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ON THE CONCEPT OF BYZANTIUM  
WITH CONTINUAL REFERENCE TO ALCIBIADES  
NAS SAFA

# On the Concept of Byzantium with Continual Reference to Alcibiades

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ALCIBIADES: Horatio? Dionysios?

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Alcibiades! What are you doing here?

HORATIO DEMES: What a pleasant surprise!

ALCIBIADES: Honestly, Horatio, Dionysios, I'm half in the bag and figured I'd stop by and see if you guys were around for a drink—

HORATIO DEMES: And you brought your nephew Demo!

ALCIBIADES: Oh, of course, he's my designated driver. Much cheaper than Uber!

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Absolutely, come in, sit down, have a drink, I'll pour you a Malbec.

ALCIBIADES: I've been trying to stay off the roads when I'm sloshed of late.

HORATIO DEMES: Yes, yes, so Alcibiades—what's new? I haven't seen you in months!

ALCIBIADES: As a matter of fact, I was just telling Demo as we walked up, I've just been inundating myself with a night I actually just remembered today, from years ago actually, completely non-descript, entirely inconsequential at face value, yet it was a night that was nonetheless a night that, now that I think of it, more or less entirely defines me. It was a night that, through pure instinct, I let my true colors show, and yes I was ashamed at first, but as the years have passed I've

realized that there's nothing a priori wrong with my true colors—actually quite the contrary.

My true colors, of course I can't change them, but even if I could I wouldn't.

Because even though my true colors require a prerequisite, a perhaps unappetizing prerequisite, a prerequisite that, yes Demo, Horatio, Dionysios, that I loathe certain people for no reason, but even though that may be the case, I believe it's actually proper to hate certain people for no reason, with no justification whatsoever, that hating people for no reason is in fact entirely necessary, and even that these certain people may deserve this intense loathing and unprovoked hatred, but let me begin, please.

DEMO DEMISES: By all means.

HORATIO DEMES: Yes by all means.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Please, proceed!

ALCIBIADES: It was an era where I found myself spending an inordinate amount of time at social events that I loathed—I loathed them both in my contemplations of having to attend them and then actually attending them.

People, ultimately, have no couth—and it's mind-numbing in a sense, because these same people will say to me, Alcibiades, do you have no couth?

When, to me, it's the exact opposite—the people who ask me if I have couth, in fact, have no couth now and never had any couth ever.

In my opinion, someone could shove substantial amounts of couth into every orifice of their body

ad-nauseam, and they'd still have no couth. They're flatly incompatible with couth.

To this day, for example, I often find myself present at social gatherings where a quote-unquote vegetable plate, along with a vegetable dip, is presented as an hors d'oeuvre, and I'm almost always a little let down by the quality of the celery.

At that particular stage in my life, in fact, the era I'm speaking of, I'd reconciled myself to the fact that I had intrinsically higher standards than most when it came to celery, cucumbers as well—I analyzed produce with an acuity, frankly, most of my peers would never achieve.

Having said that, to this day the majority of hosts in our country have next to no couth when it comes to serving celery or cucumbers.

Forced to attend a so-called post wedding brunch just a few months prior to the events I'm about to relay, I was appalled at the quality of cucumbers served—a cucumber, above all else, should be refreshing.

A piece of celery, ideally, is similar to sipping a fresh glass of ice water on a hot summer day.

The source of this regrettable degradation in the quality of our celery and cucumbers undoubtedly stems from America's overreliance on dip.

Dip, in our era, Demo, Horatio, Dionysios, has literally and figuratively become *the* hors d'oeuvre, it's become culturally acceptable to utterly ignore the quality of the celery and cucumbers, two of the most refreshing yet delicate vegetables known to our species, at social gatherings because it's assumed consumers' attention will be focused almost solely on the dip.

Yet it's precisely the dip that negates the nutritional benefits of the celery as well as the cucumbers. Americans no longer consume vegetables—no, they

consume vegetables with dips and sauces that obliterate all possible nutritional benefits of a vegetable.

These dips and sauces annihilate the intrinsically refreshing nature of our vegetables.

Guests at these parties could relieve themselves all over these quote-unquote vegetable plates and not miss a beat nutritionally—they'd probably even fail to notice a difference in taste, with the amount of sour cream currently found in the median American dip.

During this era of my life, Demo, Horatio, Dionysios, almost every week I would spend two to five minutes in the produce section arduously selecting only the finest celery stalks and most concrete cucumbers, touching all the cucumbers indiscriminately, with no regard for the customers who would inevitably touch these same vegetables after I was through—because, to this day, there's nothing more deflating than a stalk of celery gone flat by mid-week, yet there's nothing more uplifting than a freshly chopped stalk of celery, and the same can be said for cucumbers.

DEMO DEMISES: I don't disagree, Alcibiades. In fact, I find myself most at home in my local produce section.

ALCIBIADES: Yet none of us should be surprised at this state of affairs, with a vegetable dip masking the refreshing nature of the genuine article, so to speak—and this brings me to a larger point, if you'll allow me to digress just slightly before I relay my anecdote, the anecdote I've been obsessing over for weeks now.

The Anglo world, we should admit, is adroit in burying the genuine article—this is perhaps the true genius of the Anglo world.

The Anglo world is, in a very real sense, nothing more than an elaborate vegetable dip itself, and it's the most

expansive iteration of vegetable dip our world has ever experienced.

We're restricted to obscurity, Horatio Dionysios, Demo, not based on merit, but because we remain authentically Greek, perhaps even authentically Byzantine—it's our blunt refusal to become Anglo in our verbiage, and our verbiage directly links to our metaphysics, that we remain unassimilated.

We, the apparent Greeks, who are of course and are of course not, we appear to be but also appear not to be, we remain essentially unassimilated for this reason, this lack of Anglo character in our metaphysics, which at least point goes back millennia—endless ethnicities have assimilated into this proper Anglo world, but it's only because they bend the knee verbally and in turn metaphysically, they arrange their prepositions appropriately and write in the classic so-called New Yorker style.

Jews, Armenians, Turks, African-Americans, Chinese, Japanese, Mongolians, of course the Argentinians—their verbiage has been assimilated, because they bend the knee, they assimilate because they become no more, whereas the so-called Byzantine approach remains foreign and oriental and decadent and unassimilated, too East to be West, yet too West to be East.

I know all of this solely due to instinct, Demo, I provide no source material, there will be no bibliography to my harangues today, I'll state that outright.

They receive name-tags, these assimilators, that tell people “Hi, I'm an Armenian.”

But their verbiage is nothing less than Anglo at all times, because this is the Anglo world, but this is impossible for us, Demo, Horatio, Dionysios, because of course the entire Anglo world sculpted itself in direct opposition to our ancestors, the last gasp of the Greek

Thinkers, the Greeks became Christians, became Byzantines, became Orientals, became the Subjugated, became Heretics to the Islamic East, remained Heretics to the Catholic West, then became Hellenes once again, nonsensical Hellenes, just as they were.

It's the authentically Greek world that's opposed to the Anglo, the true Greek world that's been fabricated over and over again, this Greek world that, according to our sources, isn't even exactly Greek, that has continued to believe in God, because it's the Greek world that never stopped believing in the Divine Energies, it's the Greek world, that isn't even Greek, that never stopped believing it could become one with God's Energies, even if just momentarily—you see, we've never killed our God because we never stopped merging with our God.

We've all—all of us—become one with our God at one time or another, and for this reason we never chose to kill our God, we never murdered our God in cold blood because, in this Greek world, to kill our God would akin to committing suicide, because we became one with our God through the Divine Energies.

We continue to love our God because we continue to love ourselves, but in this love for ourselves and our God we've still essentially killed ourselves, we've in turn allowed the Anglo world to not only kill their God, but then cast their gaze upon us as decadent, as those who continue to worship their primitive God, as opposed to killing their God in cold blood without thought—the entire Anglo world is really, when you think about it, just a trust fund teen painting their fingernails black and dying their hair green while living under our roof.

Pretending to be radical.

Radical pretensions.

The Enlightenment was, when you really think about it, essentially a rich kid whose father worked for the CIA



as a covert operative in Western Africa in the late 80's starting a punk band, acting as if his new punk band is some kind of radical outlet while he lives under a roof funded by CIA covert operations in Western Africa.

That's what's occurring essentially, it's why we've been forbidden to exist in the Anglo world, because the so-called Byzantine metaphysics had already passed through the derivations, this Greek world that wasn't exactly Greek went through its teenage atheist phase long before the Anglo world even existed.

No parents allowed, Demo.

Essentially it's a joke. It's a joke, and it's a lurid joke.

It's actually comical.

Now, I don't find it particularly funny, yet I can't help but laugh at it.

In America the Anglo world co-opts all cultures—Vietnamese immigrants write coming of age stories that are nothing if not holistically Anglo, it's really disgusting, it's a little off-putting—how many books have been written purportedly in opposition of the very Anglo world they immediately assimilate into?

It probably comprises a good portion of the Anglo literature of the last century at least, there's no doubt about that, but not us, Demo. Horatio, Dionysios?

No, we sit in obscurity, true, but we sit in an obscurity with a vantage point that allows us to sincerely laugh, because it's comical, because everyone is assimilated but us—instead we're absurdly Hellenic, the only way to be Hellenic, of course, we look incredibly Byzantine, our scent is even Byzantine, yet the Byzantine was a decadent culture that no longer exists, this is what we're told, we have Byzantine noses yet call ourselves Hellenes.

The Afro-American Man is the Anglo Man, but the Greeks exist only in fictional formats.

Our true essence, our true ancestors, have been erased or deemed heretics, they've never understood our metaphysics, Demo—this is the first problem; in fact, nothing turns the stomach of the Anglo world more than the Byzantine metaphysics, the Anglo world can't understand the Byzantine metaphysics, the comprehension of the Byzantine metaphysics eludes the Anglo world for a variety of reasons, biologically speaking it's perhaps an impossibility for the Anglo world, because the Byzantine metaphysics is an extension of the Byzantine body, the Anglo world suffers in the presence of the Byzantine metaphysics.

The Anglo world has never understood an iota of the separation of Essence and Energy, despite the fact it's evident to all of us by dint of blood, the decadent Byzantine blood we retain traces of.

This much is true.

All of the masturbatory noodling about Plato, Aristotle, Hellenism—but how many Greek exegeses are there?

How many native Greek speakers are cited, modern Greek speakers?

I'm of course speaking of the so-called Later Greeks, the Oriental Greeks, how many of them penned brilliant exegeses of Plato and Aristotle?

