

Plato on the Thessalian Trick: A New Interpretation of *Gorgias* 513A

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A SENTENCE IN *Gorgias* 513A, a passage in which Socrates debates with Callicles on how to obtain power in the city, has long been discussed for the difficulty it poses in its use of the preposition σύν. The dialogue deals with the value of rhetoric and how a good statesman should act. In what precedes the passage discussed here, Socrates has arrived at the conclusion that rhetoric should be used to punish oneself and one's friends when they commit injustice, or to help enemies to avoid punishment, because committing injustice is worse than suffering it (480–481). Callicles does not agree and reacts by criticizing Socrates' relationship to philosophy, since it does not allow him to protect himself or his friends (486A–C). Then comes a long dialogue in which Socrates, in order to refute Callicles, asks him about various moral issues (488–500A). After that, the inquiry moves back to the topic of rhetoric and Socrates asks Callicles what the purpose of life is and the best way to live (500B–509). In response to Callicles' statement that the best way to live is to have power (510A–512), Socrates inquires how one obtains power in the city and mentions the Thessalian women as an *exemplum* of the fact that exercising power can have harmful consequences (512D–513B):¹

μη γάρ τοῦτο μέν, τὸ ζῆν ὅποσονδὴ χρόνον, τὸν γε ὡς ἀληθῶς ἄνδρα ἐατέον ἐστίν, καὶ οὐ φιλοψυχητέον, ἀλλὰ ἐπιτρέψαντα περὶ τούτων τῷ θεῷ καὶ πιστεύσαντα ταῖς

¹ Text R. Dodds, *Gorgias: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford 1959); transl. T. Irwin, *Plato, Gorgias* (Oxford 1979).

5 γυναιξιν ὅτι τὴν εἰμαρμένην οὐδ' ἂν εἰς ἐκφύγοι, τὸ ἐπὶ
 τούτῳ σκεπτόον τίν' ἂν τρόπον τοῦτον ὃν μέλλοι χρόνον
 βιώναι ὡς ἄριστα βίῃ, ἄρα ἐξομοίων αὐτὸν τῇ πολιτείᾳ
 ταύτῃ ἐν ἧ ἂν οἰκῇ, καὶ νῦν δὲ ἄρα δεῖ σὲ ὡς ὁμοιότατον
 10 γίνεσθαι τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Ἀθηναίων, εἰ μέλλεις τούτῳ προσ-
 φιλῆς εἶναι καὶ μέγα δύνασθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει· **τοῦθ' ὄρα**
εἰ σοὶ λυσιτελεῖ καὶ ἐμοί, ὅπως μὴ, ὦ δαιμόνιε,
πεισόμεθα ὅπερ φασὶ τὰς τὴν σελήνην καθαιρού-
σας, τὰς Θετταλίδας· σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις ἢ αἵρε-
 15 **σις ἡμῖν ἔσται ταύτης τῆς δυνάμεως τῆς ἐν τῇ**
πόλει. εἰ δέ σοι οἶε ὄντινῶν ἀνθρώπων παραδώσειν
 τέχνην τινὰ τοιαύτην, ἥτις σε ποιήσει μέγα δύνασθαι ἐν
 τῇ πόλει τῇδε ἀνόμοιον ὄντα τῇ πολιτείᾳ εἴτ' ἐπὶ τὸ βέλ-
 τιον εἴτ' ἐπὶ τὸ χειρὸν, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, οὐκ ὀρθῶς βουλευῆ,
 ὦ Καλλίκελις· οὐ γὰρ μιμητὴν δεῖ εἶναι ἀλλ' αὐτοφυῶς
 20 φιλίαν τῷ Ἀθηναίων δήμῳ καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία τῷ Πυριλάμ-
 πους γε πρός.

10 ὅπως] καὶ ὅπως f; πεισόμεθα Par || 12 θετταλίδας BF;
 θετταλικὰς TW Olπ; ad ἢ suprascr. εἰ W.

For surely a real man should forget about living some particular length of time, and should not be anxious about his life. He should leave all this to the god, and believe the women when they say that not a single man can escape destiny. Then he should consider the next question, how best to live, for however long he is to live should he live conforming himself to the political system he lives under, and should you now become as much like the Athenian people as possible, if you are to be a friend of theirs and gain great power in the city? See if this benefits you and me, so that the same thing doesn't happen to us, my excellent man, as they say happens to the women who draw down the moon, the Thessalian women; for we will risk what is dearest to us when we choose this power in the city. But if you think anyone will pass on to you some craft which will make you powerful in this city when you are unlike this political system, better or worse than it, then I think you are planning wrongly, Callicles. For you shouldn't be an imitator, but like them in your own nature if you are to achieve anything genuine towards friendship

with the Athenian demos, yes, with Demos the son of Pyrilampes too.

