

“See if you can defend me, for the love for this man gave me no little trouble” (Pl. *Symp* 213d): on Socrates and Alcibiades

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The skillful portrayal of Alcibiades within Plato’s dialogues is shaped by two distinct yet interconnected movements. The first is a nuanced rhetorical construction that highlights Alcibiades’ *sexual paranomia*—his deviant sexual behavior—which serves a broader political strategy aimed at controlling the historical narrative. This strategy is particularly focused on defending Socrates posthumously, as well as his *paideia* (educational influence), by addressing the ethical and political dimensions of Alcibiades’ character. The primary focus of this analysis is Plato’s *Symposium*, where the interplay of *eros* (desire) and *paideia* weaves through the dramatic and rhetorical speeches, especially in depicting the complex relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades. Alcibiades is often regarded as a key figure in Athens’ defeat and the ensuing crisis that engulfed the city in the late fifth century BCE. Given the city’s distrust of philosophical circles associated with Alcibiades, it is unsurprising that the Socratics sought to refute the accusation that Socrates had been his mentor. Recognizing the impossibility of denying the profound connection between the two, Plato employs a sophisticated dramatic framework to intervene in the historical memory of their relationship. Through this, he aims to rewrite history, absolving Socrates of the specific charge that likely weighed heavily on both Plato and Socrates’ legacy: that Socrates had been Alcibiades’ lover and mentor. This Platonic defense relies on a clever rhetorical strategy that amplifies Alcibiades’ notorious sexual deviance, framing him as guilty of an audacious and excessive attempt to seduce not only Socrates but Athens itself. By drawing on contemporary comic and rhetorical motifs, Plato intensifies the indictment against Alcibiades, seeking to distance him from Socrates and the Socratic circle. In doing so, Plato crafts a narrative that shifts blame onto Alcibiades, trying to withdraw him from the orbit of Socrates and the Socratics.

MINIBIO

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