Oh, they exist but remain uncited.

The citations cease at the adoption of demotic Greek, and the Anglo world continues to allege that it's because the culture, Byzantine culture they call it, became depraved.

All parents are decadent in the eyes of their children, aren't they?

But, let's think for a moment, let's recollect momentarily here, from whom exactly did this Greek culture, this so-called Byzantine culture, sink into depravity?

Is it—perhaps—the NAMBLA members of Ancient Athens?

Is it possible, could we postulate that the entire Anglo world cites the degradation of the so-called Greek world, which isn't exactly Greek, but only after the pederasty of the pagan Athenians faded into the background, that the only Greek culture worth citing, according to the Anglo world, are from the men who shamelessly fornicated with young boys— and other than that, when we leave the era of pederasty, then all Greek culture becomes degenerate?

These Byzantines, these imbecilic Byzantines, via the cessation of pederasty, they just became, I don't know, completely depraved, Demo!

Every editor for Harper's and The New Yorker and each and every other American or British literary magazine that's still en vogue should have their laptops confiscated for child pornography, and I'm actually being sincere here, because I would support that legislation.

Just check one time.

Give it a quick once over.

Are there any videos of adults fornicating with children—since apparently the height of all culture derived from pederasty, while the subsequent decadence did away with it?

This Anglo world is the cultural appropriator par excellence, Demo, except they never appropriated the so-called Byzantine metaphysics, instead the Anglo world distorted it gruesomely and deemed it decadent.

The Anglo world—descended from the Greeks.

It disgusts me, really.

What Greeks?

Who were they?

Certainly not our ancestors!

We're descended from the children of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Demo, not from the boy-lovers of Athens, although the Patriarch of Constantinople extended that tradition sans pederasty, the Athenian tradition, the Athenian philosophers were modified, they were analyzed extensively.

It makes my heart hurt, what they call our culture, *they* tell us what *our* culture is and expect to dance like orangutans on islands they "gifted" us from the Turks, Demo.

Which is fine, because Zorba did have a beautiful primitive soul, but at the same time I just won't have it anymore!

The entirety of Anglo letters, in my mind, is little more than a grotesque affront to our Greek world, which of course isn't quite Greek at all.

We Greeks, the apparent ones, Demo, we don't exist, that's correct, we're in no way shape or form exactly Greek.

But how could we be?

Let's be fair, the state of Greece is an essentially absurd place, it's the misnomer par excellence, our entire ethnicity is an extended misnomer—if you were to look at almost any nation that formed with any modicum of self-respect, certainly any modern European nation, then you'd see a sovereignty that took a disparate population and united them in a geographic locale.

For the so-called Greeks it was the exact opposite—an artificial geographic locale was selected for a population who already existed, a population dispersed, so then the Greeks—who existed in greater numbers outside of the borders of "Greece," mind you—were then shoved awkwardly, hamster-like, into these southern Balkan borders, and now you have Greece, the country of the Hellenes, absurdly so.

It's actually a travesty in its own way, yet it's also true that the Muslim world took such a turn that, had the Greeks stayed in their ancestral homelands, they'd have been mercilessly killed anyway. But, yes, Greece, the country where the center-left engages in the apex of a perverted tourist attraction, a ruthless faux-Hellenism, selling the modern Greek as some type of time traveling pagan from Antiquity—if it's not outright racism then it's at least truly subpar genetic analysis, and to be fair I don't even know anything about genetics, yet I know this genetic analysis is both perverted and gruesome.

But then there exists the so-called right wing in Greece, the Orthodox traditionalists, who actually support pluralism, they view Greek culture, through a so-called Byzantine lens, as a kind of multicultural endeavor, as a Greek culture that can actually absorb others, the basic pre-text for any culture with any chance of survival—as opposed to the center-left view, which is essentially idiotic in character, viewing Greek culture as little more than an antique to be left alone, to just continually degrade until the bid is so low it's thrown into a dumpster somewhere.

Everything is backwards in this Greece!

These are our liberators, the faux-Hellenes and center-left totalitarians.

It's sad.

I'm sad.

But for obvious political reasons the latter point of view—the so-called conservative point of view—can't take hold, the so-called Greeks, the absurdist Hellenes, who aren't even Greek, can't engage with their multicultural past, their Byzantine roots, they'll be banished into fictions before that.

In an era where the highest premium is placed upon multiculturalism the alleged Greeks are forbidden from

engaging with their multicultural heritage—lest they become conservative!

How dare you taint the pagan Greek pedophiles with a few drips of Muslim blood, no you'll become decadent.

Don't you see this, Demo?

Do you understand what I'm saying?

Do you grasp what's going on here?

Better to fondle a young boy than become a little Arab—this is what separates Athens from Constantinople in the eyes of the Anglo world, it's this unspoken agreement that remains blatantly latent and defines us, look at it closely and it becomes evident how inverted the Greek world is from the Anglo world, it's the only world where the conservatives are the multiculturalists while the liberals are the monocultural totalitarians.

It's why Greeks can never assimilate, only disappear.

How could they possibly assimilate?

These Anglos have been engaging in parental abuse for centuries, yet to be fair the entirety of the Greek ethnicity is essentially a fiction at this point—that much is clear.

Yet we can't hoist all of the blame on the Anglo world, even if it's an essentially barbarian milieu to this day. Is the Anglo world a barbarian world?

Perhaps.

Do I feel as though the Median Anglo is essentially a barbarian?

Extemporaneously speaking, perhaps.

Yet barbarians or not, they're not to blame for the plight of the so-called Greeks, we can't assert that, not entirely at least, because plenty of Greeks fought the endless wars against the Muslim East to turn around and lick the boot of the Anglo West.

The Greeks, ultimately, have sunk themselves, which is why they're no longer even Greek, we can't blame anyone more than ourselves, we were placed in an impossible

position between East and West, and we acted in an impossible fashion, we're no longer even ourselves.

Now the Anglo world believes it can write, but if we're being honest with ourselves it's the furthest thing from literature, what they produce, to my mind at least, maybe it's just me, but I find it suffering from literalism.

Name an author who emerged from the Anglo world, from Shakespeare, to Montaigne, to Joyce, to Stein, to Hemingway, they're all essentially, for lack of a better term, essentially literalist, either that or they're attempting to refute literalism to the extent their work reeks of literalism—if it's not essentially derivative then it's essentially literalist and if it's not essentially literalist then it's essentially drivel.

The entirety of the Western Canon is a literalist footnote to Plato, Northhead had it partially correct.

No, it's beautiful literature, you say, but I suppose I fundamentally disagree because I tend to find the literature of the Anglo as either too literalist, too derivative, or essentially drivel.

They're not good, to my mind at least.

I suppose I could be wrong.

Maybe they're great. I think it's entirely possible.

I just find it to be annoyingly literalist or essentially drivel for a variety of reasons.

The problem is there's a distinct lack ever-present—when you're forced to subscribe to a doctrine of metaphysics that restricts you from interacting with Energies, you more or less can't produce literature, because you can't become God, and if you can't become God you more or less can't produce literature.

The first requirement of literature is almost certainly a momentary becoming of God, and if your entire canon of literature has become an extended literalist lament of

how you can no longer momentarily become God, then I think you've produced something that's essentially drivel. I guess I just feel like I could never read another word from an author who emerged from the Anglo world, and I actually think I'd be perfectly fine, my life may actually be improved.

The authors of the Anglo world believe by removing passion from their prose they've become refined, but that's like a baboon wearing penny loafers believing he's prepared to make reservations at an Applebee's, yet how did we get onto us anyway, the Greeks—I have a story to tell you, although I suppose it's all interconnected, it's probably fine.

Am I repeating myself?

Did I go overboard?

Exaggerate slightly?

It's definitely possible, but I actually don't think so, because I feel like if anything I'm being too literalist myself, that if anything I'm lacking in hyperbole at the moment.

I feel as though, right now, that I'm actually being too kind, that if anything I feel like I'm being too nice. I feel as though there's vitriol that I still owe, that I've inherited a sizable debt of vitriol that I still owe to the general populace of this country.

It's possible that I'm filled to the brim with vitriol, and it's possible that I owe all of this vitriol to the general populace.

It's almost as if I'm leaving a good amount of vitriol on the table.

The Anglo world has lectured us that the true Greeks made anal love to little boys, and then when Greeks moved beyond raping young men in the rear-end it was only at that point that Greek culture became depraved and decadent.



Do you understand that, Demo?

Because it's important that you do, because that may be the most important point I relay to you today, because this is what I've personally been taught by the Anglo world—and that I can tell you for certain is no exaggeration.

I'm being literalist.

So, yes, I guess you could say I have a fair amount of vitriol.

At times my vitriol feels infinite, where does my vitriol end—that I don't know.

And yes, frankly, it just rubs me the wrong way.

Only the Greeks would allow themselves to be taught they had two sets of ancestors—one was awesome and shagged children, and the other developed the philosophy of the first but stopped shagging adolescents and was decadent—then shrug their shoulders and go get drunk somewhere.

It's just audacious, that's what it is.

If nothing else I respect the audacity.

I actually have the highest respect for the audacity of the Anglo world.

My words may or may not be hyperbolic but they're leagues less audacious than the recent actions of the Anglo world.

Our ancestors have spent hundreds of years in obscure mountains, forbidden to read or write, while the entire Anglo world has spread this misinformation about us, this slander, this character assassination, so it's no wonder pedophiles run rampant in every Western government—look who the idols of Western Civilization are!

Plato the Pedophile and Socrates the Sophomore Sucker, as if these were the only Greeks, as if there were no other Greeks to choose from, or just don't choose any

Greeks at all, in that case maybe Greeks would still exist as opposed to existing and not existing, but in any case it was a few years ago, I was at a bar downtown, actually I was at a restaurant last night, and the strangest thing happened, but I'm sorry, Demo—am I boring you?

DEMO DEMISES: Oh, not at all!

HORATIO DEMES: Alcibiades, please, proceed.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: By all means! Horatio and I are both exhausted from our previous conversation. We actually need someone to talk our ear off, we'd prefer someone to bloviate endlessly, so to speak, while we drink our wine.

HORATIO DEMES: I, for one, plan on getting quite inebriated.

ALCIBIADES: Well, in any case, I was at a restaurant across the street from my apartment for a small gathering, my good friend's cousin was in town, and she and her father both invited me to this informal dinner right across the street from my apartment, so I decided it would be a little rude for me not to go, considering I was legitimately across the street, within minimal walking distance, and had nothing else to do.

I essentially had to go but also had no issue with attending.