After this passage, Socrates continues developing his criticism of oratory: the only way to be powerful is by being like others, and when one assimilates to others, one can no longer make them better, which should be the only objective of a good politician. Thus the power which oratory provides does not pursue goodness but is a type of adulation. Therefore, oratory does not help the citizens and is an art with no real value.

Since the *editio princeps* of the *Gorgias*, all editors, translators, and commentators have followed the same interpretation of the syntagm *σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις*, understanding it to refer to the sentence *ἢ αἴρεσις ἡμῶν ἔσται ταύτης τῆς δυνάμεως τῆς ἐν τῇ πόλει*—as do the text and translation reproduced above—struggling to explain the value of *σύν*.² Heindorf commented that one would expect the preposition *ἐπί* here instead of *σύν*, but nevertheless he follows the same reading.³ However, in my opinion, the interpretation *σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις* is not completely satisfactory. On the one hand, it forces the philologist to create a new use of the preposition *σύν* ad hoc, as Heindorf himself accepts when he notes that one would have expected *ἐπί* rather than *σύν*. On the other hand, Heindorf's interpretation does not clarify why Socrates refers to the Thessalian trick and, therefore, the relation between this *exemplum* and its immediate

² Aldus Manutius, *Omnia Platonis opera* (Florence 1513) 454; J. Serranus, *Platonis Opera quae extant omnia I* (Geneva 1578); M. J. Routh, *Euthydemus et Gorgias* (Oxford 1784); L. F. Heindorf, *Platonis Dialogi selecti. Gorgias. Theaetetus* (Berlin 1805); I. Bekker, *Platonis scripta Graece omnia III* (London 1829), who quotes extensively from Routh and Heindorf's comments on the text; E. R. Dodds, *Gorgias*; R. Serrano Cantarín and M. Díaz de Cerio Díez, *Platón. Gorgias* (Madrid 2002); A. Croiset and L. Bodin, *Platon. Œuvres complètes III.2* (Paris 1955); G. La Magna, *Platone. Gorgia* (Milan 1967); J. Dalfen, *Platon. Gorgias. Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Göttingen 2004).

³ Heindorf, *Platonis Dialogi* 212: “*σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις* est cum damno eius, quod carissimum nobis esse debet (virtutis et honestatis). Cui simile illud *περὶ τοῖς φιλτάτοις* *κυβεύειν τε καὶ κινδυνεύειν* Protag. P. 313. E. et alibi. *Quanquam pro σύν h. l. exspectabam potius ἐπί.*”

context remains unclear. Dodds follows the same interpretation, vaguely commenting that it is used as a negative example.⁴

If we consider carefully the testimonies which deal with the tradition on the Thessalian trick, we find reason to consider that the syntagm *σὺν τοῖς φιλότοις* belongs to the preceding sentence, and hence to propose a change in the punctuation of Plato's text. This change would in turn allow a clearer interpretation not only of the value of the preposition *σὺν*, but also of the passage as a whole.

Several lexicographical entries that elucidate the expression *ἐπὶ σαυτῷ τὴν σελήνην καθέλκεις* ("pull the moon against yourself") explain that it derives from the belief that the Thessalian women hurt themselves when operating their spell.⁵

⁴ Dodds, *Gorgias* 351: "The reference is to the widespread belief that a witch must pay for her powers either by a mutilation (often blindness) or by the sacrifice of a member of her family." Other translators have made similar remarks. W. R. M. Lamb, *Plato III Gorgias. Protagoras* (Cambridge 1967) 484: "Socrates alludes to the popular theory that the practice of witchcraft is a serious danger or utter destruction to the practitioner." Serrano Cantarín and Díaz de Cerio Díez (*Platón. Gorgias* 220 n.841) quote Olympiodorus and the *Suda* to explain the tradition alluded to by Socrates. Dodds quotes two passages which he considers to be parallel uses of the preposition *σὺν*. In the examples given by Dindorf, *σὺν* is not used with the verb *εἰμί* and a dative, as we find in Plato, nor, in my opinion, does the preposition *σὺν* have the same value in these instances.

