Man to Man
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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Masterson, Mark.
Man to Man: Desire, Homosociality, and Authority in Late-Roman Manhood.
The Ohio State University Press, 2014.
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In 376 or 377, when emperor Gratian was approaching his twentieth birthday (he was born in 359 and had been emperor since 367), Themistius, a major intellectual and political figure in the empire, delivered an oration, his thirteenth, at Rome in the emperor’s praise. Gratian was not present, but the senate at Rome was (177D, 178B, 178D). The speech is entitled, 

significantly in the context of this book, “A Discourse on Love/Desire or Concerning the Emperor’s Beauty” (Erōtikos [logos] ἢ peri κάλλους basilikou / Ἐρωτικὸς [λόγος] ἢ περὶ κάλλους βασιλικοῦ). Throughout the oration, Gratian’s beauty, a potent and chameleon-like entity, transfixes all who behold it with love and desire.

Themistius confesses that he loves, saying that he has come to Rome not as a philosopher but as a sort of rhetorical or poetical lover. In language recalling Plato and studded with Homer, Themistius says that his encounter with Gratian’s stunning beauty of soul and body makes him give birth to love of philosophical beauty, and this, in turn, has caused him to write the speech:

1. For dating, context, and discussion of Themistius’ thirteenth oration, see Vanderspoel (1995: 179–84). I thank Amy Richlin for directing my attention back to this work.
2. As the most cursory glance at Menander Rhetor will show, adding logos/λόγος to the title merely makes explicit the noun that would have been tacitly understood.
Being in travail (οδινόν/οδίνου)
with that love, which philosophy
had written in me, for the beauty of a beautiful and lovable young man,
who mixes both beauties, that of the soul and that of the body, gleaming
with friendliness and steadiness in a manliness of luxury—“a young
man whose beard is just coming out, one whose youth is at its most
attractive”—being in travail with love of such beauty, and dreaming and
hoping on the one hand, and finding, on the other, its like nowhere on
earth or on the sea, I was experiencing wondrous things, as I was just
saying, and I was thinking there ought to be some kind of account of his
beauty. . . . (Or. 13.164C–165A)

Themistius is deeply affected by the sight of this young man whose jour-
ney into manhood is well underway. The unparalleled beauty of soul and
body awakens vague dreams and inchoate hopes. A welcoming demean-
our wondrously steady “in a manliness of luxury”—and this phrase, “in
a manliness of luxury” (en andreiai hēdupatheias/ἐν ἀνδρείᾳ ἡδυπαθείας),
exemplifies the late-ancient penchant for securing glamour through para-
dox—this demeanor has put pen in hand and stiffened resolve to write
under erōs’ orders.

Themistius is not the only one who should or will be moved by erōs
for the emperor. He hopes that the senate will love Gratian as he does. At
the very end of the oration, and again using Platonic language, i.e., Phdr.
255D–E,7 Themistius asks Zeus, Athena, and Quirinus to inspire erōs in
Gratian for Rome and an anterōs in Rome for Gratian: “may all of you
grant to my boyfriend that he love (eran/ἐρᾶν) Rome and that he be loved
in return (anterasthai/ἀντερᾶσθαι) by Rome.”8 Preferring to avoid force and
have his handsome and civilized soul win them over, Gratian makes the
barbarians love him also:

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4. Plato famously uses the noun for the travail of childbirth to refer to males, e.g., Phdr. 251E (ωδίνου) or Smp. 206E (ωδίνος), and Themistius uses here the related verb, ὀδίνειν/οδίνειν (to be in travail [of childbirth]), to refer to himself.

5. This is a mild misquotation (ὑπηνήτην instead of ὑπηνήτητι) of a line (πρῶτον ὑπηνήτητι, τοῦ περ χαριεστάτη ἥβη) that occurs twice in Homer: Il. 24.348 and Od. 10.279. Both times the reference is to Hermes.

6. ὀδίνων μὲν τὸν ἔρωτα ἐκείνου τοῦ κάλλους, ὃν φιλοσοφία μοι ὑπεγράψατο, νέου καὶ ἐρασμίου, τὰ κάλλη ἄμφω κερασαμένου, τῆς τε ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος, λάμποντος φιλοφρο-

7. εἴθελον ἔρωτος ἀντέρωτα ἔχων.

