewing in Greek culture, by which male citizens both demonstrated their power and were also subject to controlling scrutiny, see Goldhill 1998: 105–12; cf. Wohl 2012. For the erotic ‘male gaze’ in ancient literature, see also Morales 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Dorion 2004: 42, Charalabopoulos 2008: 513–14, and Tuozzo 2011: 107, who point out that an ἄγαλμα, as opposed to an ἄνδριάς, usually represents a god.

not only emphasizes his beauty but also lends to it an idealized quality. At the same time, however, it suggests an objectification of Charmides' passive body, reinforced by Chaerephon's insistence to Socrates that, if he saw him naked, he 'would think him faceless (ἀπρόσωπος)'.

Plainly, the interests of those who view Charmides, and who imagine him naked, are directed towards his body. Socrates too shares in this sexualized admiration. But, unlike them, Socrates is not interested only in Charmides' face or indeed his faceless body, but in his soul too. This double interest is played out later, when Charmides comes to sit by him and looks into his eyes: Socrates catches a glimpse inside his *himation* (155d) and is, as he puts it, 'inflamed' (ἐφλεγόμην) with desire; indeed, he feels 'out of his mind', and overpowered by him as though by a wild animal. However, he then proceeds to engage Charmides in philosophical conversation in the presence of his uncle Critias, a discussion which takes up the rest of the dialogue.

The topic of the discussion – the definition of temperance (σωφροσύνη) – is one which arises naturally from the erotically charged setting. Indeed, Socrates' own restraint, despite his desire for Charmides, provides the reader with an example of temperance in practice.<sup>6</sup> Charmides, and then his uncle Critias, are each in turn forced to admit their ignorance. It is now Charmides who admires Socrates, and he declares his determination to stick with Socrates, and be 'bewitched' (ἐπάδεσθαι) by him every day.

The dialogue ends, rather ominously, with Socrates accusing Charmides and Critias of 'plotting' against him (τί βουλεύεσθον ποιεῖν;) and intending to use 'force' (βιάση ἄρα), which Charmides admits. No one, Socrates declares, will be able to 'withstand' (ἐναντιοῦσθαι), and he himself will not try (176c–d).<sup>7</sup> At one level this shows Socrates as now the object of desire, not its subject –

<sup>6</sup> Tuckey 1951: 18; Rademaker 2005: 5, 258, 325–6; Johnson 2012: 25; Blyth 2012: 40. Socrates' sexual restraint is also demonstrated in Alcibiades' speech in Pl. *Symp.* 217a–219c, and at Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.14–15. In the *Phaedrus* (253c–257b), Plato's Socrates acknowledges that a true lover may feel sexual desire, but argues that it must be restrained.

<sup>7</sup> σοὶ γάρ ἐπιχειροῦντι πράττειν ὄτιοῦν καὶ βιαζομένῳ οὐδεὶς οἶός τ' ἔσται ἐναντιοῦσθαι ἀνθρώπων . . . Οὐ τοίνυν, ἦν δὲ ἐγώ, ἐναντιώσομαι.

a trope familiar also from Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*.<sup>8</sup> But readers of Plato would almost certainly have been aware that the real Critias went on play a leading role in the violent oligarchic regime of 404–403, as did Charmides, who was to become one of the ten men in charge of the Piraeus; both were killed in fighting with democratic forces in the Piraeus as that regime crumbled (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.19).<sup>9</sup> This rather disturbing end to the dialogue points forward to Socrates' ultimate failure to reform Charmides.<sup>10</sup>

### Oscar Wilde's *Charmides*

Let us begin our study of the reception of *Charmides* with the least thorough-going and ambitious engagement with this Platonic text: Oscar Wilde's 666-line poem, *Charmides* (published in *Poems*, 1881). The poem describes how a 'Grecian lad' travels to Athens and spends the night in the Parthenon, where he undresses and ravishes the statue of Athena; later, in anger, the goddess causes him to drown at sea. His body is cast up on a shore, where a wood-nymph falls in love with it, but she herself is slain by Athena. Finally, the two dead lovers are passionately united in Hades.

The main inspiration for Wilde's plot is the story told briefly in pseudo-Lucian, *Amores* (Ἐρωτεῖς) 15–16, of a young man who falls so in love with the naked statue of Aphrodite of Cnidus by Praxiteles that he hides in her temple overnight, ejaculates on the statue, and later throws himself off a cliff or into the sea.<sup>11</sup> But Wilde has complicated this story of excessive and transgressive

<sup>8</sup> See Scott 2000: 4–5. Cf. also the reversal of roles in Socrates' meeting with Theodote in Xen. *Mem.* 3.10, with Goldhill 1988: 113–24.

<sup>9</sup> Davies 1971: 330–1; Nails 2002: 90–4; Moore and Raymand 2019: xxiv–xxvii; cf. Tuozzo 2011: 53–5, 86–90. On the political content of the *Charmides*, see Tuozzo 2011: 52–98; Danzig 2013. For the evidence on Charmides, see also Traill 1994–2012: 987975. He was an uncle of Plato.

<sup>10</sup> On this aspect, see Tuozzo 2011: 298–303; Danzig 2013. Compare the *Alcibiades* 1, where Socrates' ultimate failure to reform Alcibiades must be in the reader's mind from the start, and which ends with Socrates declaring that he fears that the strength of the city will 'master' (κρατήσῃ) them both (135e).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Squire 2011: 97–100. Wilde was probably not inspired by the story of Pygmalion, whose statue turned to female flesh to allow him to make love to it (Ov. *Met.* 10.243–97); Wilde's Athena remains hard and cold, even when undressed: he 'kissed / Her pale and

heterosexual desire by transforming the statue from one of Aphrodite into one of Athena. Wilde's hero's actions thus become more transgressive, as they involve undressing and assaulting a goddess famous for her rejection of sex.<sup>12</sup>

But what of engagement with the *Charmides*? Readers who know Plato's *Charmides*, or who simply remember Alcibiades' reference in Plato's *Symposium* to Charmides as another beautiful young man whom Socrates had once loved (*Symp.* 222b), will be alerted by the title to the fact that Wilde's poem concerns a beautiful youth, and will not be surprised that the tone is suffused with erotic tension.<sup>13</sup> However, Wilde's *Charmides* is initially the subject of erotic desire, not its object; whereas in Plato, Charmides' admirers' gaze objectified him 'as though he were a statue', in Wilde Charmides gazes on and ravishes an actual statue. But by the end of the poem, Charmides has become a completely passive object of desire: when the nymph finally lies with him, it is with his dead body. Wilde thus takes Plato's notion of Charmides as an object of desire to an extreme; he has gone from being likened to a statue in the gaze of others in Plato, to making love to an unresponsive statue, to being the ultimate passive love object: a lifeless corpse.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the homoerotic content of the Platonic text is not reproduced directly. Desire here – at least desire articulated in the plot – is heterosexual: Charmides desires Athena's statue, and later a wood nymph desires him. But the homoerotic tone of Plato's *Charmides*, and the sense of him as passive object of male desire, is not entirely absent. From the start Charmides' beauty is emphasized, and the imagined gaze of the reader is, as in Plato,

argent body undisturbed, / And paddled with the polished throat, and pressed / His hot and beating heart upon her chill and icy breast' (123–6).

<sup>12</sup> As the poem makes clear: 'That calm wide brow, that terrible maidenhood, / The marvel of that pitiless chastity . . . the secret mystery / Which to no lover will Athena show' (93–4, 106–7). Compare Winkelmann's discussion of the Athena Farnese ('the image of virginal chastity, stripped of all feminine weakness') in Potts 1994: 132–5.

<sup>13</sup> Apart from the title, however, the name Charmides is repeated only once, immediately after his death ('And no man dared to speak of Charmides / Deeming that he some evil thing had wrought', 283–4). We are also told shortly after this, as his body is borne by the sea towards the shore, that he was in fact an Athenian (295).