In addition, I was aware the meal would in all likelihood be free, and although I didn't particularly think highly of the restaurant across the street, I knew there was at least one decent meal, or maybe even two decent meals, that I could order and feel relatively satiated.

Personally, I was a big fan of the Spicy Maki Platter, where you received eighteen pieces of tuna, salmon, and yellowtail sushi for just \$16.

It's a great meal, and because of the economical price-point you don't feel like a total loser ordering it on someone else's tab.

In any case, we're there, my good friend and I, perhaps we're even lovers, Demo, but I don't want to go into a great amount of detail about my personal life here, we might even live together in my apartment, but I'm not going into that here, we're in love with each other in a way that just feels profound, that's possible, but in any case we're there, at the restaurant, when my friend's cousins from out of town arrive, and almost immediately the conversation turns to the much discussed COVID-19 vaccine, and being wholly sober as well as extremely hungry I decide to have no part of it, I don't mention anything about nonlinear distributions, the inherent dishonesty of all large governments over the course of human history, I choose to not mention Elliot Abrams receiving a \$50 fine for trafficking crack cocaine into every black community in America in the 1980s, I choose not to mention any of this. It wasn't the right time to discuss nonlinearities and Elliot Abrams. I wasn't going to get caught up in the nature of probability distributions and Elliot Abrams' \$50 fine for selling large swathes of crack at the behest of the first Bush administration at that time.

It would have been uncouth, ill-advised, and also completely inappropriate.

But in keeping my mouth shut I felt just a momentary tinge of agitation, in hearing these opinions I inveterately disagreed with, in refraining from the saying the words nonlinearity and Elliot Abrams I became slightly agitated, the only antidote to my agitation would

be to say the word nonlinearity aloud, which I had no intention of doing.

I couldn't say the word *nonlinearity* or the words *Elliot Abrams* at this restaurant without embarrassing myself, and I knew it.

The fact of the matter is when an opinion I disagree with is expressed in my presence, and I act socially appropriately, then I often feel this tinge of agitation, as if I was put on this Earth for the sole purpose of behaving inappropriately and expressing my honest opinions, no matter the cost socially.

Instead I'm glancing intermittently at my friend's older cousin, just shamelessly speculating on his racial makeup—which I hate.

I've had it done to me countless times, I'm sure you've experienced the same, and I despise the people who just shamelessly speculate as to my racial makeup, I'm sure you despise them just as much, yet sitting across from this distant cousin of my friend I sat in this silent hypocrisy, I sat there and shamelessly, continuously speculated on his racial makeup to myself, going so far as to take specific facial features into account and speculate on a geographic area of origin.

It was grotesque.

But that's unfortunately what I found myself doing in place of sharing my sincere opinions on nonlinear probability distributions and Elliot Abrams distributing crack to the black communities of our country, which of course you more or less can't do in this country anymore.

Governments have lied to us almost without pause since the invention of the nation-state, in just America alone we've seen the large-scale oppression of African-Americans over the course of centuries, the state-sanctioned poisonings of African-American communities with crack cocaine, of lower class

Caucasian communities with prescription pills, we have pop stars named Little Xanax, millions of children in this country fantasize about abusing prescription narcotics before they go to sleep at night and the FDA apparently thinks nothing of it, we have one pop star named Little Xanax and zero pharmaceutical executives who've been prosecuted for this lurid state of affairs, and that's really just scratching the surface in America, we haven't even mentioned the Turkish occupation, the genocides of Pol Pot, of Hitler and the Nationalist Socialists, or the litany of other occupations which have occurred all across the globe, yet now the United States government informs its citizens without a trace of irony that a fast-tracked vaccine is absolutely safe, with no long-term empirical evidence available, and if we question that then we're essentially excommunicated from decent society.

If we utter the phrases 'nonlinear probability distribution' or 'Elliot Abrams was a crack cocaine dealer' we've apparently become fascists in this country.

So I have no idea as to the racial makeup of this man sitting so innocently across from me, and eventually I just say to myself—Alcibiades, you're disgusting, this is grotesque, take out your smartphone and dick around on that, for God's sake. So we order our meals.

My friend, who I may or may not be in love with, who orders right before me, orders the Spicy Maki Platter, so we both end up ordering the exact same meal, the Spicy Maki Platter, and I just gave her a look, Demo, I looked at her like *are you kidding me?*

We could have at least discussed this before the waitress asked for the orders, now we're ordering the same exact meal back to back.

But then I think to myself, well, if she doesn't eat all eighteen pieces, which she won't, then I'll at least have

the option to snag a few of her sushi pieces if I'm not completely full after my eighteen.

I guess I can be a bit gluttonous when it comes to sushi, but I also—in true Greek Orthodox fashion—tend to fast for large portions of the day, so by the time dinner arrives I'm generally prepared to feast.

I've read that modern medicine has begun to see value in this fast and feast regimen of nutrition, that the body works more efficiently when it's deprived for a period of time.

But in any case we both order the Spicy Maki Platter, and her dad, who's sitting right next to me, orders a shrimp noodle dish that has no appeal to me.

But when this shrimp noodle dish arrives the first thing her dad says is *Wow, this is big*—and it is, it's huge.

And the noodles, it should be noted, are thick—it would be nearly impossible for one person to finish a plate like that in just one sitting, save for perhaps the morbidly obese.

So immediately, and only with the best of intentions, because her father is one of the most well-intentioned individuals you'll ever come across, her dad starts offering me some of his dish, and initially I refuse not only because I find the dish unappealing but primarily because I'm eating my own meal.

But this changes eventually.

Famished as I was, I obviously finished my meal not only before anyone else at the table but considerably prior to anyone else at the table cleaning their plate—I'm sitting there with a completely clean plate while everyone else is at most halfway through their meal.

And my friend is hardly eating her Maki Platter at all, instead she's busy nibbling on her cousin's General Tao Shrimp, yet her father, well-intentioned and glancing at

my situation, for the second time asks—*Alcibiades, you want some?*

No, no thank you, I'm full, I say, not thinking at all.

Without a single thought in my skull I say I'm full—yet in retrospect what else could I say?

How can you refuse a bite of someone's meal, especially on a second offer, without saying you're full?

Yet now the problem becomes her dad believing I'm full.

But I'm actually the furthest thing from full—because sushi never fills you.

You finish a plate of sushi and the first thing you think is I could go for a little more sushi.

Eighteen pieces of fish-filled sushi and I'm not even remotely close to satiated; all I'm thinking about is eating more sushi.

So I'm obviously looking at a delicious second helping of this Spicy Maki Platter staring me in the face on my friend's plate, and I'm trying to devise a method of clandestinely sneaking a few pieces of this sushi into my mouth without my friend's dad noticing, not that he would care, but just on principle.

I already inhaled my meal, eighteen pieces of fish-filled sushi, and now I'm telling my friend's father I'm full, but then remorselessly eating the sushi next to my plate?

It just wasn't a palatable option to me at the time.

I wanted to avoid that scenario if possible.

Yet as I'm devising a plan to surreptitiously extract this foreign sushi into my mouth my friend's cousin takes her fork and starts eating her sushi—potentially my sushi.

I'm watching my friend's father struggle to finish his gargantuan shrimp lo mein on my left, then watching my friend's cousin methodically eat each leftover piece of delicious Spicy Maki on my right.

Then I look across the table and begin shamelessly racially speculating again, just to momentarily get my mind off this whole sushi-lo mein imbroglio.

By the end of the meal there were two or three pieces of sushi left, my friend says *Have one*, and I shake my head, realizing the entire endeavor, this mission to obtain more Spicy Maki, was doomed to failure.

I considered asking her to take the pieces home, but no—this urge for more Maki is misguided, I think, it's doomed to failure, it's too late for that.

The Spicy Maki Platter was delicious, but to take home the leftover sushi wasn't a palatable option to me at the time.

And the funny thing was, Demo, Horatio, Dionysios, I actually started to feel full by the time everyone else concluded their meals.

DEMO DEMISES: You know, I had a similar experience the other Tuesday. My friend Greg—

HORATIO DEMES: Greg? Doctor Dave's cousin?

ALCIBIADES: Right, that's right.

DEMO DEMISES: Yes, exactly. So Greg comes over, we're about to go to this wedding, and Greg had reached out to me the week before, because he'd noted to me that he really wanted to get blackout drunk before the wedding, so I said, sure, you can come my apartment, I don't know, maybe 2:30-ish, and we'll definitely attempt to make that happen.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: That sounds reasonable.



HORATIO DEMES: I would have said the same thing, Demo. 2:30 sounds like the perfect time to start binge drinking.

DEMO DEMISES: I thought so too. But then Greg replied to me that he was thinking more around lunch time, with an acronym for laughter, and I said that's fine, I guess.

I mean, it was frankly a little early for me, but at the same time I was willing to be flexible. I had no real qualms about getting belligerently drunk before the wedding anyway, I wasn't opposed to it at all.

ALCIBIADES: You're too kind, Demo!

HORATIO DEMES: Ah, Demo, this kindness is making me sick. You're a Godsend, you know that?

DEMO DEMISES: So I arrange things so that we can start drinking around 12:30, which I thought was reasonable, as a 12:30 start gave me enough time to do some work in the morning, go for a run, but it also gave us an opportunity to see the night through, I thought at the time, perhaps foolishly, and then I also had to get a congratulatory card for the wedding, then I had go to the liquor store—I invited my cousin as well, then I looked in my liquor cabinet and barely had anything to drink.

So I went to buy Greg a nice bottle of Dewar's scotch, I know he likes brown liquor and I had none, I also knew he liked Jameson, but it was over \$30 for a bottle, so I saved myself \$5 and got the Dewar's, which I actually felt was a higher quality brown liquor.

Of course when Greg came by he decided to drink vodka.

My cousin asked for a pack of Marlboro Lights, so I bought a pack of Marlboro Lights, which are now almost comically expensive.

So I go get a congratulatory card for the wedding, then Greg doesn't get my place until after one.

Now I know that I can't drink beer all day without getting groggy, so if I drink beer with Greg at 1PM, by the wedding, at 5PM, I'll be groggy and extremely ornery at the actual ceremony, so I can't drink beer.

I hate white wine, but I love red wine, especially Malbec, but if I drink red wine at 1PM, by the wedding at 5PM my teeth will be tinted green, and I'll embarrass myself every time I grin before the vows are even read.

So naturally I started drinking vodka at 1PM.

I poured a vodka on the rocks with a few subpar green olives I bought at Walgreens along with the congratulatory card for the wedding, and I realized, as we sat in my living room talking, that Greg had never been to my apartment before, and I suddenly felt as though he was fairly uncomfortable, so I in turn suddenly found myself uncomfortable.

