

**Anton ADĂMUȚ**  
“A.I. Cuza” University of Iasi

## DIFFERENTLY ON PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

### Abstract

The Greek is conservator: in the public sphere the man is moving; in the domestic one, the woman (as a compensation: in the public sphere there is nothing that belongs to the man directly, in the domestic one the woman owns everything in what the administration is regarded, and the keys to the pantry with supplies and to the cellar are for the woman the sign of authority, even if the man may exert some sort of extra control. Teofrast, in *Characters*, 18, shows how the man, distrustful, before bedtime, asks the wife if she had closed the chest, if she had putted the seal, if she had locked the gate). I would like to curdle things and to say that the separation from the domestic space did not imply any obligation from the man.

**Key words:** Greek philosophy, public sphere, domestic sphere, courtesans, love, marriage

The Greek is by definition a spectator, a curious one, good observer and talented story-teller. Homer and Herodotus answer for the quality of listener, that of spectator and actor of the Greek. The Greek, in the end, *sees* more (and here Homer is not an inconvenient witness!) than he *hears*, his civilization is one of the eyesight and his *paideia* is one the sight. The eye is the one facing the sun and goes blind because of its too great brightness. Most of the Greeks are blind, their teacher – Homer – was blind and Socrates wants to educate the sight. He is an oculist handicrafts-man without a workshop and without a license. No wonder he falls under the incidence of “the illicit”! He does it in public space, that is in a place in the open and which offers itself to the domestic sphere. This domestic sphere is inherited by Socrates from myths and rites and finds it sitting in the ideology of polis. Socrates knows well that “the choice that a nation makes when representing itself may say a lot, by what it passes over in silence, but also by what it shows”<sup>1</sup>.

Because they are immortal, god’s sons *live* and their daughters *get married*. And this is where the folly of things is: mistakes doubly divided, at the domestic

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<sup>1</sup> James Redfield, “Man and Domestic Life”, from Jean-Pierre Vernant (coordinator), *Greek Man*, translated by Doina Jela, Iassy, Polirom Publishing House, 2001, p. 144

level (where they bring tragedies) and at the great history level (bravery acts; heroes). And it is all connected to the natural succession of generations and to the prevention of this succession!, which means that succession is not so much of a legal matter, no, but one that aims at and vitiates the establish report between nature and culture. Here is where Hermes intermediates, the god of trade (that is of words), of robbery, of founded objects. But Hermes was also the god of moving wives from the old house to the new one, and Plato does not shrink from making Glaucon talk about marriage as a form of trade (*Republic*, 362b): “on such bases, marriage is solidly placed in a male world, of public transactions, of competing for honors and earnings. As far as it is thus understood, marriage no longer has as center the private relationship between man and woman. A consequence, one may add, is the lack of love stories”<sup>2</sup>. The classic Greek is not exactly a gentleman, but that does not stop him to be, from time to time, sad. Euripides seems to be, among the dramatist, the most interested in marriage. Even in him, *Alcestis* is the only one who expresses a regret for the lost of blissful marriage<sup>3</sup>. Marriage is a well repressed subject in Greek culture, and Athens (the stronghold) wants to protect the Athenians from an excess of the intrusion of domestic into public space. It is thus eliminated the private sphere out of the public conscience, and this makes impossible a Greek Romeo (what it means, in reality, a Greek Juliet).

From here to the exclusion of woman there is not even a step to be made. Socrates himself could not avoid the customary law (or Plato, rather). In Plato’s dialogues, Socrates mentions a few conversations that he “had” with some women (Aspasia, a courtesan and Diotima). Otherwise, it is mentioned Xanthippe, only once. Xenophon (*Memorabilia*, III, 10-11) presents a conversation of Socrates with a courtesan<sup>4</sup> who visited Athens, visited, not living in it nor practicing it.

As far as the courtesans are regarded, I would like to add a few things. Ancient Greek was the ideal country where sacred prostitution and civil prostitution could fully manifest. Solon, as a matter of fact, creates the first *dicterion* (brothel) in Athens and wanted, among others, with this position, to protect the chastity of young girls, of brides and also to fight against sodomy, so

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 147

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 148

<sup>4</sup> Widely, about all this, in Robert Flacelière, *Daily Life in Greece at the Time of Pericles*, Kishinev, 1991, chapters III-IV, pp. 53-105, where the author speaks about women, marriage, children and education. See also W. J. Watson, *Le Vice Et L’Amour. Histoire anecdotique de la Prostitution et de la Dépravation à travers les âges*, Paris-Édition, 1927, pp. 28- 33, 37-38, 49- 50, 74- 75. I also point out chapter VII from this book entitled “L’agonie du Paganisme vénusien”, pp. 84-90 whose central idea is that of a fight of the moral of chastity against one of indecency. I send also to Serge Paul, *Le Vice Et L’Amour. Étude Médicale, Philosophique Et Sociale Des Perversions Génital*, Paris, Librairie Des Publications Populaires, f.a. From Serge Paul I point out chapter VIII: “Le vice, l’amour et l’Histoire”, pp. 291-320.