<sup>14</sup> Wilde's vision, which draws not only on Victorian aesthetics of the beautiful classical male youth, but also on the Victorian cult of the dead youth, thus combines heterosexual and homosexual desire, agalmatophilia and necrophilia.

directed towards his body (esp. 1–24). Furthermore, after he flees from the acropolis, woodmen, amazed at his beauty, mistake him for Hylas, or Narcissus or Dionysus (173–86). It was common for artists and writers in the late nineteenth century to use classical themes and settings, and especially the image of the beautiful, often naked, classical youth, as represented in statues, to allow themselves to allude to homosexual desire – at a time when homosexuality was illegal in England and punished severely.<sup>15</sup> Many of Wilde's readers, already aware of his own reputation, may have read the emphasis on Charmides' beauty in this way. Readers who recognized the name Charmides and thought of the Platonic text, will have been encouraged in this reading.

But the engagement with the Platonic text goes no further:<sup>16</sup> there are no verbal similarities, no other similarities of plot or theme; the philosophical content of Plato's *Charmides*, furthermore, is completely absent. Indeed, it is doubtful whether there is much further interpretative pay-off for the reader who actually knows the *Charmides*, beyond its erotic tone and the fact that Charmides was a beautiful male youth mentioned by Plato and desired by the men who saw him. Wilde had similarly alluded to Charmides when, in a review of Spencer Stanhope's painting 'Love and the Maiden', he commented, 'His boyish beauty is of that peculiar type unknown in northern Europe, but common in the Greek islands, where boys can still be found as beautiful as the Charmides of Plato'.<sup>17</sup> In that case, Wilde is more explicit that it is

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Potts 1994, esp. 118–44; Squire 2011: 16–23; Papanikolaou 2014: 280–1.

<sup>16</sup> It is possible that a reader determined to find allusions to Plato's *Charmides* might see in the mental pain of Wilde's young man as he caresses Athena's naked statue ('It was as if Numidian javelins / Pierced through and through his wild and whirling brain', 127–8) a hint at Plato's *Charmides*' headache (155b); in the mention of wrestling (205–8) a hint at the setting of Plato's *Charmides* at a wrestling school; or in the description of the hero as 'a profaner of great Mysteries' (266) some reference to Alcibiades' and possibly Charmides' involvement in the Mysteries affair in 415 (see below, n. 56) – though the reference there is primarily to his violation of the 'mysteries' of Athena's body (105–8).

<sup>17</sup> Wilde 1877: 121 (= repr. 1908: 12). Wilde also mentions Charmides as a symbol of the beautiful Greek youth in his essay of 1891, 'The Critic as Artist' (Ross 2013: 136), and in his short story, written around the same time (though published in full only in 1921), 'Portrait of Mr W. H.', in which it is again on a dead Charmides that he focuses: 'His [W. H.'s] true tomb, as Shakespeare saw, was the poet's verse, his true monument the permanence of the drama. So had it been with others whose beauty had given a new

the Platonic *Charmides* that he had in mind. But in both cases, the allusion seems limited only to *Charmides*' beauty, youth and sexual desirability.<sup>18</sup>

### Cavafy 'In a Town of Osroene'

I have started with Wilde because his use of Plato's *Charmides* provides us with a baseline for a fairly minimal intertextual engagement, against which we can set the two other examples.<sup>19</sup> As we have seen, although Wilde exploits the erotic associations which the name *Charmides* would bring to mind, there is little engagement with the text of Plato, or with its philosophical ideas, and the homoerotic tone is muted. Let us now turn to another poem, this time much shorter (a mere eight lines), which alludes also to *Charmides* but where the allusion is more central and carries a heavier weight of meaning: Cavafy's 'In a town of Osroene' (Ἐν πόλει τῆς Ὀσροηνῆς), written some thirty-five years after Wilde's piece.

The poem is set, as so many of Cavafy's poems, at some unspecified time in the Hellenistic or Roman period, out on the eastern frontiers of the Hellenic world:

Ἄπ' τῆς ταβέρνας τὸν καυγᾶ μᾶς φέραν πληγωμένο  
τὸν φίλον Ῥέμωνα χθὲς περὶ τὰ μεσάνυχτα.  
Ἄπ' τὰ παράθυρα ποὺ ἀφίσαμεν ὀλάνυχτα,<sup>20</sup>  
τ' ὡραῖο του σῶμα στὸ κρεββάτι φώτιζε ἡ σελήνη.  
Εἴμεθα ἔνα κρᾶμα ἐδῶ· Σύροι, Γραικοί, Ἀρμένιοι, Μῆδοι.  
Τέτοιος κι ὁ Ῥέμων εἶναι. Ὁμως χθὲς σὰν φώτιζε  
τὸ ἐρωτικό του πρόσωπο ἡ σελήνη,  
ό νοῦς μας πῆγε στὸν πλατωνικὸ Χαρμίδη.

creative impulse to their age . . . Antinous lives in sculpture, and *Charmides* in philosophy' (Wilde 1970: 348 and 209).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. also the Rev. St John Tyrwhitt's remark in 1877 on 'Charmides and the divine youths whose beauties he [John Addington Symonds] appreciates so thoroughly' (Ross 2013: 35).

<sup>19</sup> I refer specifically to engagement with Plato's *Charmides*: Wilde certainly has other texts in mind, especially Keats' *Lamia* and *Endymion*: Ross 2008: 451–9, 2013: 67–76.

<sup>20</sup> Written ὀλάνυχτα ('all night', a neologism) in Cavafy's last two printings of the poem: see Hirst 2007: xxxviii, 2009: 161. Hirst prints ὀλάνυχτα in the OUP edition (2007), but Sachperoglou's facing translation has 'wide open'.

From the brawl in the taverna, they brought us wounded  
 our friend Remon, yesterday about midnight.  
 From the windows which we left wide-open  
 his beautiful body on the bed was illuminated by the moon.  
 We are a mixture here: Syrians, Greeks, Armenians, Medes.  
 Such is Remon too. Last night, though, when  
 his sensuous face was illuminated by the moon,  
 our mind went to the Platonic *Charmides*.

A beautiful young man, Remon, a friend of the speaker, is brought home, injured, from a fight in a taverna. It is not clear whether he is to be thought of as dead or simply hurt, but his body is presented as motionless, speechless, an object of his friends' gaze. As the moonlight, shining through the open window, lit up his body and face, 'our mind', says the narrator, 'went to the Platonic *Charmides*'.<sup>21</sup>

When this poem was composed in 1916 it bore the same title as Oscar Wilde's: 'Charmides' (Χαρμίδης). Indeed, Cavafy, who knew Wilde's work well,<sup>22</sup> had almost certainly read Wilde's poem.<sup>23</sup> But a year later, in its first printed version of 1917,<sup>24</sup> the title was changed to 'In a town of Osroene', which it bore in all subsequent printings.<sup>25</sup> The decision to rename the poem for its first printed form, which may have been partly motivated by a desire to avoid Wilde's title, provides readers from the start

<sup>21</sup> The poem is discussed in Kokolis 2000: 295–6; Pieris 2000a: 306–7; Zamarou 2005: 43–9; Phillipson 2013: 87–96; Papanikolaou 2014: 273–91; Skordi 2018: 50–4. It is possible that it inspired Napoleon Lapathiotis to use the pseudonym Πλάτων Χαρμίδης for his eleven parodic pieces 'À la manière de ...', published together in 1938–9 but begun much earlier, the first of which (1924) parodies Cavafy: Vogiatzoglou 2011: 241.

<sup>22</sup> For Cavafy's knowledge of Wilde, see Malanos 1957: 133–6; Ekdawi 1993; Boyiopoulos 2012; cf. Jeffreys 2006. His library contained a French translation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Karampini-Iatrou 2003: 112). Compare e.g. 'Kaisarion' (Καισαρίων), written in 1914 and printed in 1918, where the young prince appears to the poet late at night as he reads a book of inscriptions, with Wilde's description in 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' (1958: 34), of how he imagined that the fictional 'Willie Hughes', a beautiful Elizabethan boy-actor, used to appear to him in his rooms as he read Shakespeare's sonnets (Ekdawi 1993: 298).