I started drinking my vodka on the rocks with subpar green olives at perhaps an inadvisable pace, Greg was drinking vodka in a Gatorade bottle across the room, now we were talking passionately, and without thinking I asked Greg—do you read?—he politely told me he was a big reader, but doesn't usually have time to sit down and read a whole book.

Which is respectable.

In fact, reading books may actually be a degenerate act, in my opinion, although I count it among the degenerate acts I for one reason or another continue to engage in.

Yet, despite the fact Greg had just told me he wasn't all that interested in reading books from start to finish, I suddenly insisted that he take this book that I just read.

*You have to read this*, I said, completely nonsensically.

I love this book, I just finished reading it and I've been telling everyone how great it is.

I even gave Greg a poorly worded anecdote from the book, which only barely made sense, because I worded it so poorly.

In addition, since I love this book so much, I've had it on my shelf ready to re-assess, ready to revisit when the time was right, yet instead of keeping this book Greg doesn't want to read on my shelf to re-read, which I wanted to do, I more or less instead forced Greg, who clearly had no interest in the book, who held the book awkwardly on his lap for the rest of the afternoon, I insisted he borrow the book.

He kept the book on his lap, awkwardly re-arranging its positioning with the position of his drink in his hand, and as soon as I just glimpsed at the book on Greg's lap, awkwardly sitting there, I knew I'd made a grave mistake in forcing him to borrow the book.

The next day I glanced at my bookshelf in disgust as I realized I was never going to get that book back.

That book is gone.

It's never coming back.

People don't return borrowed books.

Returning a borrowed book is almost a social impossibility.

When you lend someone a book you've already read it's almost a guarantee the moment you place the book into the hand of the borrower, that moment will be the last moment you ever see that book.

Why would someone return a book?

You've already read it.

People don't view books as repetitive phenomena.  
They view books as tissue paper.  
You wouldn't return a tissue I lent you after you wiped  
a stain off your counter, and the same *modus operandi*  
applies to books.

This is how people view books.

Like tissues.

In addition, no one actually reads books anymore.

So even if they did return this unread book to you, then  
inevitably they'd open themselves up to questions about  
this book, questions they'd have no chance of  
intelligently answering, because they never read the  
book.

In fact, the only logical action on the part of the  
borrower is to never mention the book again.

Then, in turn, hope the person who lent the book never  
mentions the book again, which of course they can't,  
because you can't ask for a book back, any mention of the  
book would make the lender seem desperate—for a book  
he's already read.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: That much is true, Demo. Once  
you lend a book you can never mention it again. It's  
more or less all over at that point, the book is for all  
intents and purposes gone forever.

HORATIO DEMES: But Alcibiades, please—tell us what  
you came here to say, the thing you've been inundating  
yourself with for some time now. Because I'm sincerely  
curious.

ALCIBIADES: We need to despise people, at times, for  
seemingly no reason, Horatio. I need to say this to you,  
to reiterate this to you, that certain people are just  
deserving of our scorn.

These people have of course done nothing personally to me, but I choose without hesitation to despise them.

This is the case—I look directly into a person's eyes, knowing absolutely nothing of their background, their occupation, their culture, their personal beliefs, their moral codes, their relationship statuses, and I choose without hesitation to despise their very being, their essence.

It doesn't happen often, but it does happen, and when it does happen I trust this brutal instinct I experience, this instinct to despise without hesitation.

Our culture is dead.

We've made a valiant effort to preserve our culture, yet we've also played an integral role in destroying it all the same—we're Greeks, yet of course we're no longer Greek at all.

We belong to a dead culture.

I had a strange dream last night, Horatio, Dionysios, Demo—in this dream I was at a wedding where I was propositioned for sex by a girl I found attractive in college who had no interest in me, in fact I'm almost positive she despised me, then after finding a large game of kickball being played in a floating sandpit during the waning hours of the wedding I found myself at a small gathering surrounded by people from my high school, where I asked a guy named Tommy Nicholas what he'd been up to, genuinely curious, then about halfway through his story abruptly stopped paying attention.

Then a person I didn't recognize saw my mother walking over to a freezer of completely out of place frozen food, then noted someone had said she resembled a certain ethnicity that she wasn't—Jamie Martin, of a certain ethnicity we're not, noted my mother looked nothing like his mother, he emphasized the word *his*,

clearly shading the anecdote, and I agreed, noting my mother is often confused for ethnicities she isn't.

Then the person I didn't recognize made a reference to a movie I didn't know, this was apparently where the anecdote regarding my mother emerged from, and I had no idea what he was referring to, then the three of us concluded I hadn't heard of the movie—which was apparently well known—because I didn't have kids.

Which leads me to my two primary conclusions: Firstly, the Greek world needs to integrate other ethnicities into once again, as it did during the so-called Byzantine years—these are the reasons the Greeks are so difficult to place, yet why should the Greeks continue to cling to sort of pseudo-Europeanism it has no real heritage within, where it will exist eternally marginalized—why not return to the policies of Byzantium, which was clearly the apex of Greek culture, despite European interpretations to the contrary.

Secondly, there's the issue of the current state of children's movies. Is it possible the entertainment of our childhood—Demo, perhaps excluded—was quite this idiotic?

I recognize what I liked as a child was for the most part moronic and worthy of mockery as an adult—and I think this is pretty much common, how many well-adjusted adults still believe the propaganda they fawned over as teens is actually of merit, that stripped of the nostalgia attached to it that they would still find this propaganda worthwhile artistically?

What we like as adolescents is invariably, if stripped of nostalgia, considered idiotic when we're adults, yet every time someone comments on a children's show, which of course I'm usually completely ignorant of, I silently note to myself that this is the most idiotic thing I've ever heard of.

That I'd rather be punched in the groin than have to sit through even one segment of this show.

Even the names of these shows seem criminally unintelligent.

Most times when someone mentions the name of a children's show I actually have no idea what they're referencing, I almost feel like I popped a hallucinogen.

It just sounds just like complete gibberish, like someone's speaking a foreign language when they're only telling me about a syndicated TV show their four year old enjoys.

It's only when my flummoxed reaction has fully sunk in for them that they modify their original statement and say Oh, you don't have kids, that's right, and then they repeat the name of the program, and I still struggle to verify if what they're saying—the word combinations they're uttering—truly belong to the English lexicon.

DEMO DEMISES: But it's probably all relative—

ALCIBIADES: But we've killed our culture, Demo. Or maybe it's the destiny of the Greeks to remain small in number, maybe Makriyannis was correct.

DEMO DEMISES: Well, what about the other night—with Bobby Valentino?

ALCIBIADES: Oh, no—I agree Demo! The culture I grew up with is completely degenerate, and it wouldn't be entirely accurate to suggest that I am as well. I recognize the degeneracy of the current generation's entertainment mostly because I myself am also extremely degenerate, and I grew up with similarly degenerate art.

HORATIO DEMES: Bobby Valentin—

ALCIBIADES: Did you like Little Wayne at all, Horatio? Tha Carter 3, or Ms Officer?

HORATIO DEMES: Well, I'm a little older, so—

ALCIBIADES: In any case, Demo and I were out late the other Saturday at a friend of our's, we were smoking a home-made hookah when the song Ms Officer by Little Wayne and Bobby Valentino came on, and I just happened to recall the repeated rumors that Bobby Valentino enjoyed the sexual company of persons who dressed as so-called traditional women but also had penises and testicles, when, just coincidentally, our friend next to me said something to the effect of: Imagine being the studio and having to sing Wee-Oh-Wee, repeatedly. Which was funny. So I decided to add to the speculation, although I knew adding to the speculation wasn't necessarily my strong-suit, but jubilant with hookah smoke, I nevertheless added something to the effect of Yeah it was because—when the song stopped and there was a pause in the music. Silence ensued. And another friend of ours just happened to say What Alcibiades in a somewhat menacing tone, and at the time, unconcerned with my public image whatsoever, I said It was because they had a person who dressed as a traditional female but also had a penis and testicles standing behind Bobby Valentino—clearly implying the person's penis behind Bobby Valentino was penetrating Bobby Valentino's butt—and that's how they got him to make the Wee-Oh-Wee sound. Which a few people found amusing, yet unfortunately—

DEMO DEMISES: Unfortunately one of our friends, the person who said What Alcibiades, had just started



seriously dating a person who identified as a traditional male with a penis and testicles but who also intermittently performed locally while dressed in traditional feminine attire—

ALCIBIADES: In other words, he perhaps could at times, although not all the time, be found as a person who dressed as a so-called traditional female, yet a traditional female who had a penis and—

DEMO DEMISES: I'm not entirely sure—

ALCIBIADES: It was embarrassing.

DEMO DEMISES: It was an off color remark.

ALCIBIADES: I would say it was moderately offensive.

DEMO DEMISES: Arguably completely out of line.

ALCIBIADES: If I had any career aspirations I might be worried.

HORATIO DEMES: A person dressed as a so-called traditional female but with a—

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Penis?

ALCIBIADES: Yes, that's correct. A person who assumes aesthetic values of what some would deem a feminine character, but who also has a penis and testicles. Yet we've killed our own culture, my friends. This is the case. The Greek world, the Byzantines, the Eastern Romans, of course, had eunuchs, and Theodora, Justinian's wife, was a famous prostitute, a true lady of the night who

longed with larger orifices of the nipple, so she could be penetrated via five holes, this was before she became Empress. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with a little sexual exploration. Having said that, personally, I find the draconian regime regarding terminology to be a little—

DEMO DEMISES: suffocating?

ALCIBIADES: Yes, but I don't object to being suffocated. Being suffocated from time to time isn't entirely objectionable. In fact, suffocation is at times necessary, a precursor of ingenuity. Our culture, which is more or less dead at this point, was in many ways the result of suffocation, Demo—you know this. We couldn't be Romans, so they called us Greeks. Then when the Greeks posed a threat to the pipelines of the Middle East our ancestors became Byzantines, and we time travelled from Antiquity, so the British could maintain a stranglehold on the oil of the Middle East. They'll call anyone anything as long as the oil keeps flowing. We became an entirely separate ethnicity so the British could sell Middle Eastern oil in Pounds. Ethnicity is a construct of modern economics, Demo, don't be mistaken about that. The Saudis will be viewed as transdimensional entities in the next decade if it guarantees that oil isn't sold in Yuan. We know this. I have no issue with suffocation. In fact, my natural state may in fact be suffocation. If I'm not on the verge of suffocation I'm arguably borderline out of my element. But onto my story.