common at his time. Prostitution remained free in other towns. In Corinth, for example, merchants and strangers used to come to “enjoy” themselves; in Sparta, love was “freely” practiced, and in Athens courtesans were tolerated, though Solon’s law was strict (it even imposed a special kind of clothes).

To be more explicit, courtesans’ corporation included three classes: *dicteriades*, *auletrides* and *hetairae*.

On the lowest level we have the *dicteriades*; they used to populate the dicterion and they came back to what the French called *bordelières*. They each belonged to a master (a “pimp”, frankly speaking).

The *auletrides* had a different status, they were musicians and dancers, they had the intermediary rank in the hierarchy of courtesans, they animate the holidays and feasts of these fond of the bottle that the Greeks were. They used to give themselves, according to lechery, to those whom they attract.

Finally, the *hetairae*, queens of courtesans in Greece, did not give themselves unless they wanted and usually for a great deal of money. Most of them were true beauties, educated, artists, they were honored by everyone and accessible only to the wealthy ones. One can see, therefore, that Greek prostitution of this kind was addressed to all tastes and all pockets. They had private courts and separate neighborhoods.

Basic prostitution (the one practiced by *dicteriades*) was frequent in Piraeus, the intermediary one, hierarchically speaking, was intensely practiced in Megara, while the *hetairae* occupied the most select neighborhood of Athens. A man of the world would prefer the hetaera to the wife. The wife was for him duty, hetaera was pleasure and the mentioned man did not believe in any way that he was mistaking by adding pleasure to duty. Hetaera is newness, ornament of the stronghold, is to be found in the elite audience of the rhetoric and philosophers, inspires artists and writers, advises princes and people of the state. Her presence, in sum, is benefactress. Two examples:

- Aspasia, comes from Miletus to Athens, intelligent, beautiful, accompanied by a suite of charming students, all perfectly educated in the matters of spirit and love. Pericles was not just her lover (and she was his second wife, they had a son together, also called Pericles), but also her disciple. Aspasia’s power was huge so it is not randomly the fact that she was accused of impiety and immorality. She was judged in Areopagus and Pericles’ intervention can barely save her. It is not the case of Phidias and Anaxagoras, brought under the same accusation;

- Sappho, married to Cercala, a rich fellow from Andros (terrible irony!), has a daughter, Kleis. Widow, with a mess of her own imagination and senses, convinces herself that each sex must focus on itself. She was not beautiful (as Laïs was). She was small, brunette, with bright eyes, not tall, blonde, languishing, as we usually imagine her. Horatius claims that she was hermaphrodite, Dionysius that she was a lesbian. In order to punish her, Venus (well, Aphrodite!) makes her fall in love with

a young man – Phaon, who rejects her. Sappho comits suicide by throwing herself out of a rock in the sea.

In conclusion, namely always on the road, Venus’s religion admits an applicable hierodulism to the two sexes. Here we can see the origin of homosexual behavior and which is previous to the feminine one, invented later by refined and bored women or dissatisfied by the canonical patterns of love. Shortly, Athens was famous by its sodomites and its pedophiles, just like Corinth was by its lesbians.

*Citizens* were the free adult men (in democracy), or just some of them (in oligarchy). Children, women and slaves were excluded. “They were family members, but not of the stronghold, only in an indirect way; the stronghold was of course their country, but they were not part of the public sphere”<sup>5</sup>. In attic jurisprudence, *atimia* was equal with the loss of the right to appear in public (which returned to a kind of inner provoked exile, and the “atimos” citizen was “reduced”, throughout *the atimia* to the condition of woman, child, slave). The competition of citizens was among equals, not among the unequal, and it was public. The coward became *atimos*, the war was a male occupation and even *talking* belonged to an exclusively male privilege (*Iliad*, VI, 492; *Odyssey*, I, 358). Male monopoly on intelligence (political) is easy to grasp, also after our scale of values, “the irrationality” of this claim. It must be pointed out that such an irrationality is observed (and contested!) during the time, before Socrates, by Aristophanes, in *Lysistrata*, in a play written for men, not for women! Socrates develops such a theme in *Republic* – he is not against admitting women in public life. There is however a difference that makes “life separate”: the political and the private sphere. The public sphere is masculine (word, idea, competition, equals). The public sphere wants to identify its own equals, case in which the body should not be covered (it is the so-called “erotic nudity”), and that means that the person (citizen) is a social unit whose purpose is to affirm itself. The exigency of competition places the other one in the exact same situation and, in competition, citizens do not improve their similarities, but their differences. They are common by the fact of being initially similar; they are different since they improved in dissimilarity. This is the public sphere (military by excellence and so much more standardized). Finally, the community of competition has as exigency the initial similitude.