⁵ Ps.-Plut. *Proverb.Alex.* 13; Apostolius 7.81; *Suda*. s.v. *Ἐπὶ σαυτῷ τὴν σελήνην καθέλκεις*. Almost contemporary with Plato is a reference to the tradition of the Thessalian trick in Aristophanes' *Nubes*, where Strepsiades comes out with the idea of hiring a Thessalian witch (*γυναῖκα φαρμακίδ'*) to pull down the moon, thus stopping the growth of interest on his debts (749–750). On Thessalian women as witches see O. Phillips, "The Witches' Thessaly," in P. Mirecki and M. Meyer (eds.), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden 2001) 378–386. On the spell see D. E. Hill, "The Thessalian Trick," *RhM* 116 (1973) 221–238; P. J. Bicknell, "The Dark Side of the Moon," in A. Moffatt (ed.), *MAISTOR: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning* (Canberra 1984) 67–75; Ch. Mugler, "Sur l'origine et le sens de l'expression *καθαρεῖν τὴν σελήνην*," *REA* 61 (1959) 48–56.

Since lexicographers depend upon each other, it is not surprising that lexicographical works transmit the same—or almost the same—text. However, while all the readings state that the harm the Thessalian women inflict upon themselves is the loss of an eye or a foot, Zenobius' text (4.1) says that they lose an eye or a “child.”⁶ This is a significant variant, for the idea of losing a child can be related to the Platonic text where, according to my interpretation, Socrates would refer to the people dearest to the Thessalian witches:⁷

ἐπὶ σαυτῷ τὴν σελήνην καθαιρεῖς· αἱ τὴν σελήνην καθαιροῦσαι Θετταλίδες λέγονται τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ τῶν παίδων στερίσκεσθαι. εἴρηται οὖν ἐπὶ τῶν ἑαυτοῖς τὰ κακὰ ἐπισπωμένων ἢ παροιμία.

“You pull down the moon against yourself”: It is said that when Thessalian women pull down the moon, they are progressively deprived of their eyes and their children. This expression is said, then, about those who bring misfortunes upon themselves.

Dodds pointed out that this might be the “true reading,”⁸ since a note in the Bodleian codex of Zenobius offers the following explanation:⁹

ἐπὶ σαυτῷ τὴν σελήνην καθαιρεῖς· Ἀσκληπιάδης φησὶ τὰς Θετταλὰς ἐκμαθούσας τὰς τῆς σελήνης κινήσεις προαγγέλλειν, ὡς ὑπ' αὐτῶν μέλλοι κατάγεσθαι, τοῦτο δὲ πράττειν οὐ χωρὶς τῆς ὑπ' αὐτῶν κακώσεως· ἢ γὰρ καταθύειν τῶν τέκνων ἢ τὸν ἕτερον τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἀπολλύειν· λέγεται γοῦν ἐπὶ τῶν κακὰ ποριζομένων. Δοῦρις δὲ φησιν ἀστρολόγον προαγορεύοντα τὰς τῆς σελήνης ἐκλείψεις οὐκ εἶ ἀπαλλάξαι.

3 ὑπ' αὐτῶν κακώσεως B: ὑπ' del. Gaisford, Leutsch, Jacoby ll 4 τῶν τέκνων: ἕνα τῶν τέκνων suppl. fort. Jacoby

⁶ On the harm suffered by the Thessalian women see N. Villagra, “Tessalias: brujas, cojas y sin hijos,” in E. Suárez de la Torre and A. Pérez Jiménez (eds.), *Mito y Magia en Grecia y Roma* (Barcelona 2013) 67–76.

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

⁸ Dodds, *Gorgias* 351.

⁹ Leutsch, *Paroem. Gr.* I pp.83–84 = Jacoby, *FGrHist* 12 F 20 = *Proverb. Bodd.* 374 (Gaisford).