HORATIO DEMES: But what he speaks is the truth, Demo.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Some among us have, at times, viewed your Uncle through an unfavorable lens, but I think we'll all admit that, if nothing else, he's a student of history.

ALCIBIADES: Well, thank you, Dionysios. But onto my story—

DEMO DEMISES: Well, hold on just a second—

ALCIBIADES: Well, yes, Demo—what I just said in a general sense is in fact the truth. The Greek world, so-called, began in Antiquity, as is well documented, we'll certainly grant that the so-called Greek world began in Antiquity, with its general apex, during Antiquity, believed to be give or take around 400 BC, around the death of Socrates, who was stoned to death in 399 BC. This era was around the time of the wars of the Peloponnese. Now it's not this era I take umbrage with so much, it's not this era that's been, in my opinion, ruthlessly falsified by subsequent European generations, by the so-called Anglo world, Demo—it's the Late Antiquity Greeks and Medieval Greek history that I take umbrage with, essentially what we refer to as Byzantine history, which diverges substantially from Europe's history, that's what I, personally, specifically take umbrage with. Primarily, it's the—well, let me pause for a moment and allow me to put it this way. How is it we define ethnicity today? Give or take?

DEMO DEMISES: We shout epithets at each other and convince ourselves of falsehoods?

ALCIBIADES: Would it be absurd to state that a so-called Spanish person today is considered Spanish

insofar as he or she is either a native Spanish speaker or is descended from native Spanish speakers?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: Is this not the glue that binds the so-called Hispanic world together today, more or less? Is that fair?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: A mutual speaking of differing dialects of the Spanish language?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: With a shared Roman Catholicism being perhaps a distant second. Because after all, an atheist in the Dominican Republic remains a part of the Hispanic community, does he or she or they not?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: And what exactly is the bond between the peoples of Mexico, Puerto Rico, Spain, Argentina, Chile—if not this shared heritage that's in essence bound by the language of Spanish? Is that not fair?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: And in the Arab world, are there not Christian Arabs, Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, Alawite Arabs, Druze Arabs?

DEMO DEMISES: That's perhaps a fair assumption.

ALCIBIADES: And, conversely, the Iranian world remains majority Shia Muslim, yet Iranians are ethnically Persian rather than Arab, Iranians are generally not considered Arabic because Iranians, in general, don't speak Arabic as their native tongue, is that correct?

DEMO DEMISES: That's perhaps a fair assumption.

ALCIBIADES: And are there not people who reside in Lebanon and Syria who still worship the Greek Orthodox God, yet are considered Arabic purely by dint of the primary language they speak and/or are descended from (descended again meaning descended from people who spoke Arabic)? Is this not the case?

DEMO DEMISES: That's perhaps a fair assumption.

ALCIBIADES: So it's perhaps a fair assumption to state that the Arab world, expansive as it is, and the Spanish world, even more expansive as it is, are bound essentially by a question of language?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: That we've delineated the Arab by dint of he or she speaking Arabic or being a descendent of Arabic speakers?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: That we've delineated the Spanish person by dint of he or she speaking Spanish or being a descendent of Spanish speakers?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: That yes, sure, religious and cultural issues are always at play, but stripped of the common language these ethnicities we now refer to as Spanish and Arab would become more or less nonsensical?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: That the only logical boundary that subsists through the entirety of these so-called ethnicities we refer to as Spanish and Arab is, in fact, a boundary of language? Perhaps?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: Yet, in a historical context, we have a litany of examples of populations who speak Greek, yet are curiously divorced from the Greek ethnicity. Once we leave Ancient Athens, historically speaking, in the eyes of Anglo history, the people who speak Greek are twisted and turned and contorted until they become anything but Greek. Hoards of populations speak Greek, yet are somehow, retroactively, divorced from the history of the Greek ethnicity. Did Plotinus of Alexandria not speak and compose in Greek?

DEMO DEMISES: That's perhaps a fair assumption.

ALCIBIADES: If Plotinus spoke Arabic would we not consider Plotinus an Arab scholar, regardless of his status as an Alexandrian?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: If Plotinus spoke Spanish would we not consider Plotinus a Spanish scholar, regardless of his status as an Alexandrian?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: Did Symeon the New Theologian not speak and compose in Greek? If he spoke Arabic would we not consider Symeon an Arab Christian scholar? If he spoke Spanish would we not consider Symeon to be a Spanish theologian? Did Pseudo-Dionysius not—am I boring you?

DEMO DEMISES: Not yet.

ALCIBIADES: Would you tell me if I was?

DEMO DEMISES: Perhaps.

ALCIBIADES: But once we leave the city of Socrates, of the Athenian pederasts, once the Greek speaking world expands into the East, into new cosmopolitan centers such as Constantinople, such as Antioch, such as Alexandria, such as Smyrna, once the Greek world begins to synthesize the canonical Gospels with the metaphysics of the Greek pagan philosophers and Neoplatonists—then the so-called Greekness of these Greek speakers is called into question, if not summarily discarded. The Greeks are no longer Greek, despite the fact these non-Greeks are the true forefathers of the so-called modern Greeks. In fact, called into question is actually too generous a phrase, as more often than not the Greek ethnicity of these Greek speakers is simply summarily discarded, but only in retrospect and only for

political reasons. Only in retrospect and only for political reasons. For political reasons, in retrospect, these populations are divorced from their proper Greek ethnicity, despite speaking Greek. Primarily in modern times this occurs. Because in medieval times the Eastern portion of Rome, which remained intact and financially dominant, consisting again of Greek speakers, was denigrated by the Europeans as Greek—the Europeans at this time viewed the intact portion of the Roman Empire, Eastern Rome, as essentially Greek, they divorced Eastern Rome from Rome because they spoke Greek. It's important to make this distinction between the pre-modern conception of Eastern Rome and the modern conception of Eastern Rome—because the fundamental linguistic character of Eastern Rome never changed, Eastern Rome was always populated with, primarily, Greek speakers. But in the pre-modern Anglo world, the Eastern portion of Rome became Greek, because the Anglo world needed the concept of Rome to remain purely European. The Anglo world, at this point, in its pre-modern vocabulary, remained consistent in its formulation that Language Equals Ethnicity. The Eastern Roman world was Greek because A) it spoke Greek and, more conveniently, B) the emerging European world needed to claim Rome as inheritance, as a purely European inheritance. But then as we enter the Enlightenment, as modernity dawns upon us, as modernity progresses this formulation changes, and suddenly these same Greeks—who again the Anglo world previously deemed to be Greek—can no longer be considered Greek. Because now the Anglo world is exposed for the first time, through Arabic transcripts no less, to the texts of the Athenian philosophical schools.



DEMO DEMISES: So is it fair to say that Greek world began then in Antiquity, as city states in modern Greece and Asia Minor, then became subsumed in the Roman Empire, but retained the Greek language, then when the Western portion of Rome fell, the Eastern portion of Rome subsisted?

ALCIBIADES: That would be a fair assumption.

DEMO DEMISES: That the initial Greeks spoke Greek, worshipped pagan Gods, and had a political structure of the city-state, then became integrated into the Roman Empire, where the Greeks continued to speak Greek, worship pagan Gods, but within an imperial political structure.

ALCIBIADES: That would be a fair assumption.

DEMO DEMISES: Then the Greeks, being Greek speakers, when the Western, Latin speaking, portion of Rome fell then they became the last portion of the Roman Empire to subsist. Eastern Rome remained Greek speaking, with an imperial political structure, but also gradually integrated the philosophies of Antiquity into a Christian framework, melding the canonical gospels with the philosophies of the Neoplatonists and Stoics, so the Greeks, rather than being pagan and tied to the city-state, progressed into Orthodox Christianity under an imperial political structure?

ALCIBIADES: That would be a fair assumption—which takes us to the time of the Enlightenment, which takes us to around the time of the fall of the Eastern Rome, of Constantinople, to the Turks in 1453. Which is when the Greeks within the crumbling Eastern Roman imperial

structure began to be viewed as non-Greek in the eyes of the Anglo world—the Anglo world, exposed to the works of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, et al, now redefines what it means to be Greek. Just as it redefined what it meant to be Roman centuries earlier, it now redefines what it means to be Greek centuries later. Now these Greeks of Eastern Rome, in addition to being divorced from true Roman-ness, are now considered divorced from true Greek-ness. They're a decadent, oriental strain of the true Greeks, who are exemplified in the works of Plato and Aristotle, yet this notion is almost akin to you, Demo, beginning to learn arithmetic, then demanding all the trigonometry and calculus books to be burnt, so you could take your rightful place at the forefront of mathematics. This was the essential dilemma of Anglo world at this time, as it became quote-unquote Enlightened—what to do with these decadent populations it had been deeming Greek for the past few centuries? The Anglo world couldn't revert the Greeks of Eastern Rome to Roman, because, if you recall, the Anglo world already decided to inherit Rome, it stripped these Greeks of their Roman-ness centuries earlier, but then with the Hellenophilia spurred on by the introduction of the Platonic and Aristotelian texts, it now also seemed like an offense to good taste to consider these Greek speakers of the East as Greek. The current residents of Constantinople hardly seemed Greek. It was an offense to good taste to consider them Roman, but it was also an offense to good taste to consider them Greek. In time, these Greeks of the East—in the eyes of the Anglo world at least—became known as the Byzantines, a brilliantly nonsensical term that, more or less, meant absolutely nothing but also served as a euphemism for Oriental. In short, the Anglo world needed to co-opt Rome politically, and it needed to co-opt Athens

intellectually, so the Greek speakers of the East, who perpetuated the political philosophies of Rome and the intellectual philosophies of Athens, must now be identified as something Other, as something essentially decadent when compared to the true Greeks, the Athenian Greeks, when compared to the true Romans, the Roman Romans—both of whom were now obviously exemplified by the emergence of the Anglo world. Because by altering the ethnicity of these Greek speakers of the East the Anglo world positioned itself as the rightful inheritor of the dual philosophies—both political and metaphysical—of the so-called Graeco-Roman world. And these people, these Greeks of the East, must not just become an Other but an Other that was also brilliantly nonsensical—an Other that was at once nonsensical yet also grotesque, something so nonsensical that it ensured their decadent erasure would never be questioned. What better than Byzantine? Derived from the name of the city of Constantinople before it became Constantinople in 330 AD? A city rarely if ever mentioned in the numerous texts of the Greek speaking world? The Byzantines become a mysterious, mystical people with almost no recorded history, nonsensically continuing traditions of both the Greek and Roman worlds. They appear more or less out of thin air—mystically—irredeemably decadent and Oriental.