The private sphere has as principle the difference man-woman. Marriage is a relation between the different, not between the similar (alike). Marriage is relationship, not competition, is cooperation of things not competition of ideas: “this is the place of origin of both production, as well as consumption, the place where the citizen makes contact with its natural self and with earth. Socrates’ imaginary hypothesis tries to cut this bound with the earth, to deny the being to the

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<sup>5</sup> James Redfield, *op. cit.*, p. 153

body, of the natural self”<sup>6</sup>. A closed society is a male society, but that does not mean that an opened one would be a female one.

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Women did not travel and Greeks did not prepare themselves to receive women as guests. However, even for the Greeks, a house without a woman was an empty house. In the bedroom there was the matrimonial bed. It belonged to the man as husband and it was for the woman as wife; the sexual liberty of man was total; the sexual liberty of woman would limit exclusively to her man and only when he thought it was right. All women had to get married and their moment of perfection is that of the virgin/virginity – *parthenos*. The father enjoys the daughter

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 158

<sup>7</sup> Mathilde Niel, *The Drama of the Liberation of Woman*, translated by Ecaterina Oproiu, Bucharest, Politica Publishing House, 1974, p. 34. Homer is, above all, responsible for starting such an education (to check the excellent paragraph entitled “The Pleasures of Love” in Félix Buffiere, *Myths of Homer and Greek Thinking*, translated by Gh. Ceaușescu, Bucharest, Univers Publishing House, 1987, pp. 263-266, especially the analysis of the scene from Ida mountain).

not because she is his, but because he can give her in to someone else: “the more wanted she is, the more desired for marriage and, thus, he will loose her even more secure and faster. For the woman, the moment of maximum ambiguity is, at the same time that of maximum accomplishment, to be more precise the moment when she becomes wife”<sup>8</sup>, wife by excellence (Pandora, Penelope), abandoned wife (Hera)<sup>9</sup>. Pandora is the first woman (she brings on the world death, but also life), Hera is the last woman (sterile marriage is the sign of eternal reign, but of course, only in Olympus). In the space under the moon, however, things are not exactly the same. For them not to happen in contrary, there is the need of an intermediary; the intermediary is not a man but a woman – Aphrodite. She is *paraitios* (“participant”) at the marriage she makes with the earth. She is, somehow, accomplice at this marriage, she encourages it and transforms a whole story into only a half one: the man enjoys the public space and there is thus a dichotomy born. From it he can only turn out mediated, but the mediation is not in him. Whether the Greek likes it or not, the mediation can be found in the woman. When he does not like it, the mediation can be found in some sort of substitute which must respect a rule: temporal difference and sexual homology. It is in fact about a “rite of transition” (about hair, veil, special languages, sexual rites and so on)<sup>10</sup>. The exigency of the substitute is an ontological commandment, because to love yourself by yourself means, in reality, to cease existing. It takes a certain availability in the fact of wanting to return being childish, case in which eros (just like irony) is nothing else but a demonic creature<sup>11</sup>.

**Anton ADĂMUȚ:** Prof. Dr., “A.I. Cuza” University of Iasi, Department of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences. Author of the books: *Filosofia sfântului Augustin* (Polirom, 2001), *Cum visează filosofii* (Editura ALL, 2008), [*Și*] *Filosofia lui Camil Petrescu* (Editura Timpul, 2008).

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<sup>8</sup> James Redfield, *op. cit.*, p. 164. For the Greek marriage is, however, a “tragic institution”. Around it there are “metaphorical games” weaved. By comparison, in Greece, “marriage means, for the consumption of the sexual act, what sacrifice represents for the consumption of meat” (Claude Calame, *Eros in Ancient Greece*, translated by Margareta Sfirschi-Lăudat, Bucharest, Symposion Publishing House, 2004, p. 151).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 165-171

<sup>10</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Transition*, translated by Lucia Berdan and Nora Vasilescu, Iasi, Polirom Publishing House, 1996, pp. 147-165

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Irony*, translated by Florica Drăgan and V. Fanache, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1994, pp. 149-155