<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps worth pointing out that Cavafy spent part of his childhood in Liverpool and London and was fluent in English; his first poetic compositions were in English, and he spoke Greek with a slight English accent. Cf. Malanos 1957: 14; Liddell 1974: 25–7; 104; Faubillon 2003: 51; Jeffreys 2006: 58–61, and 79 n. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Savvidis 1991: 159. On Cavafy's method of distributing his poems, see Jusdanis 1987: 58–63; Savvidis 1991: 14–15; Papanikolaou 2005: 243–4, 2014: 182–6.

<sup>25</sup> The title of this poem may have been inspired by the phrase Βάτναι, πόλις τῆς Ὀσροηνῆς in Herodian, *De prosodia catholica* 3.1, p. 326 and 3.2, p. 872 Lentz, and in Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnica* 2.57 Billerbeck.

with some geographic, though not much chronological, specificity: Osroene was an area in northern Mesopotamia, including Edessa. It was a Roman province (Osrhoena) for at least parts of the late second and early third centuries AD, and otherwise formed a buffer between the Roman Empire and Parthia; it was conquered by the Arabs in AD 638, which probably provides a *terminus ante quem* for the setting of the poem.<sup>26</sup>

However, the renaming of the poem, and the removing of ‘Charmides’ from the title, also has an important ‘literary’ effect. The explicit mention of the Platonic text is now delayed until the last line; it is thus only when the reader reaches the end of the poem that he or she is invited to think of Plato’s *Charmides*. Wilde’s naming of Charmides in the title had run the risk of producing a disappointing frustration of expectations, as readers alert to the potential of the intertext to endow the poem with meaning may have sought in vain for such significance, beyond the erotic tone and the fact that the protagonist is to be seen as a beautiful love-object. In Cavafy, on the other hand, the delay of the name aligns the reader’s reactions with the ‘we’ of the poem.

This alignment of reader and narrator is reinforced by the language of the poem. The vocabulary of the first lines mirrors the ‘popular’ setting: ταβέρνα, καυγᾶς, ὀλάνοιχτα are all words of a prosaic, non-elevated tone,<sup>27</sup> as is probably Γραικοί (rather than “Ελληνες or ‘Ελληνικοί”):<sup>28</sup> the world created here is not an idealized Hellenic one, but a down-to-earth world of tavernas and fist fights, a world in fact familiar from many of Cavafy’s non-historical poems.<sup>29</sup> Even as the sixth line begins, with ‘Such’ (Τέτοιος), the tone is still prosaic.<sup>30</sup> But at the moment when Remon’s group of

<sup>26</sup> See Wagner 1983.

<sup>27</sup> Zamarou 2005: 48.

<sup>28</sup> Cavafy normally uses the term “Ελλην/Ελληνικός; the use of Γραικός here (and in ‘In church’ (Στὴν ἐκκλησία), ‘Theophilus Palaeologus’ (Θεόφιλος Παλαιολόγος) and ‘Taken’ (Πάρθεν)) is marked. Cf. his statement to Stratis Tsirkas, Εἴμαι κι ἐγώ Έλληνικός. Προσοχή, δχι “Ελλην, ούτε Έλληνίζων, ἀλλὰ Έλληνικός. See Keeley 1976: 109.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. ‘At the entrance of the kafeneion’ (Στοῦ καφενείου τὴν εἴσοδο), ‘The next table’ (Τὸ διπλανὸ τραπέζι), or ‘One night’ (Μία νύχτα). Cf. Kappler 2000 on the lexical register in such poems.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Papanikolaou 2014: 275–80, who suggests that τέτοιος, sometimes used as a slang term for gay, might strengthen the homoerotic atmosphere of the scene; cf. Babiniotis 1998 s.v. 4.

friends, looking at his beautiful body in the moonlight, think of Plato's *Charmides*, so at that moment, in the last line of the poem, the reader too is invited to think of the *Charmides* of Plato, and to reassess the poem in that light. The reader, that is, who has not been primed by a title or anything in the poem until this point, experiences that same sense of recognition as Remon's grieving friends did.<sup>31</sup>

Through this brief, explicit citation, then, the reader's mind too goes to Plato's *Charmides*, both the text of that name and the young man who appears in it. The effect is that the reader brings to his or her image of Remon all the attributes which *Charmides* had in Plato: his beauty, of course, and the fact that he was courted by many admirers, but also his intelligence and his interest in matters philosophical. The allusion also suggests something about the narrator's relationship with or attitude to Remon: that of an older man, perhaps, who desires Remon's intellectual development, if we see the narrator as playing the role of Socrates, but also strongly attracted by him (*Chrm.* 155d). It also reinforces the homoerotic tone here: the gaze of Remon's friends is, like the gaze of Socrates and other spectators, and of *Charmides'* classmates, erotically charged. Just as *Charmides'* friends looked at him 'as though he were a statue' (πάντες ὥσπερ ἄγαλμα ἔθεῶντο αὐτόν, 154c), so Remon's friends gaze at his apparently motionless body lying on a bed;<sup>32</sup> the objectification of Remon as the recipient of the erotic gaze of his male friends is reinforced in Cavafy by the fact that he never speaks.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Cavafy's decision to present a motionless, and perhaps dead, *Charmides*, rather than the very much alive *Charmides* of Plato, emphasizes the passivity of his young man, who is the passive object not only of desire but also of affection from his admiring friends. Wilde too had ended his poem

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Zamarou 2005: 43–5, 48–9; Skordi 2018: 51–4.

<sup>32</sup> The mention of the bed adds to the erotic atmosphere of the scene and suggests the desire felt by the 'we' of the poem: beds are places where dead bodies are laid out, or the injured tended, but also of sex and desire. Compare 'From the windows . . . his beautiful body on the bed was illuminated by the moon' with the obviously erotic poem 'Afternoon sun': 'By the window was the bed, where we made love so many times . . . the afternoon sun used to reach it half way' (Πλάσι στὸ παράθυρο ἦταν τὸ κρεββάτι ποῦ ἀγαπηθήκαμε τόσες φορές . . . ὁ ἥλιος τοῦ ἀπογεύματος τῶφθανε ὡς τὰ μισά).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Papanikolaou 2014: 281–3.

with the dead body of Charmides being desired; but whereas in Wilde the tone was tortured and unfulfilled, in Cavafy the prone young man is surrounded by loving friends.

The allusion also suggests something about the society imagined in this poem: the mixed world of Syrians, Greeks, Armenians and Medes, out on the frontier. The fact that Remon's name is not Greek in origin, but Coptic (Egyptian Christian), makes him emblematic of the cultural mix brought out here, as the narrator stresses ('Such is Remon too'). Readers might think of all those other poems of Cavafy which dramatize a multicultural world,<sup>34</sup> or where individuals or populations struggle to maintain or demonstrate their Greekness in their distant outposts.<sup>35</sup> But this is still a world in which Plato was a living point of reference, where one's mind *did* go to Plato's Charmides when one thought of a beautiful young man's body and face.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the movement from the face and body of a particular beautiful young man to an idealized, intellectualized beauty is itself very Platonic, as expressed most memorably in Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* (esp. 210a–211e), where she talks of 'ascending' from loving a single beautiful body, to beautiful bodies in general, then to beautiful souls and beautiful ideas, to finally beauty itself. Both Remon's friends and the reader, at the mention of Plato's Charmides in the last line of the poem, take a small step on this Platonic ascent. Thus what began as a tale of the bloody aftermath of a fight in a taverna is transformed into a reverie, an ethereal dreamlike, moonlit vision of idealized Platonic beauty, and of idealized 'philosophical' love.