“You pull down the moon against yourself”: Asclepiades says that the Thessalian women, having learned the movements of the moon, announce them as if they had pulled it down, and that they do so not without inflicting harm upon themselves. Indeed, they either sacrifice one of their children or are hurt in one eye. This then is said about those who bring evil upon themselves. Duris says that an astronomer who announced the moon’s eclipses did not end well.¹⁰

Since Müller’s edition in 1849 (*FHG* III 306), the Asclepiades mentioned here has been identified as the mythographer Asclepiades of Tragilos, a fourth-century author who we are told was a pupil of Isocrates and who wrote a work in six books titled the *Tragodumena*.¹¹ If this identification is correct, we would have a testimony very close in time to the Platonic text—whose date of composition is considered to be around 387–385 BCE—indicating that the Thessalian women sacrificed a child to operate their spell, or during its operation.¹²

A text in the scholia to Apollonius Rhodius also refers to the trick of pulling down the moon and links it specifically to the loss of a relative (schol. 4.59–61a):

ἦ θαμὰ δὴ καὶ σεῖο· μεμύθενται, ὡς ἄρα αἱ φαρμακίδες τὴν
σελήνην ταῖς ἐπωδαῖς κατασπῶσι. τοῦτο δὲ ποιεῖν δοκοῦσιν
αἱ Θεσσαλαὶ σφαλεῖσαι τῆς ὑπολήψεως· καθὸ Ἀγλαονίκη,

¹⁰ Duris is identified with the Samian historian of the fourth-third century BCE. This anonymous figure is not a Thessalian witch, but a parallelism can be established between Duris’ anonymous astronomer and the Thessalian women. Although the text refers vaguely to the bad end of this astronomer, it reflects the same idea we find in the other testimonies: that the observation or manipulation of celestial bodies causes harm. Indeed, the fact that the lexicographer places Duris’ fragment precisely after Asclepiades’ shows that he takes this text as evidence of the same idea. Also, a scholion to Apollonius Rhodius explains the spell of pulling down the moon as a fraud based on an astronomical skill (see below).

¹¹ *X Orat. Vit.* 837C (Mau). For an edition and commentary on his fragments see N. Villagra, *Τραγοδούμενα. Edición crítica, traducción y comentario de los fragmentos atribuidos a Asclepiades de Tragilo* (diss. Bellaterra 2012).

¹² On the date of composition of the *Gorgias* see Dodds, *Gorgias* 18–30.

Ἡγέμονος θυγάτηρ, ἔμπειρος οὖσα τῆς ἀστρολογίας καὶ εἰδυῖα τὰς ἐκλείψεις τῆς σελήνης, ὅποτε μέλλοι αὐταῖς ἐγγενήσεσθαι, ἔφασκε τὴν θεὸν κατασπᾶν, καὶ παραχρῆμα περιέπιπτε συμφοραῖς, τῶν οἰκείων τινὰ ἀποβαλοῦσα. ὅθεν κατὰ τὸν βίον λέγεται παροιμία ἐπὶ <...> “τὴν σελήνην κατασπᾶ.”

The myth runs that witches pull down the moon with their spells. It is said that when Thessalian witches do this, their plan is foiled. Accordingly, Aglaonice, the daughter of Hegemon, who was skilled in astronomy and knew the eclipses of the moon and when they were going to happen, used to say that she was drawing down the goddess, and immediately fell into calamities, losing one of her kin. Thus it is from her life that the proverb is said about <...> “draws down the moon.”

Surprisingly, the scholion talks about a specific woman, Aglaonice, whose case provided the origin of the expression. The explanation of Aglaonice’s magic as a fraud based on her knowledge is similar to the rationalistic interpretation we read in the Bodleian manuscript of Zenobius citing Asclepiades’ authority. Be that as it may, what is relevant is that the story of Aglaonice provides an independent testimony of the loss of a relative associated with the trick of pulling down the moon, which is clearly associated with the Thessalian women.¹³

Olympiodorus, the sixth-century Neoplatonist who wrote commentaries on several of Plato’s dialogues, also seems to have understood the passage of the *Gorgias* as referring to the loss of children and other dear ones (*In Grg.* 39.2):

ἡ δὲ ἱστορία ἐστὶν αὕτη· ὥσπερ νῦν ἐν ταῖς ἐκλείψεσιν νομίζουσι μάγους καταφέρειν τὴν σελήνην, οὕτω καὶ πάλαι ὄοντο τὰς Θετταλικὰς γυναῖκας λέγειν τινὰ, καὶ εἰ μὲν δυνη-

¹³ This Aglaonice is mentioned twice by Plutarch for her astronomical skills: *Mor.* 145C (*Coniug. Prae.*) and 416F–417A (*De def. or.*). As these three texts are the only testimonies we have, we cannot place her in time with any certainty. P. Bicknell, “The Witch Aglaonice and Dark Lunar Eclipses in the Second and First Centuries BC,” *Journal of the British Astronomical Association* 93 (1983) 160–163, points out that Aglaonice must have lived in Plutarch’s time at the latest and not before the third century BCE.