DEMO DEMISES: Is it possible that I should begin to self-identify as Asian-American?

ALCIBIADES: Then of course after so-called Byzantines succumbed to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the Greek world more or less ceases intellectually, which is fortuitous for the West, as the Christian Greeks are essentially forbidden from reading and writing within

the Ottoman Empire, and the Greeks who do escape to pursue so-called higher learning do so in Europe, where the ideological bias is at all times immanent. And four hundred years later the Greek state is manufactured out of a tangled web of political interests that's almost impossible to disentangle, even today—but of course the state is and was notably distinct from any Byzantine influence, because the Byzantines are of course decadent, but also because these Byzantines ran a Greek-speaking Empire in the modern day Near East, in Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and to endow this so-called Greek state with any Byzantine influence could very well enable chaotic intentions that would destabilize British and American economic interests in the Middle East. If a group of Greek speakers, say, sought to reclaim ancestral land in the Middle East—that was never going to be politically palatable for the Anglo world, or at the very least it could never be as politically palatable as these same Greek speakers dancing like Zorba while quoting Socrates on a Mediterranean island. That was always going to be the more politically palatable option of the two—it would, to say the least, be more in line with British and American interests in the Middle East. Quarantining the Greek world to a slab of the southern Balkans and drawing direct lines from Plato's Athens to Metaxas's Athens—that's ideal. So the so-called modern Greeks become time travellers, the descendants of Ancient Athens, with the entirety of the so-called Byzantine world either erased or considered something notably distinct from the so-called True Greeks. Something better forgotten. But of course we're now dealing with a fictional ethnicity. We're fictionally Greek, Demo, you and I, and anyone who grew up even remotely Greek should be able to easily recognize it as such—the descent of the Greek speakers of our modern

day is decidedly not found through Antiquity, at least not directly, it's much more readily found in the remnants of the so-called Byzantines, in the so-called Rum Millet of the Ottoman Empire. This is, for better or worse, the true recent history of the so-called Greeks, who I supposed I hardly Greek at all, unless we suppose time travel to be possible. Which it very well may be. I suppose we can't rule it out. Having said that, I do have a story I want to relay to all of you.

HORATIO DEMES: And then we all became Athenians, Demo.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: And then Deutsche Bank sold us all credit cards.

ALCIBIADES: Dionysios, do you by any chance have a twelve year old boy for me to sodomize?

HORATIO DEMES: Every night I masturbate to an icon of Zeus and speak Attic Greek in a British accent, and I've done so for years.

ALCIBIADES: Yet, for better or worse, this is our history, to the extent that we remain Greek at all, which of course we hardly do.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Few know the truth as we see it, yet even this strikes me as essentially irrelevant.

ALCIBIADES: Which brings me to my story—well, I should preface it with a quick introduction.

HORATIO DEMES: I actually think I was there on this particular night, if it's the night I'm thinking of?

ALCIBIADES: No, it's not the night you're thinking of.

HORATIO DEMES: With the dolphin video?

ALCIBIADES: Yes, that's it.

HORATIO DEMES: Was that with C and D?

ALCIBIADES: No, at that point I was no longer in communication with C and—

HORATIO DEMES: But, Alcibiades, do you remember C and D? Do you recall them? C and D?

ALCIBIADES: Of course, I remember almost everything like it was yesterday, unfortunately. I recall sitting with the two of them, not on the night I want to discuss here, I vividly recall sitting with them, C, D, and I—we were sitting outside of an extremely Italian bar and lounge, and C and D were discussing what a dickhead E was as I sipped nonchalantly on a light beer, somewhat regretting going out for drinks, strenuously considering the fact I really needed to get my budget in order, sooner rather than later. He's suuuuuchh a dickhead, C said. Suuuuuuuuch a dickhead, D replied. I recall distinctly that I'd just given myself somewhat of a drastic haircut and, in the interim, more than a few people had complimented me on the cut, C and D both complimented me on my haircut as we sat at the extremely Italian lounge. C said I like your hair, did you cut it?! and D agreed, more or less reiterating C's comments. Of course, as you probably remember, I was having sex with D at the time, which was weighing heavily on the entire conversation, every iteration of it.

Having said that, I'd noticed the compliments, including C and D's, were being relayed in a way that seemed to denigrate how my hair was, as if people were denigrating how I had had my hair as much as they were actually complimenting my current hair. I specifically recall that I'd only cut my hair by mistake, and that I hated how short it was—I only meant to give myself a light trim but cut one strand too short and was subsequently forced into a full blown cut. We sat outside at the extremely Italian lounge looking onto Atwells Avenue. To some extent, those who accept the utter irrelevance of their existence become free to do as they please, whereas those who fail to accept their utter irrelevance become doomed to become stars in their own eyes and live lives of quote-unquote social people, doomed to repackage this utter irrelevance into utterly irrelevant episodes of micro-drama, they become stars in the micro-soap operas of their social circles, they become entirely fueled by their own micro-relevance, their shifting roles and arcs in these micro-theaters, and, of course, none of it can ever change the immutable nature of our utter irrelevance, and that immutability can only be suppressed for so long, and at some point most of us stumble upon just that. We come face to face with that unbearable fact right in its unbearable, terrible face. C, of course, was engaged in so much micro-drama that, to her credit, it may have well been macro-drama. Her life could only be understood through drama, the manufacturing of drama, the distribution of drama, the interpretation of drama, the dissection of drama, and, finally, the deconstruction of drama. As objectionable as her methods were in concept, they were, if we're being honest with ourselves, equally admirable in execution. E's suuuuuuuch a dickhead C said, delicately sipping from a glass of house white wine. Are you babysitting

this weekend? D asked pensively. I recall distinctly that I felt a sudden, somewhat muted, urge to slit my wrists. House sitting. Yes, C said. Of course, D replied, well, I was thinking maybe we could ... come over one night? C glanced at me in an impish but good natured manner and said Of course! and I recall feeling a sudden, somewhat muted, urge to slit my wrists. I could already see where things were going, and I knew it wasn't good, and it was actually even worse than I'd imagined.

HORATIO DEMES: You know, it's amazing you didn't slit your wrists, if I'm being honest.

ALCIBIADES: I'm actually amazed myself. Because, if we're being honest, I had every reason to swiftly slice both of my wrists, you're absolutely right.

HORATIO DEMES: Even we've inevitably picked up and even retained certain Anglo characteristics, these tendencies of wrist slitting—

ALCIBIADES: are essentially Anglo.

HORATIO DEMES: There's almost nothing more Anglo than slicing your wrists to pieces.

ALCIBIADES: I can't help it if I'm an emotional guy, Horatio, sometimes I just need to express myself.

HORATIO DEMES: We all do.

ALCIBIADES: And sometimes there's just nothing more theatrical than a suicide.

HORATIO DEMES: All theatre is rooted in suicide.



ALCIBIADES: There's nothing more dramatic.

HORATIO DEMES: Even setting aside the Anglo world, we can cast our gaze at Greek tragedy.

ALCIBIADES: It's all suicidal. Of course the Anglo world and the Greek world are anything but opposites, they're essentially iterations of the same world.

HORATIO DEMES: I mean when you're staring into the abyss.

ALCIBIADES: The abyss is staring into us at all times, Horatio, it's only a matter of whether we return the gaze.

HORATIO DEMES: You're probably right.

ALCIBIADES: Oh, I know I am, and there's nothing more beautiful than the gaze of the abyss. That's what people get wrong—the abyss in practice isn't lurid and horrifying at all, it's actually just too beautiful. There's nothing more beautiful than the abyss, sharing its gaze with it—it's timeless. How could you ever come back from the abyss?

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: But in any case.

DEMO DEMISES: In any case, Alcibiades, let's—

ALCIBIADES: So it was a few years ago at this point, Horatio may have been there, it was a totally nondescript night, absolutely nothing of note was occurring, and I think all of us were at that point questioning why we were even out, why we weren't at home sleeping like

young children. We were at the Dean Hotel on Washington St in a dark back bar called the Magdalena Room where nothing much of note was going on, very little of note was ever going on at this hotel bar, never mind in the back room, which was dimly lit in an almost abrasive way and usually at half capacity at best. But maybe that's what the venue intended, I'm not sure. In any case, I'm with a few friends, Horatio may have been there, and two well-to-do Anglo girls are there and one of us—not me—approaches the two Anglo girls, and a conversation ensues. One of our friends is without a doubt trying to have mutually agreed upon sexual encounters with these girls in the near future, if things go according to his plan, however, that's not how the story proceeds, things aren't about to go according to his plan, and, inadvertently, I'm about to make sure his plan is foiled in an irreversible manner. Not in the slightest are things going according to his plan, and I'm inadvertently about to ruin his night. Inevitably these two young girls, they live in the plush part of the city, they don't have jobs, or they have jobs they clearly received due to their statuses of being young and rich, they inevitably begin to discuss the various properties their families' own, in San Francisco I believe, perhaps some other outrageously opulent areas of the US, maybe even overseas. I forget the specific locales, there were a few, where their fathers' owned this property or that property, they'd summer here or they'd summer there, but it was all opulent in any case, some area where only the most egregious dickheads live. It didn't particularly offend me. But their tone was condescending in a way that almost made you believe they viewed you as an equal, which infuriated me. When people inveterately believe themselves to be superior, yet still have the audacity to condescend as if you're almost equals, it's

infuriating. As a somewhat unrelated matter, as it so happened, I'd been watching an extended documentary on the internet at work that afternoon, it was a slow afternoon, regarding the mating habits of dolphins, in fact this video went into great detail regarding the specific mechanics of how dolphins perform sex. Given the esteemed intelligence of dolphins—and dolphin intelligence is indeed substantial—I went ahead and shared some of this information, regarding the specific mechanics of dolphin sexual intercourse, with the group. The conversation went downhill immediately. Apparently this was some kind of faux pas on my part, Demo—it was clear these young females, although innocent enough, were just of a separate class, and they believed it, and they knew it. It was true to them. Their ancestors were having pebble wars and eating medium-rare squirrel while our ancestors were writing extensive commentaries on metaphysics and enforcing complex systems of taxation, but in our current milieu they were both undoubtedly of superior stock to anyone else in the room. That much could not be disputed. I don't dispute it to this day. Yet to discuss the intricacies of dolphin sex was, in their eyes, something revolting, something for lack of a better word classless. It was essentially a Marxist anecdote, noting specifically how dolphin penis penetrates dolphin vagina in the Magdalena Room that night. I grew up inundated with Anglo-Saxons, Demo, and I know when I'm being viewed as an Other, in fact I know it instinctively, it's at this point something that runs in my blood, and this was a particularly egregious case. And it became particularly egregious following my monologue illuminating the details of dolphin intercourse. Quite particularly egregious. I may have made a few subsequent off-color comments once the conversation was clearly going

completely downhill, once this discussion was clearly irreparable. I probably raised my voice to an inadvisable decibel level. But in any case I came to despise these two innocent young girls. And in retrospect, if I'm holding myself to the highest standard of honesty, I despised them at first sight. The second our friend—Horatio may have been there—approached these two girls I despised them. Instinctively I knew the three of us could never be cordial, that perhaps the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 still divided us in an immutable manner. I believe in the perpetuating characteristics of blood, Demo, I don't care what the scientists say. Spirits are always among us and where better to hide than in our blood? If the spirits of ancestors are hiding anywhere it's without a doubt in our blood. From the second I saw these two innocent, decent-looking girls I despised them, and I never questioned it. Instinctively I knew discussing dolphin boners would be abhorrent to these innocent young girls, and I relayed the anecdote without hesitation. I loved it. The second their faces filled with disgust at my anecdote I was satiated. If they walked into this room right now I'd immediately start to discuss dolphin intercourse. Dolphins are highly intelligent mammals—why shouldn't we learn, in-depth, about their mating habits? It seems entirely logical to me, even now.