8. 13.180A–B: διδοίητε τοῖς ἔμοις παιδικοῖς ἔραν μὲν Ρώμης, ἀντερᾶσθαι δὲ ὑπὸ Ρώμης.
Ares . . . is not a god for our good emperor by choice but through necessity. Our emperor is blessed in that he considers how it might be possible to make the barbarians obedient not through the sword but through the beauty and cultivation of his soul. Not only do philosophers love the splendor of Gratian, it seems, but the barbarians do as well, and willingly they yield and go under the yoke, defeated by his intention. (Or. 13.176B)\(^9\)

To some extent metaphorizing Gratian's power and *uctoritas/axios* as sexual attractiveness—the philosophers and barbarians, compelled by the beauty (*kallonēi/kallōnē*) of his soul, come to love or have *erōs* (*erōsi*/ἐρῶσι) for his splendor—, Themistius uses the corporeal reality of erotic yearning to make his praise more lively. In this regard, the intertextuality of the speech with works of Plato, mention of which has already been made above, rewards more detailed consideration. For the hearer or reader in possession of knowledge of Plato, the pederastic and, as will be shown, same-sex sexual investments of this oration delivered in the homosocial environs of the senate are considerable. Giving due weight to these intertextualities further intensifies the perception that this oration is saturated with same-sex desire.

The conclusion of the speech with *erōs* for emperor and *anterōs* for Rome and senators calls the *Phaedrus* to mind. This intertextuality with the *Phaedrus* renders the oration as a whole a specimen of ring composition, for there is undeniable reference to the dialogue at its beginning. The beginning of the oration's title, *Erōtikos [logos]*, and the fact that the first word of the speech is “Socrates” (161B) bring the *Phaedrus* immediately to mind. Perhaps the most famous *erōtikos logos*, or discourse on love/desire, in history is the one that appears shortly after the beginning of Plato's dialogue (*Phaedrus* speaks):

> This matter surely is appropriate for you to hear, Socrates. There was indeed a *logos*, engaging us [Lysias and Phaedrus] for some time, that was *erōtikos* in some kind of way. Lysias wrote of one of the beautiful ones being courted, not by the one who desired/loved him and—and this very thing you will agree is so very clever—he says that the beautiful one must give in to the one who does not love him, instead of to the one who does. (*Phdr. 227C*)\(^10\)

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9. Ἀρης . . . ἀγαθῷ βασιλεῖ θεὸς οὐχ αἱρετός, ἀλλ’ ἀναγκαῖος. καὶ εὐδαίμων ὡς ἐξεῖη μὴ ἔξει ἐντὸς μὴ βαρβάρους σιδήρῳ εὐηνίους ποιεῖν, ἀλλὰ τῆς τῆς ψυχῆς καλλονῆς καὶ εὐμουσία. τῆς δὲ Γρατιανοῦ ἀγλαίας οὐχ οἱ φιλόσοφοι μόνον, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ βάρβαροι ἐρῶσι καὶ ἑκόντες  ἱκουσι καὶ ὑποκύπτουσι, τῇ γνώμῃ αὐτοῦ ἔττωμεν.

10. Καὶ μὴν, ὦ Σώκρατε, προσήκουσα γέ ουι ή ἀκοή: ὁ γάρ τοι λόγος ἤν, περὶ δὴν διετριβομεν,
Shortly after these words, Phaedrus reads out Lysias’ carnal and evidently engaging logos erōtikos, which then is followed by not one, but two more logoi erōtikoi from Socrates: one ironic and the other sincere. While there is further intertextuality with the Phaedrus, the pederastic investments of Themistius’ oration through its intertextuality with Plato don’t stop here. The Symposium frequently lends vocabulary and verbal jingles to Themistius’ text. Significant in the context of the argument of this book are mentions of Charmides and Alcibiades. And it is not just Plato. At a particularly swooning moment in which he says he can no longer look at Gratian, Themistius senses himself “being breathed on . . . and being inspired” (165D: empneomenou . . . kai enthouσιοntos/ἐμπνεομένου . . . καὶ ἐνθουσιώντος). This new sensory register for Themistius that takes the place of refused sight recalls Theocritus’ famous pederastic Idyll 12 (lines 10–16). Readers or listeners who know this poem will associate Themistius, as he is in this state, with the figure of the erōmenos in the Idyll. There the “listener” (line 14: aίτην/ἀίτην, i.e., the erōmenos) is breathed upon by the “inspirer” or “the one who breathes upon” (line 13: eispnēlos/εἴσπνηλος, i.e., the erastēs). Interestingly, in this moment of the sensory overload, Themistius allows the tables to be turned and becomes the boy to Gratian’s man.