θείσαν, φασίν, καταγαγεῖν, ἐποίουν τὸ σπουδαζόμενον, εἰ δὲ ἀδυνάτως ἔσχον πρὸς τὸ καταγαγεῖν, πρόρριζοι ἀπόλοντο αὐταί τε καὶ τὰ παιδιά καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες καὶ αἱ πόλεις. τοῦτο οὖν λέγει, ὅτι ὁ ὁμοιούμενος τῇ κρατούσῃ πολιτεία πρόρριζον τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπόλλυσιν.

And this is the story: just as magicians are believed to have pulled down the moon when there are eclipses today, in ancient times it was believed that Thessalian women said something and if they could pull it down, they accomplished anything they desired; but if they were unable to achieve the descent, they certainly killed themselves, their children, their husbands, and their cities. This means that the one who becomes similar to the *politeia* which rules, utterly destroys his soul.

With the expression ἡ δὲ ἱστορία ἐστὶν αὕτη—very common in scholia to introduce mythical narratives—Olympiodorus introduces the story of an ancient tradition—καὶ πάλαι ᾤοντο—necessary to understand Plato’s words. After the ἱστορία he offers an interpretation of the Platonic ideas, which is introduced by the expression τοῦτο οὖν λέγει, equivalent to our “i.e.”

The ἱστορία relates that it was believed that a mistake in the performance of the spell caused the death of the witches themselves and their families, and brought destruction upon their cities. I think it is significant that Olympiodorus never refers to the mutilation or loss of feet or eyes. In his account, what the Thessalian women destroy can easily be put under the generic designation of τοῖς φιλτάτοις of the Platonic text, which is interpreted as a neuter noun by Heindorf, Bekker, and Dodds. However, it could also be a masculine noun referring to the “dear ones” of the Thessalian women (i.e. their family and fellow-citizens). Thus, Olympiodorus would be explaining the Platonic generic expression σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις by naming the specific elements included in it. Indeed, his reading of the Platonic passage must be that σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις belongs to the sentence which refers to the Thessalian women. Of course, a sixth-century commentary is a late text to provide evidence of a belief in Plato’s time. However, I think it is very revealing that Olympiodorus understood Plato’s text this way, and none of

the editors or translators of Plato seem to have noticed this.

In addition to the sources which specifically relate the Thessalian trick to the death or ruin of kin, several mythical traditions link magic to the death of relatives who are the addressees of spells—children, husbands, or fathers. Thus, Medea is the archetype of the sorceress in Classical literature and many traditions make her responsible for the deaths of members of her family: she killed her brother Apsyrtus,¹⁴ and she caused the death of her own children.¹⁵ Her attitude is clearly

¹⁴ The best-known version is that of Apollonius Rhodius, in which Apsyrtus is an adult man who chases the Argonauts when the Colchians realize they are escaping with the golden fleece (4.303–481). However, other sources say that Apsyrtus was a baby and was murdered either by Medea or by the Argonauts (Pherecyd. fr.32 Fowler). An interesting scholion which quotes Leon the rhetor states that Apsyrtus was killed with *pharmaka* (schol. Eur. *Med.* 167 [FGrHist 278 F 2]). Euripides and Sophocles attributed this crime to Medea: Soph. *TrGF* IV FF 546 and 343; Eur. *Med.* 1334–1335. Later sources include Hyg. *Fab.* 23 and *Orph.Arg.* 1024–1032. On Apsyrtus see J. Bremmer, “Why Did Medea Kill Her Brother Apsyrtus?” in J. J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (eds.), *Medea: Essays on Medea* (Princeton 1997) 83–100.