Indeed, the allusion to Plato functions not only to transform Remon into Charmides, but to transform this group of young men, in their upstairs room, united in their love for Remon and in their thoughts of Plato, into a Platonic gathering, the sort of idealized society that Plato pictures around Socrates. Might their

<sup>34</sup> See the papers in Pieris 2000b.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. 'Orophernes' (Ὀροφέρνης), 'Philhellene' (Φιλέλλην), 'Tomb of the grammarian Lysias' (Λυσίου γραμματικοῦ τάφος), 'That is the man' (Οὗτος ἐκεῖνος), 'For Ammones, who died aged 29, in 610' (Γιὰ τὸν Ἀμμόνη, που πέθανε 29 ἔτῶν, στὰ 610), 'Epitaph of Antiochus, King of Commagene' (Ἐπιτύμβιον Ἀντιόχου, βασιλέως Κομμαγηνῆς); 'Posidonians' (Ποσειδωνιάται); 'Going back home from Greece' (Ἐπάνοδος ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλλάδα). Cf. Keeley 1976: 103–31; Kokkori 1993.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Zamarou 2005: 47–8; Sturges 2005: 1–2, 4.

discussions, their parties, have been as philosophical as those in Plato? Or, to put it another way, might we not imagine the symposia, the gatherings at gymnasia and private houses, the conversations while walking that we read about in Plato as like *this* society?<sup>37</sup> Indeed, might we see in Remon and his friends not a pale imitation of a Platonic coterie, but a more real incarnation of it – in this defiantly non-classical, ethnically mixed group of young men who frequented tavernas and got into fights, and who loved each other, who loved their comrade's *body* – more real than might be found in the classicizing fantasies common in the art and literature of the time?<sup>38</sup> Might not their appreciation of beauty, and temperance, and virtue, be as philosophical, as wise as in Plato? In posing these questions, Cavafy's invocation of Plato's *Charmides* elevates this group, whose sexuality would have placed them outside the bounds of contemporary society, into an ideal.

But the allusion to Plato's *Charmides* might also leave readers with a doubt. The real Charmides son of Glaucon had later been deeply involved in the oligarchic regime of 404–403. Indeed, as we have seen, the rather disturbing end of Plato's text, in which Socrates accuses Charmides of intending to use 'force' (βίάσης ἄρα), which Charmides admits, hints at their later violent actions. Perhaps the fight in which Remon was wounded was political, too – or is the point that it was not, that political struggles *do not* happen, in that outpost beyond the Euphrates?

That all these trains of thought can be activated by the brief mention of the Platonic original shows both its effectiveness and its extreme economy. It is worth making four final points about the Cavafian use of the Platonic intertext. First, the allusion is *explicit*: that is, although the revised title gives nothing away, the last line of the poem not only mentions the Platonic text and/or the character after whom it is named, but also provides readers with a model, an exemplar, in the form of the thoughts of that mixed group of Remon's friends, that they too should have Plato's

<sup>37</sup> Pieris 2000a: 306–7; Skordi 2018: 53–4.

<sup>38</sup> It is relevant here that Cavafy's vision of the Greek past is almost entirely Hellenistic and Byzantine: very few poems are set in the classical period, a feature which sets him apart from other writers, Greek and non-Greek, of his period.

*Charmides* in mind. Secondly, despite the centrality of the *Charmides* to this poem, there are no clear verbal echoes of the Platonic intertext itself, nothing in the language of the poem which is reminiscent of, or alludes to, particular passages or lines of the Platonic text.<sup>39</sup> Even ‘our mind went to’ is less direct than it might have been: contrast the ending of the earlier ‘Sculptor of Tyana’ (Τυανεὺς γλύπτης), with its invocation of Platonic forms: ‘It was this one I was dreaming of, when *my mind was ascending to the ideal* (ό νοῦς μου ἀνέβαινε στὰ ἴδαινικά)’.<sup>40</sup> Thirdly, the reader’s understanding of the poem is, as we have seen, broadened and enriched by the knowledge of the Platonic text which he or she brings to it.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the allusion *activates* the readers’ pre-existing knowledge of Plato’s *Charmides*, which then in turn enriches their interpretation of Cavafy’s poem.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, the eroticism of this poem is implied rather than stated, and in this the mention of both Plato and specifically Plato’s *Charmides* is central. Whereas for Wilde the mention of *Charmides* was deployed simply to evoke a beautiful ‘Classical’ youth, with hints at his desirableness to men as well as women, for Cavafy, *Charmides* evokes a specifically homosexual love. In Cavafy’s Alexandria, although his sexuality was something of an open secret, homosexuality was both illegal and considered by most of society to be disgraceful. Cavafy himself was the subject of vitriolic attacks in the press because of his sexuality;<sup>43</sup> he certainly knew of Oscar Wilde’s arrest and trial in 1895, and the two years’ imprisonment to which he was condemned and from which he never recovered, dying a mere three years later in 1900. Cavafy referred to the need to hide the homoerotic elements in several poems, such as ‘When they are roused’

<sup>39</sup> Contrast e.g. Vizyenos, who includes verbal echoes of the *Phaedrus* in his short story ‘The consequences of the old story’ (Αἱ συνέπειαι τῆς παλαιᾶς ἱστορίας, published 1884): see Kalligas 2011. Also the influence of Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* in Sikelianos’ erotic poems: see Skordi 2018: 63–79.

<sup>40</sup> Skordi 2018: 53–4, 73–4. ‘Sculptor of Tyana’ was written in 1893, rewritten in 1903 and published in 1911: Savvidis 1991: 141.

<sup>41</sup> For references and allusions to Plato in Cavafy more generally, see Zamarou 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Of course, many real readers of Cavafy may never have heard of, let alone read, Plato’s *Charmides*, and for them the effect of the (explicit) allusion is more limited, but still profound.

<sup>43</sup> Papanikolaou 2005: 243, 2014: 182–3, 202–3.

## 7 The Reception of Plato's *Charmides* in Wilde, Cavafy, and Plutarch

(‘Οταν διεγείρονται), which was printed in 1916.<sup>44</sup> His reference to Plato's *Charmides* one year later in his 'In a town of Osroene' allowed him to discuss homoerotic love without having to state it openly.<sup>45</sup>

### Plutarch's *Alcibiades*

Let us now turn from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to antiquity, and to the presence of the *Charmides* in Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades*. Here, as we shall see, the invitation to the reader to think of the Platonic *Charmides* is implicit rather than explicit and relies instead on the reader's ability to recognize close verbal echoing, of a type not seen in either Wilde or Cavafy. Furthermore, Plutarch's approach to the erotic and philosophical elements in the *Charmides* is rather different from theirs. Plutarch does not use the *Charmides* as a means to hint at or sanction homoerotic love. On the contrary, while he evokes the setting of the *Charmides* and some of its language in order to call to mind the way in which Socrates approached young men with an educational aim in mind, he denies explicitly that Socrates was motivated at all by sexual desire for such youths. Socrates' *erōs* is thus stripped of its sexual content. In removing the sexual element from Socrates' motivations in approaching young men, Plutarch integrates the picture of Socrates in the *Charmides* with that in other Platonic texts: as we shall see, the allusions to the *Charmides* form part of a web of allusions to other Platonic texts which set Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades in the context of an idealizing and philosophical love which aims solely at the moral and intellectual education of the beloved. In so doing, Plutarch 'corrects' Plato with Plato.

Plutarch deals with Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades in chs. 4–7 of his *Life*. He draws heavily here on two Platonic works

<sup>44</sup> 'Try to keep them, poet, however few of them can be contained: the visions of your eroticism. Put them, half-hidden, in your phrases. Try to hold them back, poet, when they are roused within your mind, at night, or in the blaze of noon' (trans. Sachperoglou, adapted). The poem was written in 1913 (Savvidis 1991: 162); on it, see Papanikolaou 2005: 242–3; 2014: 181–3.