There is, then, a hypertrophy of intertextual pederasty at the point of educated reception of Themistius’ oration. But even though Themistius is often presenting in Gratian a golden vision of a desired and beautiful young man who is at the upper age limit to be a beloved boy, that is not all that is going on in the oration. As has already started to be evident, i.e., Gratian is also a man who “inspires” Themistius, Gratian is more than a boy and the roles assumed in pederasty are not adhered to. Indeed, elsewhere in the oration, Themistius presents Gratian as a soldier-man and holder of adult authority, which again takes the metaphorization of Gratian’s admirability by desire out of pederasty’s asymmetries and into the realm of same-sex desire between men:

οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅντινα τρόπον ἐρωτικός. γέγραφε γάρ δὴ ὁ Λυσίας πειρώμενόν τινα τῶν καλῶν, οὐχ ὑπ’ ἐραστοῦ δὲ, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο καὶ κεκόμπευται· λέγει γάρ ὡς χαριστέον μὴ ἐρῶντι μᾶλλον ἢ ἐρώντι.

11. In addition to the moments of intertextuality already mentioned, ‘Themistius’ oration is arguably intertextual with the dialogue at 165A–B (cf. Phdr. 252C [note: the TLG text of ‘Themistius’ oration here has reference to the Phaedo (Φαίδων), which is incorrect]), 166A (cf. Phdr. 228D), and 168D, which has βλάστην ἐρασιωτέραν (cf. βλάστην at Phdr. 251D).


13. 13.177B.

14. Emperor Julian’s fourth oration also has a notable moment of intertextuality with Theocritus’ Idyll 12. See my discussion in Masterson 2010: 91–93.
I am the exegete and prophet of my boyfriend: indeed, he has so much beauty that he makes the barbarian beautiful, the Goth gentle, the Persian tame, the Armenian already Roman, the Iberian Greek, and the nomad a householder: each changing from his former shame to the opposing beauty. I am the praiser and lover of both the soldier’s belt and emperors, especially if I see the belt pulled tight with Justice, but I should wish more to praise and love the head and eyes, where the place and dwelling of thought and mind are. (Or. 13.166C–D)\(^{15}\)

The pederastic aspect to Themistius’ regard for Gratian is certainly reinforced when Themistius calls him his boyfriend (\(ta\ \text{paidikā} / \tauὰ\ \text{παιδικά}\)), as he does a number of times in the speech.\(^{16}\) But other details from the passage argue that Themistius is ultimately talking about same-sex desire between men, and the pederastic language, as so often in late antiquity, is a means to this end. This desire, in turn, metaphorizes the admiration of a magnificent man by another man.

Themistius provides a clear example of this metaphorical use of same-sex desire in the passage when he says that he is the lover (\(erastēs\)) of emperors. A little later in the oration, at 177C, he says that “his desire (\(erōs\)) is for two emperors,”\(^{17}\) and the referents are Gratian and his uncle, emperor Valens, who is nearly fifty years old. Themistius also metaphorizes Gratian’s exercise of power to police the others on the border of empire in terms of sexual attractiveness. Through a sort of sympathetic reaction, Gratian’s beauty makes the barbarian himself beautiful, and causes changes, salutary from a Roman point of view, in Goth, Persian, Armenian, Iberian, and nomad. The welcome alterations that make the others more attractive, easier to handle, and even Roman and Greek are metaphors for military subjugation, a point which is driven home when Themistius says he is not just the lover (and praiser) of emperors, he is the lover too of the soldier’s belt, the \(cingulum\), rendered in the passage by the word \(zōnē\) (\(ζώνη\)).\(^{18}\)