¹⁵ Medea’s killing of her own children is described by Euripides as an act of revenge on Jason (*Med.* 1399), a version which would become canonical. See E. Griffiths, *Medea* (London/New York 2006) 47, 81–84. However, as Mastronarde points out, Euripides must have known other traditions of the death of the children: D. J. Mastronarde, *Euripides: Medea* (Cambridge 2002) 50–53 and 360–361, on lines 1236–1250 and 1238–1239. According to a local Corinthian tradition recorded by Pausanias (2.3.6), the children were stoned by the inhabitants of the city as punishment because they helped Medea to poison Glauke. In schol. *Med.* 264, which transmits a fragment of Parmeniscus, a grammarian of the second or first century BCE, and a fragment of Creophylus, the women of Corinth killed Medea’s children as an act of rebellion against the new foreign and magical queen. Pausanias (2.3.10) provides still another version, quoting Eumelos of Corinth (FGrHist 451 F 2a), in which Medea sent her children to Hera’s temple in order to make them immortal, but did not succeed. The narrative is not explicit on what happened to the children, but we can guess that they died. These versions might distantly reflect the idea that a great power such as magic comes at the price of losing the children.

different from that of the Thessalian women, who cause the death of their relatives unwillingly.¹⁶ However, it is interesting that she is the inducer of the patricide of Pelias, tricking his daughters with her advise of a magic spell that would restore his youth. Thus, the Peliades can be seen as a parallel to the Thessalian women, for they wanted to help their father but ended up killing him because they did not know how to use the magical power.¹⁷ Also Deianira, even though she is not a φαρμακίς, killed her husband Heracles by applying a putative love charm, following the instructions of Nesos.¹⁸

Let us return now to Plato's text. As noted above, the reference to the Thessalian trick occurs when Socrates is debating the best way to obtain power in the city. This discussion develops out of his inquiry into which art provides the power to protect oneself and one's loved ones from injustice. In fact, the importance of relatives and friends is often stressed in relation to ideas of committing injustice and being punished. In several

¹⁶ The oldest sources on Medea show her as a sorceress. In an interesting passage of Apollonius, the goddess Selene describes Medea as a witch and complains that she had pulled her down many times (4.50–64). This shows that by the third century Medea had been assimilated to a Thessalian φαρμακίς. See Griffiths, *Medea* 41–46. On the construction of the character of Medea see Clauss and Johnston, *Medea*.

¹⁷ Pindar refers to Pelias' death in an allusive way, saying only that Medea killed him (*Pyth.* 4.249–250), and we know that two lost tragedies treated the episode (Eur. *TrGF* V FF 601–616; Soph. *TrGF* IV FF 534–536). Other sources include Eur. *Med.* 9; Paus. 8.11.2; Ov. *Met.* 7.297–349; Hyg. *Fab.* 24; Palaeph. 41; Apollod. 1.9.27; Diod. 4.51.

¹⁸ In Soph. *Trachiniae* Deianira is not characterized as a φαρμακίς, but as a wife desperate to win back the love of her husband. P. E. Easterling, *Sophocles. Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1982) 146, highlights the emphasis in describing her as innocent: Deianira says that she hates magic and hopes not to learn magical practices. Nevertheless, she resorts to using them to displace the young woman of whom Heracles has recently become enamored (*Trach.* 531–597). The terms she uses for the practices she resolves to perform to win Heracles back are φίλτροις and θέλκτροισι, “love charms and spells” (584–585).

passages the term φίλος is used in the plural to refer to friends or loved ones in contexts in which the usefulness of rhetoric is critiqued.¹⁹ Socrates' response and refutation of Callicles' accusation aims to demonstrate that, contrary to what Callicles and others defend, oratory does not provide the power to help anyone. I think that the *exemplum* of the Thessalian women is a direct response to their claim and establishes a parallel: an orator can help his friends the same way a Thessalian woman helps hers when she pulls down the moon—she does not help them at all.²⁰

¹⁹ In fact, at 480B–C Socrates concludes that rhetoric does not help to protect anyone from injustice, “unless someone supposes it is useful for the opposite purpose—that he should denounce most of all himself, then his relatives, and whatever other friend (καὶ τῶν οἰκείων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὃς ἂν ἀεὶ τῶν φίλων) does injustice; and should not conceal the unjust action.” Later he argues that the moderate man should aim to not deserve any punishment, but, if he deserved it, it would be better to be punished than to escape justice. He refers again to relatives: “but if he or any of his own, an individual or a city (ἢ αὐτὸς ἢ ἄλλος τις τῶν οἰκείων, ἢ ιδιώτης ἢ πόλις), need tempering, justice and tempering must be imposed, if he is to be happy” (507D). Again, several lines below, he explicitly refers to φίλοι, linked to οἰκείοι: “You [Callicles] say indeed that I am unable to help myself or any of my friends or relatives (οὔτε ἑμαυτῶ οὔτε τῶν φίλων οὐδενὶ οὐδὲ τῶν οἰκείων), or save them from the most serious dangers” (508C). The same idea is expressed in 509C: “Surely this defence definitely must be the most shameful for us to lack power to provide, for ourselves, for friends and family (μήτε αὐτῶ μήτε τοῖς αὐτοῦ φίλοις τε καὶ οἰκείοις).” The idea of “the dearest ones” appears again when Socrates describes the τεχνή of a seaman (511E), for Callicles should reckon that the seaman saves people's lives when he takes them safely from one place to another (ἐὰν πάμπολυ, ταύτης τῆς μεγάλης εὐεργεσίας, σώσασα ἃ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον, καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ παῖδας καὶ χρήματα καὶ γυναῖκας, ἀποβιβάσασ' εἰς τὸν λιμένα δύο δραχμὰς ἐπράξατο). Translations from Irwin.