<sup>45</sup> On Cavafy's caution in expressing homosexual desire or activity explicitly in his own voice, see e.g. Keeley 1976: 45–73, 204; Papanikolaou 2005, 2014: 159–214.

in which Alcibiades plays a prominent role: the *First Alcibiades*<sup>46</sup> and the *Symposium*.<sup>47</sup> In fact, while the *Alcibiades* and the *Symposium* clearly function as sources here, to talk of them simply as sources is to underestimate their importance: numerous allusions are made to both texts, and Plutarch's readers are plainly meant to have in mind the relationship of Alcibiades and Socrates which is sketched out in them.<sup>48</sup> The *First Alcibiades* is a dialogue between Socrates and the young Alcibiades; in it Socrates notes Alcibiades' rejection of other lovers, declares himself the only true lover of Alcibiades, but insists that his interest is in his soul not his body (131c–132a), and tries to convince him of how unprepared he is for public life. This provides the basic scenario which Plutarch assumes in *Alc.* 4–7, though in Plutarch, unlike in Plato, Alcibiades' other lovers are still very much a presence, competing with Socrates for his affection. Also heavily exploited is Alcibiades' speech about Socrates in the *Symposium* (215a–222b), where he declares his love for Socrates and describes his failed attempt to seduce him and his shame and confusion in Socrates' presence,<sup>49</sup> and ends by comparing Socrates' treatment of him to his treatment of other young men, including Charmides (222b).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Pace Roskam 2012: 99. I take no position here on the question of the authenticity of the *First Alcibiades* (on which see e.g. Pradeau 1999: 24–9 and 219–20; Denyer 2001: 14–26; Gribble 1999: 260–2; Smith 2004; Benitez 2012). For present purposes it is enough that it was considered Platonic in Plutarch's period.

<sup>47</sup> I have discussed the use of Plato in the *Alcibiades* in Duff 1999: 224–7, 2009, 2011, and 2020. Other discussions include Russell 1966: 40–1 (= repr. 1995: 196–7), 1973: 127; Pelling 1996: xlvii–xlix, 2005: 116–25; Gribble 1999: 270–6, and, on the use made of both Plato and other Socratic writers, Alesse 2004–5.

<sup>48</sup> Jones (1916), in his catalogue of 'Platonic quotation and reminiscence' (107) in Plutarch, and Helmbold and O'Neil (1959), in their study of Plutarch's quotations, note for the *Alcibiades* only the quotation at 4.4 (*Phdr.* 255d) and the allusions at 1.3 (*Alc.* 1.122b), 6.1 (*Symp.* 215e) and 7.3–5 (220f–221b). Verdegem (2010), in his discussion of *Alc.* 4–7, does not notice the allusions to *Charmides*, *Lysis* or *Phaedrus*' speech from the *Symposium*. Only one allusion to *Charmides* has been noticed by scholars in all of Plutarch's works: see above n. 1.

<sup>49</sup> On Plutarch's use of the *Symposium* at *Alc.* 4–7, see Duff 1999: 216–18 and esp. 2009. Some of the material is repeated in *Amat.* 762b–f, *De audiendo* 46c–47b and *Quomodo adul.* 66a–b, all of which also draw heavily on the *Symposium*. See Duff 2011: 28 n. 6. For analysis of how such clusters of similar elements in several different Plutarchan texts might be explained, see Van der Stockt 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2004, 2004–5; Van Meirvenne 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Another Platonic intertext of great importance for Plutarch's *Alcibiades* 4–7 is the *Republic*, especially book 6: see Duff 2011: 32–7 and 39–40. Cf. also the allusion in

Plutarch begins his analysis of Alcibiades' relationship with Socrates by noting the stiff competition that raged for Alcibiades' attention between Socrates and Alcibiades' other, less high-minded admirers:

"Ηδη δὲ πολλῶν καὶ γενναίων ἀθροιζομένων καὶ περιεπόντων, οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι καταφανεῖς ἦσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν λαμπρότητα τῆς ὥρας ἐκπεπληγμένοι καὶ θεραπεύοντες, δὲ δὲ Σωκράτους ἔρως μέγα μαρτύριον ἦν τῆς πρὸς ἀρετὴν εύφυΐας τοῦ παιδός, ἦν ἐμφαινομένην τῷ εἶδει καὶ διαλάμπουσαν ἐνορῶν.

Already many noble men were gathering around and courting him. The others were clearly astounded by the radiance of his youthful beauty and cultivated him, but the love of Socrates was great testimony of the boy's potential for virtue, which Socrates could discern hinted at in his appearance and shining through. (*Alc.* 4.1)

We are plainly meant to have in mind here the opening of the *First Alcibiades*, where Socrates comments on Alcibiades' 'other lovers' (οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι δι' ὅχλου ἐγένοντό σοι διαλεγόμενοι . . . πολλῶν γὰρ γενομένων καὶ μεγαλοφρόνων); as he explains there, Alcibiades spurned them all (103a–b).<sup>51</sup> But Plutarch states explicitly here what is implicit there: that Socrates could discern Alcibiades' 'potential for virtue' (εύφυΐα). Indeed, the fact that Socrates loved Alcibiades<sup>52</sup> is used by Plutarch not as evidence of Alcibiades' beauty, still less of Socrates' sexual desire for him, but as evidence of Alcibiades' moral potential, since Socrates was not, as Plato has him declare in *Alc.* 1.131e, attracted by his looks.<sup>53</sup>

But the description of the crowd of Alcibiades' admirers, and their astonishment at his beauty, also echoes the start of Plato's *Charmides*. As we have seen, there Socrates describes how, when the young Charmides entered a *palaestra* where Socrates and his

<sup>51</sup> *Alc.* 34.7 to *Grg.* 492c, noted by Russell 1973: 127, 1983: 124; Gribble 1999: 275; Duff 2003: 98–9.

<sup>52</sup> Gribble 1999: 272.

<sup>53</sup> But, as Pelling 2005: 117–19 points out, while it is natural to take ὁ . . . Σωκράτους ἔρως as Socrates' love for Alcibiades, readers who remember the role reversal in the *Symposium* may think also of Alcibiades' love for him too, which Plutarch discusses at 4.4 and which also demonstrates Alcibiades' good nature; cf. Socrates' complaint in *Symp.* 213c about ὁ τούτου ἔρως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, which is similarly ambiguous.

Cf. also Aeschines Soc. *Alc.* fr. 11c Dittmar = VI A 53.5–6, 27 Giannantoni; Xen. *Mem.* 4.1.2, *Symp.* 8.1–42; Pl. *Prt.* 309c. In *Symp.*, Plato dramatizes, by means of Alcibiades' own story of his failed seduction of Socrates (217a–219c), the notion that Socrates' love of Alcibiades had as its goal Alcibiades' education rather than his body.

friends were sitting, all seemed to be in love with him (οἱ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι πάντες ἐρᾶν ἔμοιγε ἐδόκουν αὐτοῦ), as they were so struck by his beauty (ἐκπεπληγμένοι τε καὶ τεθορυβημένοι); many other lovers preceded and followed him as he walked (πολλοὶ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι ἐρασταὶ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὅπισθεν εἴποντο, 154c). Charmides' admirers wax lyrical about the boy's beautiful body, but Socrates wonders whether he is also well endowed by nature (εὖ πεφυκώς) in his soul (154e). Socrates then engages him in philosophical conversation, to which Charmides responds enthusiastically.

The allusion suggests a parallel between Alcibiades and Charmides and reinforces the notion of Alcibiades' youth and beauty, but also his good nature – though the accusations of his promiscuity and violence as a boy, reported in *Alc.* 3.1–2, have already suggested that Alcibiades' 'potential for virtue' is not fully realized. The crowd of admirers which surrounds Charmides, and the discussion among Socrates' friends of the beauty of his face and body, provide a vivid template for how we might imagine the interest shown in Alcibiades by his lovers. The parallel also suggests the kind of educational relationship that Socrates developed with Alcibiades. In the *Charmides*, while others focus on Charmides' looks alone, Socrates addresses him in a kindly and serious way, helping him to take his first steps in philosophy, as he gets a taste of Socrates' method of interrogation, and thus wins his devotion (176b). So, it is implied, did Socrates behave with Alcibiades and with such natural intellectual curiosity did Alcibiades respond.