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15. τῶν ἐμῶν δὲ παιδικῶν ὁ ἐξηγητὴς καὶ προφήτης, τοσοῦτον ἄρα αὐτῷ κάλλος περίεστιν ὦστε καὶ βάρβαρον ποιεῖν καλῶς, καὶ τὸν Γέτιν ἡμερον καὶ τὸν Πέρσην ἑπιεικῆ καὶ τὸν Ἀρμένιον ἡδὴ ἡμαίον καὶ τὸν Ἴβηρα Ἐλληνα, καὶ τοῦ σκηνητῆν οἰκουρόν καὶ ἕκαστον ἐκ τοῦ πρόσθεν αἴσχους εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον κάλλος μεταμορφοῦν. Εγώ δὲ εἰμὶ μὲν καὶ τῆς ζώνης καὶ τῶν βασιλέως ἐπαινετῆς καὶ ἐραστῆς, καὶ μάλιστα εἰ καὶ ξὺν δίκῃ ζώνυμεν ἀντίνα καθορών, πολὺ δὲ μάλλον ἐπαινοῦν ἂν καὶ ἐρῷν τῆς κεφαλῆς καὶ τῶν ὀμμάτων, ἵνα τὸ τῆς γνώμης καὶ νοοῦ χωρίου καὶ οἰκητηρίου.

16. 166C, 168C, 175D, 179A, 180B.
17. ὁ δὲ ἐμὸς ἔρως δυοῦς βασιλέων ἐστιν.
18. For \(cingulum\) as \(zōnē\), see LSJ ζώνη II.3 or Lampe ζώνη 1C.
Themistius uses *zônê* metaphorically twice, and then, following these uses, *zônê* designates non-metaphorically the actual soldier’s belt (*cingulum*) cinched tight on Gratian’s body. First, *zônê* refers in a general way to soldierly endeavor: “I am the . . . lover of . . . the soldier’s belt. . . .” His love for the *zônê* expresses his esteem for the military. *Figura Etymologica*, not easy to reproduce in English and embodied in the pairing of *zônês*/*ζώνης* (“belt”) with *zönnumenên xun dikêilζωννυμένην ξύν δίκη* (“pulled tight [i.e., belted] with Justice”), reveals the second metaphorical meaning *zônê* can have, that of imperial *axiôma*/ἀξίωμα.

Themistius praises and loves the belt, now understood as imperial authority, when it is graciously restrained by legality (which of course it always is, as this is panegyric, and this declaration of love functions as hopeful recommendation). And then, in the next phrases, “but more should I wish to praise and love the head and eyes, where the place and dwelling of thought and mind are,” the *zônê/cingulum*, no longer a metaphor for things military or gubernatorial, is made to appear literally on Gratian’s body, as the reader’s eyes, having had their long look, are raised up from the manly belt to the eyes. There has also been a correction from thinking of things below and corporeal (the crotch) to things above and sublimatory (the head and eyes). A “ladder of love” has been scaled.

In this short passage and, indeed, throughout the speech, Themistius shows the implication of same-sex desire in the making of authority amid homosociality among late-Roman men. Themistius delivers the oration in the homosocial space of the Roman senate, trusting in *paideia* to make his audience understand what he is saying (and the speech lives on in written format, available for multiple educated receptions, late-ancient and later). Exemplified in the passage, but recurring throughout the oration, is the glamorization of masculine authority through associating its admirability with same-sex desire. This is the use of corporeal excitement to give liveliness to admiration, and, furthermore, the forbidden nature of the desire increases the stature of the grand emperor through the empowering effects of paradox (e.g., Gratian’s “manliness of luxury”; the use of the forbidden and illicit, i.e., same-sex desire, to increase the stature of that which is emphatically licit, i.e., imperial *axiôma*). In addition, Themistius’ gentle correcting movement of the reader’s gaze up from the belt to the head and eyes recalls the empowered knowingness that disciplining authorities have of the desire that they interdict: Themistius knows of same-sex desire and is one to incite, direct, and control it.