²⁰ Also, in the lines immediately preceding our text, Socrates has compared oratory to other arts, swimming, navigation, and military engineering, to show that these *technai* also help to save one's life. The reference to the Thessalian women comes after this progression of comparisons and is expressed as a warning. From my point of view, this *exemplum* is the highest point of the denigration of orators: they are worse than other skilled men, they are like Thessalian witches, and they will destroy the city. On the other

Furthermore, when Callicles enters the discussion, Socrates expresses his joy about it and addresses him as ὦ φίλε ἑταῖρε (482A) and βέλτιστε (482B).²¹ Callicles is thus seen by Socrates as a φίλος. Therefore, when Socrates introduces the *exemplum* with a warning for both Callicles and himself, “see if this will benefit you and me” (τοῦθ’ ὄρα εἰ σοὶ λυσιτελεῖ καὶ ἐμοί), he is including his *friend*. This, in my opinion, has a correspondence with the Thessalian women and those dearest to them (τὰς Θεσσαλίδας σὺν τοῖς φιλότατοις).

As a consequence, I suggest that the full stop in the Platonic text be moved and placed after σὺν τοῖς φιλότατοις, as I believe that this syntagm refers to the loved ones whom the witches lose. The meaning of the *exemplum* of the Thessalian women and of the passage as a whole becomes clearer if we read the text in the way I propose, and the syntactic problem with σὺν disappears. Indeed, this preposition is used with an inclusive value, instead of the more common μετὰ.²² The Thessalian witches, for their part, are a parallel to Plato’s specific conception of power in democratic Athens, and this implies a fierce criticism not only of oratory but of the whole democratic system. Thus Callicles’ access to power in the city bears comparison with the Thessalian witches’ access to unnatural power: it will harm loved ones, as the *demos* of Athens is now a col-

hand, friendship appears to be a very important idea to define what is good, together with order. The immoderate man does not respect the order of the world and is therefore unable to form relationships (508A). The specific practice of pulling down the moon must have been seen as a rupture of this order by Plato’s audience, and order is the basis of what Plato establishes as the good. Therefore, by comparing orators to the Thessalian women, Plato is implying that obtaining political power by means of oratory is against the cosmological order. If one respected the real order of the world, one would obtain political power with philosophy, which is the only way to reach goodness. Any other way will destroy the city and everyone in it, as in fact orators could.

²¹ Translated by Irwin as “my friend” and “my excellent friend.”

²² See Kühner/Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik* II.1 467 n.1a.

lective friend to him, once he has been assimilated to it. Indeed, Socrates insists upon the point that Callicles will not be able to obtain power unless he becomes like the *demos*. The sentence ἡ αἴρεσις ἡμῖν ἔσται ταύτης τῆς δυνάμεως τῆς ἐν τῇ πόλει, as I understand it, underlines that *this* type of power is the only power that oratory provides, which would illustrate the previous definition of oratory as “fawning.” Thus, in my opinion, Plato would be stressing the focus of the sentence (ταύτης τῆς δυνάμεως) by two means: by the demonstrative and by the postponed position.

According to my interpretation, the translation of the whole passage should run as follows:

See if this benefits you and me, so that the same thing doesn't happen to us, my excellent man, as they say the Thessalian women suffer with their dearest ones when they pull down the moon. This is the type of power that we will be seizing in the city. But if you think anyone will pass on to you some craft which will make you powerful in this city when you are unlike this political system, better or worse than it, then I think you are planning wrongly, Callicles.²³

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