Symposium Reading 1, to section 180c (p. 26-36, Reeve)

The dialogue opens with Apollodorus asked by an unnamed friend to tell him about the party at Agathon’s where Socrates, Alcibiades and some others talked about love. Instead of just answering the question, Apollodorus tells him about how Glaucon (Plato’s brother, most likely) had asked him the same thing not long ago, and tells his friend the answer he gave Glaucon.

It turns out that the party was quite a long time ago, when Apollodorus and his friend were children. Apollodorus heard about it from Aristodemus, who was at the party. It was the night after Agathon had celebrated his first victory for a tragedy he’d written. (Agathon was a tragic playwright; none of his plays survive.)

In section 173b when Apollodorus says Aristodemus was “obsessed with Socrates,” it is a comment on the unusual nature of attraction he (and many others – “one of the worst cases at that time”) felt toward Socrates. Socrates was an old man, not a young boy, and the kind of interest Aristodemus (and others) showed in Socrates was not typically directed to the old. We will hear more about the nature of the pursuit of Socrates farther into the text – but it was not sexual (not usually). This introduces the idea of Socrates as a “disturber of the sexual norms” of his society, as I mentioned in class.

173c/d: Apollodorus makes it clear he has a low opinion of the life choices his friend, a businessman, has made. What kind of conversation is the only kind Apollodorus thinks is worth having?

So Apollodorus begins the story of the symposium at Agathon’s house.

174a: What was so unusual about Socrates’ appearance when Aristodemus ran into him?

When Socrates invites Aristodemus to the party, Aristodemus agrees, but says that they need to come up with some reason for his presence there because he doesn’t want to show up uninvited.

174e: Do Socrates and Aristodemus actually walk together and do the planning they agreed to? Why not? Describe Socrates’ manner of walking.

Nevertheless, it turns out that Aristodemus was supposed to be invited. So, Aristodemus was led inside, and a slave was sent out to find Socrates, who’d disappeared.

175a/b: Where is Socrates? What’s he doing? What does Aristodemus say about it?
175c: Agathon tells the slaves to serve up some food (and to do it as if they are the hosts of the party). Socrates finally comes in and Agathon invites him to share his couch. Agathon suggests he might gain some wisdom from Socrates by being near him. Socrates counters: he (Socrates) is not wise at all and would be the one to benefit from wisdom being able to pass in this way. He praises Agathon’s wisdom as “bright and radiant and [having] a splendid future.”

176: They finish eating and do the usual libations. Pausanias suggests they drink less tonight than they had the night before (remember, it was Agathon’s victory party the night before). Everyone agrees that a night of light drinking would be best. Erixymachus (a physician) dispenses some wisdom about heavy drinking being bad. **What is Pausanias’ second suggestion? What should they do instead?**

177b: Erixymachus suggests a topic – praise of Eros, but it is not his own. **Whose topic is it? Why is it a worthy one?**

177d: And so, they agree to praise Eros, one by one, starting with Phaedrus. Socrates, famous for saying he doesn’t know anything, says that “the art of love” is the only thing he understands. We will learn more about what Socrates means by this later. **Why do you think Socrates picks out Agathon and Pausanias as people who couldn’t say no to discussing Eros?**

178a: There’s a caveat: Aristodemus couldn’t remember everything, and neither can Apollodorus remember everything Aristodemus said.

**Phaedrus’ Speech: 178a6-180b8**
Phaedrus’ speech is a standard *encomium*, a speech of praise. He gives the lineage of the god Eros, one of the most ancient gods. The sort of guidance young men require in order to live well is best given through that god.

178e/179: **Who does Phaedrus say would be the very best fighters? Why?**
Phaedrus gives examples of love: Alcestis (a woman, no less!) with courageous love; Orpheus with not-quite-so courageous love and Achilles. Achilles, says Phaedrus, killed Hector knowing he himself would die in order to avenge his lover Patroclus.

*In Homer, Achilles and Patroclus are not portrayed as having a sexual relationship. You can believe it if you go in looking for it, but it is simply not there in the Iliad. (Slash-fiction?) Stories about them as lovers arose in the ancient world from Aeschylus, for one.*

180a: **What does Phaedrus believe Aeschylus got wrong? Why?**

180b: **With whom are the gods more delighted, the erastes or the eromenos? Why?**