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19. For *zônê* as *axiôma*, see *LSJ* ζώνη II.3.
The goal of this book has been to reveal the ways in which same-sex desire and pleasure were visible within elite late-Roman manhood. In late antiquity there were a suite of visibilities of same-sex desire that recent accounts of this period have often missed due to scholars’ excessive deference both to the sources’ frequent protreptic goals and to perceived authorial intention. The corporeality of actual encounters remembered, intellectually known, and/or feared, left its mark on late-ancient discourse beyond the enunciation of prohibition in norms and law. As a constituent part of late-ancient manhood and an ever-present possibility, same-sex desire provoked rejection, enjoyed acceptance as a vehicle to express admiration or portray friendship, and increased authority’s power through demonstrations of penetrating observation and knowing discipline. Discourses that had (relative) dispassion about the fact of same-sex desire in masculine life found this desire useful rhetorically. The corporeal intensity of desire achieving its objective made for a powerful metaphor, and the obscene and material, through a paradoxical logic much favored in late antiquity, were choice vehicles for expressing their ostensible opposites: the sacred and transcendent. Asserting that inexplicable connections exist between this world and the next, late-Platonic philosophy played a part in making such metaphors and paradoxes effective too.

But this was not the whole story. The exemplary Athanasius presented a manhood whose glamour and admirability could not be metaphorized as same-sex sexual attractiveness. While Athanasius did show a scrutinizing and uncompromising authority’s knowledge of same-sex sexual activity, he separated same-sex desire and pleasure from the transcendent and relentlessly corporealized them. Athanasius’ stance was a logical result of his envisioning the transcendent as a perfect reflection of terrestrial norms and not the thing of inscrutability and mystery proposed by late Platonists such as Iamblichus. Ammianus’ presentation of the emperor fell between the late-Platonists’ (and others’) use of same-sex desire as a positive metaphor and Athanasius’ rejection of it. While wanting at times an Athanasian transcendent responsive to earthbound morals (civility), and yet, at other times, embracing one that was mysterious (Constantius’ imperial grandeur), Ammianus delivered respective blame and praise to his emperors, Constantius and Julian, via the medium of same-sex desire.

In a recent high-profile publication that considers changes to the family
in late antiquity, the following is offered as part of a summative comment on late-Roman manhood:

To be survived by a hearty son, able to consolidate and perhaps extend one’s dominance, was the crown of male military achievement. That this depended on factors beyond a man’s own control, such as longevity and the right reproductive partner, made it all the more potent a sign of divine favor.20

In these remarks, the domestic scene is important. There is much of the domus or oikos here, and fair enough; the piece is, in the first instance, about changes to the family in late antiquity and the household is important to consider if gender broadly construed is the topic. What deserve question are the claims implicit in the evocative phrases, “extend one’s dominance” and “the crown of male military achievement.” The family has been left behind when we speak of dominance and an acme of soldierly accomplishment. It is no longer the oikos or domus; this is the polis, empire, the political. However the notion of “military achievement” in relation to the vast majority of elite households in the late-ancient empire is to be understood—and that must surely count as an open question, inasmuch as late antiquity saw a controversial barbarization of the army—, it is overreach to pronounce the birth of a son key to securing dominance in a political sense. Marriage strategies were important to elites and the secondary literature coruscates with mention of the advantageous marriages men would make,21 but fathering a son is not a political accomplishment comparable to achieving success in the homosocial environs of, say, service to the emperor. For example, the plaque the province of Asia set up for Nummius Aemilianus Dexter mentions no son, and it is surely the case that his political career was substantially a function of friendly relations with other officials and the hardly pro-marriage Jerome.

Restricting the view of late-ancient men in the matter of desire to that for women obscures important dynamics in the male homosocial spheres that characterized the expanding senate and the growing classes of elites serving the emperor. Same-sex desire was productive of powerful positive and negative passions in this homosocial world. The reality of (knowledge

of) this desire and pleasure constituted a dimension to late-ancient men’s experience that will be always be missed if it is imagined that erotic and emotional needs could (and can) be met without remainder in all cases by the licit pleasures and joys of marriage to a woman and the satisfactions of family. The reality was more complicated. It is my hope that this book will lead to a more balanced appraisal of late-Roman manhood and the undeniable presence of same-sex desire within it.