HORATIO DEMES: I remember that night distinctly.

DEMO DEMISES: But were they actually Anglo, Alcibiades? Did you even ask?

ALCIBIADES: Everyone is Anglo, Demo. Maybe I haven't made that abundantly clear yet, but we're all essentially Anglo, we have a residual amount of Hellenism, we're direct descendants of the so-called

Byzantine, the Ρωμοσύνη, but essentially everyone is Anglo, us included. You may sit here and believe that, say, Puerto Ricans are somehow distinct from the median white, when in actuality Puerto Ricans are Anglo. But Dominicans are different, right—no, Dominicans are actually Anglo as well. Afro-Americans are incredibly Anglo, in fact. The Portuguese are definitely Anglo, they're the height of Anglo, the Spanish are also totally Anglo, and the Italians are as Anglo as anyone, Filipinos are maybe the most Anglo of anyone, but we're all essentially equally Anglo, wherever Catholicism and its metaphysics has spread, the Anglo world without a doubt has followed, wherever the sordid metaphysics of the Catholic church has planted its roots, Anglicism has grown unabridged. Anglos, Franks, Venetians, Italians, the Germanic tribes, we shouldn't lose much sleep in distinguishing these terms, because they're all subsets of each other essentially, we shouldn't lie to ourselves about that. These terms encompass the entire world and for that reason mean essentially nothing. We all attempt to quarry groups of people off by the tint of their skin, the shapes of their eyes, the contours of their noses, the thickness of their lips, when the reality is everyone is essentially Anglo. Michael Jordan is incredibly Anglo. As is Larry Bird and Shaquille O'Neal. Caitlyn Jenner is nothing if not Anglo. And the Kardashians are the spitting image of Anglicism. The world is incredibly complex, but at times it can be divided evenly into two—the Anglo world and the Greek world, which no longer exists. The world is incredibly complex, but at certain times it can be easily split down the middle, at times the world reduces to essentially two dimensions, in some ways the world only exists two dimensionally, the schism between the Catholicism that overtook the world and the Orthodoxy that eventually

became more or less extinguished, maybe that's one instance of binary simplicity, the idea—and of course Dionysios and Horatio know this all too well—of a God who wants to hear your petty sins, who wants to speak with you and have some type of relationship. A personal relationship with God—it's the most absurd thing. It's essentially atheism. There's only one end-game to believing the alleged Creator of the Universe wants to hear about how you stole a bag of Lays chips from your University convenience store as an eighteen year old and now you're sorry—the only end-game to that sort of metaphysics is atheism. There's no other route. That's Anglicism. It's the atheist iteration of monotheism, Demo. It's ruthlessly dualist but also delightfully atheist. If you truly believe God wants to speak with you about the young man you viciously threatened with violence when you were only nineteen years old then you're essentially an atheist. That's how we could best describe it. An idea that the experience of God is summarized verbally, and that all spiritual experience must defer to intellectual understanding of it—we're all Anglo now. Of course I despised those two innocent Anglo girls, because I saw myself in them—in so many ways I've become an innocent Anglo girl just by dint of living in the world in a continuous fashion. Why haven't I retired to an obscure mountain somewhere, to become Πωμοισὺνῆ again? But that's why I have no qualms about despising certain people for no particular reason, because we're all essentially Anglo.

HORATIO DEMES: They, those two girls, were not fans of you, Alcibiades, I do recall that much.

ALCIBIADES: Horatio, we've been too busy wondering if we have Turkish noses to recognize the Anglicism of everything.

DEMO DEMISES: But these two were distinct from C and D?

ALCIBIADES: Completely different people, Demo—my apologies if I failed to make that clear. But they may as well have been C and D. Really, there was no one worse than C and D, don't you agree, Horatio?

HORATIO DEMES: They were fairly terrible, that much I agree with. I remember when we used to go to that pool hall, don't you?

ALCIBIADES: Right off Charles St, of course I remember it.

HORATIO DEMES: I recall being there one night when C said to me You know my friend said she would totally fuck you if she didn't have a boyfriend, that's what she actually said to me, out of the blue, and my ears perked upward noticeably as the words My Friend were uttered, my eyes darted upward immediately as the words Totally Fuck were uttered. I remember holding one of those public pool sticks that had most likely never been wiped down or thoroughly cleaned in my bare hands, I was standing across from you, hunched over a public pool table in the process of losing my third straight game of pool by a wide margin, wondering how my pool skills could fluctuate so violently, acutely cognizant of the fact I hadn't fornicated in quite some time, feeling completely engulfed in a financial and emotional malaise that I speculated could easily endure for the remainder of my

sentient life. Those pool tables and pool cues definitely weren't wiped down often, and I had a real thing back then about my hands being clean, because I felt like I involuntarily touched my face a lot. I remember C was wearing a turquoise blue dress that was a little boxy around her thin frame, and I felt fairly strongly she was a completely untrustworthy person, although I couldn't pin the feeling on any particular event, but her general style of speech (disingenuous, overly enthusiastic, pandering) seemed to exude either a subdued nefariousness or just a deep, probably irreversible, self-loathing. Oh yeah? I replied, now definitely holding up the game of pool then asked What's her name again? despite the fact I knew her friend's name, but I said What's her name again? despite knowing her friend's name with a fair amount of certainty. Then I recall that C stated the name of her friend aloud and said I'm, um, pretty sure you guys met before, which I was aware of, and I admitted I'd actually thought that was the case, that I just wasn't one hundred percent sure what her name was, and that was actually why I asked the question. Yes, I actually admitted to disingenuously asking for her friend's name again. To be honest, I didn't particularly like C even then, although I didn't feel like I had a legitimate reason to dislike her, I couldn't successfully pin my dislike to any particular event, as she was always kind enough to me, and that surface level kindness caused me to struggle with the fact I found myself instinctively disliking her. Sometimes I asked myself why I found myself instinctively disliking C, as I was always nice to her, and I was always polite—I definitely kept my dislike latent, or at least I believed I did, but how could I know for sure? It was definitely possible C was actually conversing behind my back, maybe she even said something to you about it, it was



entirely possible she was wholly aware of my blatant disdain and excoriating me for allowing my true feelings to seep so shamelessly to the surface, despite the fact I, personally, went around believing I kept my dislike latent. Yeah, she's cute, I said, although I wasn't all that attracted to her friend. C's boyfriend at the time, E, I recall, was eyeing me, seemingly increasingly eager to continue the game of pool, but also, possibly equally, interested in the tabloid-like scenario C was clearly encouraging. Oh yeah, she definitely wanted me to have sex with her friend who had a boyfriend, that was clearly how she got off, me having sex with her friend, who had a boyfriend, was preferable to her having the most mind blowing sex of her life, there was no doubt about that.

ALCIBIADES: That was essentially C in a nutshell, that's who she was and is at bottom. She saw me about six years ago and just immediately, without even attempting any sort of segway, proceeded right into recollecting the time I fooled around with one of her slightly overweight friends, just immediately, barely even a hello, proceeded right into remember that time—that time you fooled around with my fat friend, yet, first of all, it's her own friend she's calling fat, I didn't necessarily call her friend fat, but here's C, in public, heavily implying a person I fooled around with, her friend, was significantly overweight, morbidly obese. I actually found it to be slightly prejudiced. Wasn't I, when you think about it, wasn't I the progressive one of the group?—in my total lack of discrimination of who I would or would not fool around with, in my complete lack of discrimination of so-called weight class, my disregard for weight class, because I didn't note weight class, when it came to the friends of C's I may or may not have drunkenly kissed and/or fooled around with? She starts winking at the

people she's with as if she's successfully being slick, she really glanced at others while relaying this inane anecdote as if she was clever and slick, like she was really getting the better of me, like me fooling around with her perhaps obese friend was some indictment on my character, as if my character wasn't already defamed and muddied and tarnished to significant degrees, as if this one drunken liaison would be the liaison to finally defame my already thoroughly defamed character, that her bringing it up years after the fact, with her only concern clearly being her own friend's weight issue, was an appropriate thing to do, as if this the relaying of this anecdote wasn't an intense indictment on her character as well as mine. It was really egregious—egregiously attempting, blatantly attempting to embarrass me in front of people I didn't know in the least, people I'd never met, yet little did C know, my pride had been thoroughly annihilated years prior, it had been years since I thought anything of myself, that the scorn of the general populace no longer affected me in any deleterious way, that my self-esteem had been annihilated to a degree that it actually became a sort of immaculate defense, that my total lack of self-esteem protected from precisely these types of insipid anecdotes from my past—the entire world could be made aware that I fornicated with a girl who may or may not have had a serious weight issue, and I wouldn't be all that bothered by it, I wouldn't be bothered in the least. Which of course bothered C immensely, my innate defense against her insipid anecdotes, in her mind, was an outright attack on her character, the fact that I wouldn't curl up into a ball in a catastrophic defeat at her calling her own friend fat in public, that actually annihilated C. But that's how she is—she wants to rub your face, shove your nose, press your lips right into whatever she thinks

will make you deeply uncomfortable, she wants to annihilate you over and over, and if you fail to be annihilated that fact, your lack of being annihilated, will annihilate her—hence, C is constantly being annihilated by the people who refuse to be annihilated by her poor manners, by her complete lack of any social couth whatsoever, yet she's not an entirely bad person.