The parallel set up here between Alcibiades and Charmides has another function. Readers of Plato and of Plutarch may have been aware that Charmides, like his uncle Critias, as we have already mentioned, also went on to be involved in the oligarchy of 404–403.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the *Charmides* had ended with hints at this later history. The issue of Alcibiades' attitude towards democracy had been central to contemporary presentations of him (e.g. Aristoph. *Frogs* 1422–32; Thuc. 6.15.4) and the later literary tradition.<sup>55</sup> It is also a recurrent theme throughout the Life (e.g.

<sup>54</sup> See above, p. 171.

<sup>55</sup> See especially Gribble 1999; also Seager 1967.

16.2–3, 7–9); he is implicated in the oligarchic coup of 411 (25.5–6, 26.1), though he manages to switch to the (winning) democratic side when it suits him; his second exile is precipitated by popular fear that that he might have wanted to overthrow the constitution and establish himself as tyrant (34.7–35.1). The allusion to *Charmides* here raises that question early in the Life: will Alcibiades turn out the same way?<sup>56</sup>

But there is a difference: in the *Charmides*, Socrates shares the general interest in Charmides' body; indeed he himself admits his intense sexual desire for Charmides, when he sees inside his *himation* (155d), though he makes clear at the same time that he is interested in his soul more than in his body (esp. 154e). However, the notion that Socrates was sexually attracted to the young men in his circle was, by Plutarch's time, something of a problem for those who wished to defend and promote his works; the *Charmides* in particular, set at a wrestling school where men admire youths and chat about what they look like naked, and with its frank admission of Socrates' sexual arousal at the sight of Charmides, was a particular challenge for later Platonists.<sup>57</sup> Plutarch's strategy in what follows is to deny that Socrates was motivated at all by sexual desire, and to neutralize the sexual

<sup>56</sup> There is also another reason to link Alcibiades and Charmides: both would be accused of involvement in the profanation of the Mysteries in 415. In fact, according to Andocides, it was in Charmides' house that Alcibiades and others held their profanatory rites, and Charmides, like Alcibiades, went into exile as a result (*On the Mysteries* 16); a passage from Xenophon's *Symposium* (4.31) suggests that Charmides probably, like Alcibiades, had his property confiscated. (That the Charmides mentioned in And. 1.16 is Charmides son of Glaucon, and that the latter's poverty in Xen. *Symp.* 4.31 is a result of the confiscation of his property for involvement in the Mysteries affair, is argued by Wallace 1992.) For readers who recognize it and who remember Charmides' background, the allusion also points forward to Alcibiades' later condemnation for involvement in the Mysteries affair, narrated in *Alc.* 19–21, and reminds us that, for all Socrates' attention and concern for him, Alcibiades, like Charmides, would go his own way.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Dillon 1994, 2003. The Stoics Zeno and Chrysippus insisted that 'erōs is an effort towards the creation of friendship through beauty which shines through, and should not aim at sex (συνουσία) but at friendship' (Diog. Laert. 7.130 = *SVF* 3.716). This tendency to tone down the sexual nature of Socrates' interest in Alcibiades was not universally accepted. Athenaeus puts into the mouth of a certain Masurius an attack on the version of the relationship put forward in the *Symposium*, in which it is Alcibiades who hunts Socrates rather than the other way round. On the contrary, Masurius argues, Socrates was in love (ἔρως) with Alcibiades and was given advice on how to press his suit by Aspasia (219a–220a): see Trapp 2000: 357–61.

element in the *Charmides* by drawing on other Platonic texts which deal with the idealized love of the philosopher for a young man.

Plutarch continues, in a passage dense with allusions to the *Republic*, as well as the *Alcibiades* 1, *Symposium* and *Apology*<sup>58</sup> and including a quotation of a lost play by Phrynicus, to describe Socrates' love for Alcibiades, the dangers posed by his other lovers and the way in which Alcibiades was humbled in Socrates' presence (4.1–4). He sets up a contrast, familiar from the *First Alcibiades*, but already implied in the *Charmides*, between *other* men, whose main interest in brilliant youths such as Charmides or Alcibiades was sexual, and who aimed to corrupt and use them, and Socrates, whose love was philosophical, moral and educational. Sexual desire is now wholly that of the 'other lovers'; Socrates, by contrast, desires to protect (ἀμύνειν, 4.1) him from their corrupting attentions, and his aim is now only the young man's soul.

The most explicit statement of the desexualization of Socrates' love is Plutarch's claim that Alcibiades, in rejecting his other lovers and paying attention to Socrates, 'listened to the words of a lover who was not hunting unmanly pleasure (ἥδονὴν ἀνανδρον) nor begging for kisses and touches, but trying to expose the rottenness of his soul and squeeze his empty and foolish pride' (4.3). The insistence that Socrates was not interested in Alcibiades' body is probably meant to bring to mind Socrates' rebuffing of Alcibiades' sexual advances in the *Symposium*. It also alludes to Socrates' attack on pederastic love in his speech in *Phaedrus* 238e–241d (esp. 239c–d): a conventional lover, Socrates says, will pursue someone used to a 'soft and unmanly way of living' (ἀπαλῆς καὶ ἀνάνδρου διαίτης), and will aim to make him weaker, poorer and more isolated, so he can master him more fully.<sup>59</sup> Socrates' aim, on the contrary, was an educational one: to 'expose' (ἐλέγχοντος) the flaws in Alcibiades' character,

<sup>58</sup> E.g. 4.4, 'He thought that Socrates' activity (πρᾶγμα) was in reality a service of the gods directed towards the care and salvation of the young (εἰς νέων ἐπιμέλειαν εῖναι καὶ σωτηρίαν)', recalling Socrates' own claim about himself in *Ap.* 30a: 'I think that there has never been a greater good in the city than my own service to the god (τὴν ἐμὴν τῷ θεῷ ὑπηρεσίαν)'. Socrates' πρᾶγμα alludes to Pl. *Alc.* 1.104d, *Symp.* 217c. See Duff 2009: 40, 2011: 36–7.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Plut. *Amat.* 749f–750a. See Duff 2009: 39.

a phrase which brings to mind the Socratic *elenchus*, his question-and-answer method of teaching which often resulted in the ignorance of his interlocutor being exposed, as it does in the *Charmides* and *First Alcibiades*.<sup>60</sup> Socrates, for Plutarch, was interested only in educating and protecting such beautiful young men.

### Idealized Philosophical Love: Other Platonic Intertexts in the *Alcibiades*

This notion of an idealized, non-sexual, philosophical love is reinforced by allusion to several other Platonic texts. Alcibiades, Plutarch continues, recognized the beneficial effects of Socrates' interest in him, and was ashamed of his own shortcomings as he admired Socrates' virtue. In fact, he fell in love with Socrates himself: 'he acquired', says Plutarch, 'without realizing it, an image of love, as Plato puts it, which reflects love' (ἐλάνθανεν εἰδωλον ἔρωτος, ὡς φησιν ὁ Πλάτων, ἀντέρωτα κτώμενος, 4.4). This is an explicit quotation of *Phaedrus* 255d.<sup>61</sup> Plato has been discussing the way the true lover will approach the boy he loves, and the effect of his love on the latter. The lover, Plato says, reins in his passions, which are compared to an unruly horse, and approaches his beloved gently (253c–254e). The beloved, seeing that the lover really does love him, yields to him, and as their intimacy grows is astonished at the lover's friendship, and when he looks into the eyes of the lover sees his own beauty reflected. The beloved boy, Plato claims, also falls in love, and 'sees himself in his lover as in a mirror, without being aware of it (λέληθεν)'. He desires his lover, just as his lover desires him, thus 'having an image of love in return for love' (εἰδωλον ἔρωτος ἀντέρωτα ἔχων) (255d) – εἰδωλον here signifying both the literal image of himself that the beloved sees in the lover's eyes, and, metaphorically, the way the beloved now shares the 'image' which the lover has of

<sup>60</sup> Pelling 2005: 118; Duff 2011: 36; Roskam 2012: 89.

<sup>61</sup> On Plutarch's use of this passage here, see Pelling 2005: 118–19; Duff 2011: 38–9. Plutarch uses the same quotation elsewhere: *Ant.* 36.1–2; *De virt. moral.* 445b–c; *De gen.* 588f; *Plat. quaest.* 1008c–d, 1009b; cf. *Galba* 6.4; *De tuenda sanit.* 125b; *De cohib. ira* 453c. See Pelling 1988, on *Ant.* 36.1; Duff 1999: 78–9.

him.<sup>62</sup> Whereas the *Charmides*, like the *First Alcibiades* and *Symposium*, purports to give a record of how Socrates actually approached the beautiful young men with whom he was associated, and how they responded, the *Phaedrus* presents a more abstract or idealized blueprint.<sup>63</sup> By invoking the *Phaedrus* passage here, then, Plutarch assimilates Socrates and Alcibiades' relationship more directly to this idealized type of philosophical and pedagogical love, in which the lover exercises self-control<sup>64</sup> and the beloved loves him in return.<sup>65</sup>

In 4.5–5.5 Plutarch leaves Alcibiades' relationship with Socrates and narrates two anecdotes about his imperious and disdainful behaviour to his 'other lovers'. The setting of one of these anecdotes, a dinner party to which Alcibiades arrives drunk, recalls his arrival in the *Symposium* – though here his behaviour is more outrageous and insulting ('hubristic', as other guests call it). Furthermore, the fact that the host of the party, who loves Alcibiades but whom Alcibiades humiliates, is one Anytus son of Anthemion gives this a much darker tone: Plutarch's readers would know from the *Apology* that Anytus would later be one of Socrates' accusers (*Ap.* 8b, 29b–c, 31a); the implication is that Alcibiades' behaviour may have contributed to Socrates' execution.<sup>66</sup>

Chapter 6 deals again with Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades, and the struggle between him and his 'other lovers' for Alcibiades' attention. The situation is very much that envisaged in the *First Alcibiades*: Alcibiades is talented but prone to arrogance and will enter politics before he is ready; he is attracted to the other lovers more because they play on his ambition than because of the pleasures that they offer. Once more there is a dense

<sup>62</sup> On the popularity of the *Phaedrus* in Plutarch's period, see e.g. Trapp 1990. Plutarch's *Amatorius* is heavily influenced by the *Phaedrus*.

<sup>63</sup> Though, as Dillon 1994 shows, it was the *First Alcibiades* that became the paradigmatic text for how a philosopher should love.

<sup>64</sup> Memory of the image of the unruly horse from *Phaedrus* 253c–254e suggests not the struggle within Alcibiades' soul (Pelling 1996: xlviii) but that Socrates approached him as a philosopher should, that is, with self-control. On this aspect of the picture of love in the *Phaedrus*, see Dillon 2003.

<sup>65</sup> In later Platonist discussions both of these elements were considered central to 'good' philosophical love: Dillon 1994: 388.

<sup>66</sup> Hunter 2004b: 103–4; Duff 2009: 42. The same story is told in *Amat.* 762c–d, where Anytus' role in Socrates' prosecution is mentioned.

## 7 The Reception of Plato's *Charmides* in Wilde, Cavafy, and Plutarch

network of allusions, not only to the *Alcibiades* 1, but also to the *Symposium*, and *Republic*.<sup>67</sup>

Plutarch concludes the chapter with a simile, in which the tough love meted out to Alcibiades by Socrates is compared to the effect of plunging iron heated in the fire into cold water:

ῶσπερ οὖν ὁ σίδηρος ἐν τῷ πυρὶ μαλασσόμενος αὔθις ὑπὸ τοῦ ψυχροῦ πυκνοῦται καὶ σύνεισι τοῖς μορίοις εἰς αὔτόν, οὕτως ἐκεῖνον ὁ Σωκράτης θρύψεως διάπλεων καὶ χαυνότητος ὁσάκις ἀν λάβοι, πιέζων τῷ λόγῳ καὶ συστέλλων ταπεινὸν ἐποίει καὶ ἄτολμον, ἡλίκων ἐνδεής ἐστι καὶ ἀτελής πρὸς ἀρετὴν μανθάνοντα.

So just as iron when softened in the fire condenses again under the operation of cold and its atoms contract, in the same way, every time Socrates took him back, stuffed full of softness and puffed-up conceit (θρύψεως διάπλεων καὶ χαυνότητος),<sup>68</sup> he would squeeze and crush him with reason and make him humble and hesitant (πιέζων τῷ λόγῳ καὶ συστέλλων ταπεινὸν ἐποίει καὶ ἄτολμον). (*Alc.* 6.5)

This is an allusion to Plato's *Lysis*.<sup>69</sup> There Socrates advises Hippothales, the besotted lover of the beautiful aristocratic teenager Lysis son of Democrates, on how he should deal with his favourite. He should not praise him too much, he says, as this will make failing to catch him all the harder to bear; besides, handsome boys, when praised, are filled with arrogance and haughtiness (φρονήματος ἐμπίμπλανται καὶ μεγαλαυχίας, 206a). Socrates then engages Lysis in conversation, as his lover looks on. Through a series of questions, Socrates convinces Lysis of his ignorance, but also inspires him to self-examination. Halfway through the conversation, Socrates can scarcely restrain himself:

καὶ ἐγὼ ἀκούσας αὐτοῦ ἀπέβλεψα πρὸς τὸν Ἰπποθάλη, καὶ ὀλίγου ἐξήμαρτον· ἐπῆλθε γάρ μοι εἰπεῖν ὅτι Οὕτω χρή, ὡς Ἰππόθαλες, τοῖς παιδικοῖς διαλέγεσθαι, ταπεινοῦντα καὶ συστέλλοντα, ἀλλὰ μὴ ὕσπερ σὺ χαυνοῦντα καὶ διαθρύπτοντα.

On hearing him answer this, I glanced at Hippothales, and nearly made a blunder, for it came into my mind to say: 'That is the way you should speak to your *paidika*, Hippothales, humbling and crushing him, instead of puffing him up and softening him, as you do.' (Plato, *Lysis* 210e)

<sup>67</sup> See Duff 2011: 39–40.

<sup>68</sup> An allusion to Pl. *Resp.* 494d, σχηματισμοῦ καὶ φρονήματος κενοῦ ἀνευ νοῦ ἐμπιμπλάμενον, on the effect of flattery on the talented young man.

<sup>69</sup> For discussion of the *Lysis*, see e.g. Sturges 2005: 13–39.

The parallel between Lysis and Alcibiades is neat: both young men have admirers attracted by their beauty; Hippothales sings the praises of Lysis' looks, family, horse-breeding and chariot victories, all attributes of Plutarch's Alcibiades too (cf. *Alc.* 4.1, 10.3, 11.1–3). Both are in danger of being made arrogant by the praise of their lovers; indeed Hippothales' fear that Lysis might be angry with him if he sees him watching him (207b) suggests that the good-natured boy treated some of his lovers with the disdain with which we have seen Alcibiades treating his (4.4–5.5). With both young men, Socrates is interested in their souls rather than in their bodies, and both he challenges intellectually.

The *Lysis*, then, like the *Charmides* and *First Alcibiades*, provides for Plutarch a model for the sort of intellectual conversation that Alcibiades is imagined as getting from Socrates. Lysis is so inspired by his conversation with Socrates that he even invites a young friend to join in (211a); Alcibiades, we are to imagine, was similarly inspired by Socrates. Thus this allusion, like the earlier one to *Charmides*, suggests not just the kind of searching questions that we are to imagine Socrates putting to Alcibiades, but also how fascinated Alcibiades was with Socrates, and how well he responded to the intellectual and moral demands Socrates made of him.<sup>70</sup> The experience may have been humbling, like being plunged into cold water; but Alcibiades appreciated it and kept coming back for more – a testimony to his εὐφυΐα (4.1, 6.1).

We have mentioned, finally, that the *Symposium* is a presence throughout this section of the Life, and allusions and quotations are not hard to find. But Plutarch's use of the *Symposium* is not limited to that part of the text in which Alcibiades is actually present or speaks. In *Alc.* 7.3–5, Plutarch describes Socrates

<sup>70</sup> Socrates, Plutarch concludes (6.5), made Alcibiades begin to understand 'how much he lacked and how incomplete he was in virtue' (ἡλίκων ἐνδεής ἐστι καὶ ἀτελής πρὸς ἀρετήν), alluding to both the start and end of Pl. *Alc.* 1 (104a, 135e) and to *Symp.* 216a (cf. 4.1: Alcibiades' 'potential for virtue', εὐφυΐα πρὸς ἀρετήν). Memory of these passages emphasizes Socrates' influence but also suggests the all-too-present hold which politics had on Alcibiades. Cf. also *Resp.* 491d: if a plant lacks the proper food and environment, the stronger it is, the more it falls short of perfection (ἐνδεῖ τῶν πρετόντων); so it is with talented men deprived of philosophical education. Also *Cor.* 1.3 (itself alluding to the *Resp.* passage): a good nature which is lacking in education (παιδείας ἐνδεής) is unstable. See Russell 1966: 40 (= repr. 1995: 196); Duff 2009: 45.

defending the wounded Alcibiades on the field of battle at Potidaea. The crown for bravery, Plutarch remarks, should rightfully have gone to Socrates, but he urged the generals to give it to Alcibiades. This is all based on Alcibiades' own description of the battle and its aftermath in *Symp.* 220d–221c, which serves here as a source.

But Plutarch supplies Socrates with a motive for championing Alcibiades' cause not mentioned in the latter's speech: Socrates 'wanted [Alcibiades'] ambition for fine things (τὸ φιλότιμον ἐν τοῖς καλοῖς αὐτοῦ) to grow' (7.4). This alludes to Phaedrus' speech in *Symp.* 178c–179b, before Alcibiades' entry. Phaedrus has been speaking of love as bringing the greatest blessing a man can have. What love provides, he says, cannot be obtained by 'kinship, honours or wealth' (all advantages that Plutarch's Alcibiades had);<sup>71</sup> it instils in lovers 'shame at shameful things, and ambition for fine things' (τὴν ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς αἰσχροῖς αἰσχύνην, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς καλοῖς φιλοτιμίαν, 178d). As a result of this, Phaedrus argues, lovers defend and never desert each other on the battlefield.<sup>72</sup> By alluding to this passage, Plutarch makes more explicit what is implicit in Alcibiades' description of the Potidaea campaign in the *Symposium*: namely, that Socrates and Alcibiades on campaign are to be seen as an ideal pederastic couple, with the older exercising an educational and protective role over the younger, and inspiring him towards fine conduct.<sup>73</sup> Plutarch alludes, then, to a part of the *Symposium* which does not concern Alcibiades and by doing so sets his relationship with Socrates in a wider context of idealized, desexualized pederastic relations – just as the allusion to *Charmides* and the other Platonic texts had done.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined three different receptions of Plato's *Charmides*. Oscar Wilde's poem provides an example of minimal

<sup>71</sup> *Alc.* 4.1–2, 10.3; *Pl. Alc.* 1.104a–b. Cf. *Lys.* 14.18, 38; *Dem.* 21.143; *Diod.* 12.84.1.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. the military imagery in Cavafy's prose poem Τὸ σύνταγμα τῆς ἡδονῆς ('The regiment of pleasure'), which may have drawn some inspiration from Phaedrus' speech: Skordi 2018: 61–2.

<sup>73</sup> See Duff 2009: 45–9.

textual engagement: here, the name Charmides is invoked solely for its connotations of young, Greek, male beauty; the tone is erotically charged but the homoerotic content, though implied, is muted. Readers need only remember that Charmides was one of the beautiful young men with whom Socrates conversed in order to activate the full force of the allusion, and readers who have never heard of Charmides will not lose much.

In Cavafy, by contrast, the explicit allusion to ‘the Platonic Charmides’ is central to, and forms the culmination of, the whole (much shorter) poem. The allusion brings out much more clearly the homoerotic elements of the poem, and endows the culturally mixed group of young men, and their admiration for the beauty of their wounded friend, with the prestige of a Platonic gathering and Platonic love. Note that this is not just about the reader recognizing the origin of a quotation or the source of a detail: the allusion activates the reader’s much broader knowledge of Plato’s *Charmides*, and perhaps of Charmides as a historical figure, which they then bring to their interpretation of Cavafy’s poem.<sup>74</sup>

Plutarch too exploits the *Charmides*, but there are some important differences in the way he does this. First, as we have seen, in Plutarch the allusion is implicit rather than explicit (Charmides is not named), and relies much more on the reader’s pre-existing knowledge of the exact wording of the Platonic text and ability to recognize echoes of it here. Of course, it is much less of a leap for a reader to think of Plato when reading a biography of Socrates’ most famous pupil, especially in those sections which deal with his relationship with Socrates. And Plutarch does in this section once mention Plato explicitly, when he quotes from the *Phaedrus*. Furthermore, the importance of the Platonic texts was highlighted

<sup>74</sup> I leave out of consideration here the question of how much Cavafy may have been influenced in this allusive technique by Plutarch; he was certainly steeped in, and a very sensitive reader of, Plutarch. For Cavafy’s use of Plutarch, see e.g. Lavagnini 1988; Harrison 1992; González González 1994; Paschalis 1999; Papadopoulou 2001; Voutsas 2011. What remains of Cavafy’s personal library, now housed at the Center for Neo-Hellenic Studies (Σπουδαστήριο Νέου Ελληνισμού) in Athens, contains four volumes of Plutarch, including two volumes of Sintenis’ Teubner edition of the *Parallel Lives*, a French edition of *Caesar*, and a modern Greek translation of the (ps.-Plutarchan) *On Education of Children*; Michalis Peridis saw eight volumes when he inspected the library in Alexandria in 1941–2. See Karampini-Iatrou 2003: 42 and 52, 2012: 282–3.

at the very start of the *Alcibiades*, when Plutarch cites both Plato and the Socratic writer Antisthenes for details about Alcibiades' upbringing (1.3).<sup>75</sup> But still, Plutarch's allusive technique requires the ideal reader to recognize implicit allusions to the *Charmides* through close attention to the exact wording.

Plutarch's dialogue with the *Charmides* is therefore much more detailed than those of Cavafy and Wilde. But there is also another important difference. Whereas Wilde and especially Cavafy exploited the *Charmides* for its erotic atmosphere and its frank discussion of Socrates' sexual desire for young men, Plutarch, while calling to mind the educational conversation with which Socrates engaged Charmides, explicitly denies that Socrates' motivation was in any way sexual. Plutarch achieves this by integrating allusion to the *Charmides* into a broader network of allusions to other passages in which Plato describes Socrates' encounters with beautiful young men, or the ideal relationship of a mature man with a younger beloved, in which the sexual element is entirely absent. Plutarch makes a similar move in the *Amatorius*, where – in a text suffused with Platonic imagery and language, and drawing especially on the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* – Plutarch shows how Plato's vision of ideal love might find better expression in married, heterosexual relations than in homosexual ones.<sup>76</sup> In both cases, Plutarch, through appeal to Plato, sidelines an element of the Platonic texts that had become an embarrassment for Platonists of his period.

<sup>75</sup> Plato for the name of his *paidagōgos* (*Alc.* 1.122b), and Antisthenes for that of his nurse (VA 201 Giannantoni). Cf. Gribble 1999: 272. For analysis of *Alc.* 1–3, see Wohl 2002: 131–4; Duff 2003, 2008: 196–201.

<sup>76</sup> Goldhill 1995: 148; Rist 2001; Hunter 2012: 185–222; cf. Brenk 1988.