HORATIO DEMES: She has some redeeming qualities.

ALCIBIADES: It's often the case that certain people despise themselves so much that they can't help but attempt to smear the people around them, by any means necessary. But in fairness to these people they can't help themselves, but for people like us there's substantial risk in overexposure to this condition, because these people can be contagious, and that's precisely the risk. These people are afflicted. Because despising yourself is a sickness. Verifiably. Even at my lowest points, even when I've wanted to jump off a bridge, I've always loved myself, it was simply my milieu that drove me to those depths, to the depths of wanting to jump off of a bridge, of wanting to drive my car into a tree, but for those who despise themselves there's no environment, no amount of money that can cure them of their essential pettiness, their duplicitous character flaws. We can't blame them for lashing out, for wanting everyone to become as misguided as they are inveterately. The truth is the healthy disgust the sick. We're made to believe we must do anything we can to cure the sick, when the fact of the matter is that the sick look at the healthy and become even more sick. The sick are disgusted by the healthy. We shouldn't hold that against them. These people were born into the world, without being asked, and they were afflicted with upside-down dispositions, and truthfully, if

we're being honest with ourselves, we probably can't do a thing to help them, but we shouldn't scorn them for what they can't help—

HORATIO DEMES: But avoiding them is perfectly fine.

ALCIBIADES: It's recommended!

HORATIO DEMES: The harsh truth is no one can truly be helped, the vast majority of human occurrences are essentially beyond our understanding.

ALCIBIADES: If you have to practice something incessantly, if you have to treat something like a job, you'll ultimately never get anywhere. A job will never get you anywhere.

HORATIO DEMES: That's my belief.

DEMO DEMISES: It's certainly possible this is the case.

ALCIBIADES: I always thought I was incapable of making music proficiently because I never put in the work, Demo. I always thought I could have been a great musician—had I just put in the work. But then I spent two years practicing music incessantly, and I still never—despite sincere and intense effort—produced anything that was even remotely beyond mediocre. I put my heart and soul into music but failed to surpass barebones mediocrity. My theory that my effort was holding me back musically was empirically false, as I put all of my efforts into music, yet never became good at music. Working at things is only applicable to the industrious fields, while everything else is essentially beyond our understanding. We're either innately great at

things or we'll never be. Where our greatness emerges from, that we'll probably never know, it's essentially unknowable. And why should we need to know? Is possessing a talent not enough? Is greatness not enough for us? I practiced music for two and half years, incessantly, poured myself into this music, but I never became good, not even close—never mind great. I simply became okay. Yet as a younger person I always assumed that I never became great at music because I failed to put the work in. Alcibiades, you could have been a great musician if you had just put the work in . . . I always said to myself, but the reality was I could have become a decent musician had I put the work in, but never a great one, even if I put all the work in, I would never surpass decency as it pertained to musicianship. And I did become a decent musician, but I'll never be a great musician. Greatness is given—only decency is earned. We tell children that through hard work and dedication they can become great at anything when the truth is through hard work and dedication they can become great at nothing. We should tell our children that through hard work and dedication you can become just about average at almost anything you choose—that, sure, you can become decent at almost anything through hard work and dedication, but greatness will always be just beyond your grasp unless you've been chosen by energies you can't never fully grasp. Would you agree my speech is mellifluous, Demo?

DEMO DEMISES: It's fairly mellifluous.

ALCIBIADES: That my speech is a sort of music unto itself?

DEMO DEMISES: I suppose I could put certain phrases on an internet playlist and enjoy them from time to time.

ALCIBIADES: Yet I've never strived to be a mellifluous speaker, my speech comes naturally—I have absolutely no awareness of my speech as I'm speaking it. If I were to try and think my speech, to premeditate my speech I would be the worst of speakers. You would have walked away hours ago, you'd hate my company instead of loving my company—another glass of wine, Dionysios? I'll have one too. My speech is essentially automated, mellifluous yet automated, divine yet automated, it's beyond my conscious thought, my speech is like a kind of artificial intelligence I didn't create. It comes from a place I'm totally unfamiliar with, and I'd prefer, at this point, to stay unfamiliar. I don't need to know. I don't even want to understand it. It's a flow of sorts that I follow without thought. I'm thoughtless, Demo.

DEMO DEMISES: I don't disagree.

ALCIBIADES: I'm entirely thoughtless at the moment, but this is the nature of greatness as I experience it, as perhaps Horatio, Dionysios, and I experience it.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: He doesn't lie, Demo. I spent a year of my life painting in oils only to realize I'm only truly great at drinking wine.

ALCIBIADES: I can attest to that calendar year. Dionysios, your paintings were truly awful.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: I don't disagree, but I worked extremely hard to become passable at painting in oils.

ALCIBIADES: I'm just so glad you stopped. Because whereas I became a decent musician, you never became even a passable painter.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: It was a challenging time in my life, but I eventually managed to quit.

ALCIBIADES: But it wasn't from lack of effort that you became terrible at painting, Dionysios. You were inveterately terrible, and your insistence on attempting to get better perhaps improved your end product slightly—but even this is debatable—yet even with minor improvement you were still essentially terrible. But this is the nature of greatness. You never attempted to become great at drinking wine, yet you're my favorite person in the world to drink wine with—and I'm far from the only one who feels that way. But this is the nature of greatness. We believe we can not only understand greatness, we also believe we can control greatness through hard work and dedication, when in fact not only is greatness entirely beyond our control, it's also entirely beyond our understanding. For example, C was a natural genius at social deviancy. Her social deviancy, as harmful it was for everyone around her, was in some ways totally redeemed by its essential genius. C was able to manufacture issues between people with a particular brilliance that I've failed to come across since, I've never encountered a genius of social deviance that quite equals C to date. It was her innate skill, her natural brilliance. And I respected it then and now. I was repulsed by it, but I respected it. I was disgusted by her then and now, the mere mention of her name engenders just utter disgust in my flesh and bone, but I also found her brilliant. I was asked just the other day to gauge the intelligence of a few people, sitting on a porch just slightly hungover I was

asked this question, and I answered in a way that was inaccurate and in retrospect maybe even slightly embarrassing. Because we can't gauge intelligence. There are pockets of brilliance in some people, and varying levels of intellect depending on the topic in almost everyone. There are countless geniuses of directions in the working class, yet many of these same people would fail a standardized test eight times out of ten. These people naturally gravitate to knowing the best route anywhere but could never be taught to achieve an eighty or above on a rudimentary chemistry test. The most brilliant geographic mind I've ever come across has never read a book—a true genius of backroads and throughways, and he will readily admit to having never finished a single book in his lifetime. I wouldn't be shocked if he's never read a magazine cover to cover. Yet I can hardly deny his genius when it comes to directions—at any point in the city he can navigate you swiftly and effortlessly to any other part of the city. I've never seen him even remotely lost.

HORATIO DEMES: And of course you were involved with D, who was also a genius.

ALCIBIADES: A genius of lying to herself, absolutely, she was the Albert Einstein of telling herself lies she believed in. But these are the limits of intellectualism. Of course people become geniuses of manufacturing social theatrics, of lying to themselves about their relationship statuses, of impressively navigating coastal cities, and then we assume this same intellect will reach some sort of spiritual conclusion that will make us happy. The genius that allowed D to believe she didn't have a boyfriend when she did is the same genius that will fail to corroborate the authenticity of our perceptions. Our



perceptions are only apparent, never real, Demo, and that's the problem. Perhaps we as Greeks—who are never exactly Greek—have a slight edge in understanding this. The skew always catches up to us, there's an intellectual arbitrage of sorts we can never escape with regard to the utter unreliability of our perceptions. I remember when D and I stood at an amusement park in mid-June in oppressive heat and she said to me in all seriousness—It'll never work, if I vomited on you right now, would you still love me? Well, I don't know about vomit, I said. She still had a boyfriend, that much was clear, and her nerves were on the brink of getting the better of her, that much was clear, but she was a genius of emotion nonetheless, I was just beginning to take note of her brilliance, and I was dangerously ambivalent with regard to my feelings and moral responsibilities, that much was clear. Oh nice, I love bumper cars, I said, standing in line for the bumper cars. I was genuinely having a great time, and the fact the day would inevitably have to end, that other, equally enjoyable, days would also inevitably have to end, tortured me relentlessly. You having a good time, though? I said to her. Oh ya! she said, laughing nervously, the nervous laughter communicating so much to me, the nervous laughter communicating so much to me, so many essential feelings that can never be accurately simulated or recreated, those moments end, and even as you speak of them in remembrance you eventually realize they no longer exist, that you're fabricating as you go along, that the people you cared for most are nothing but memories, and memories are simulations, and simulations are sui generis, but, in any case, all of those days had to end, and they'd all torture me relentlessly until I misremembered them all. They're just fleeting feelings now!

HORATIO DEMES: This is the most likely nature of our perceptions.

DEMO DEMISES: I'm not sure I agree.

ALCIBIADES: Because you're young, Demo, and youth is always tragic. In my case, my comic sensibilities only properly developed when the tragedy of my youth dissipated once and for all. Young people and young cultures trust their intellect. They believe they can get to the bottom of things, and it's only through time and heartache that it becomes apparent that they'll never get to the bottom of things. The bottom of things—I wish you the best in your forays into reaching the bottom of the things, Demo, yet the truth is you'll never understand the bottom of things. D was a genius of recollection, she was a genius of emotion, the methods she employed with regard to her own recollection were just remarkable. I would spend hours with her just observing with great amusement the dexterity she allowed herself with her own recollection. D could paint herself via recollection in a way the best oil painters of all time could never paint. Dionysios may have pursued painting after meeting D just one time. D would speak enthusiastically with a playful air with absolutely no regard for the truth, she despised the truth and avoided its attacks like a masterful martial artist, her artistry was exquisite. It was only amidst apparent things she was at home, in some ways she was the most authentically Greek person I've ever known, despite being a Russian whore, she was truly apparent in an essential way, and this is a significant distinction we can make between C and D when compared to the two young Anglo girls I despised at the Magdalena Room. The two young Anglo girls, it was clear to me from the outset, they weren't geniuses of

deceit. They were economically privileged yet intellectually barren. Sometimes you meet people, Demo, and before they even utter a syllable to you you become aware they have nothing of note to say. This is the tragedy of the digital age, we're connected with a seemingly never ending line of people who just have nothing of note to say. How many text messages do we receive that contain just pure nonsense—there's nothing of note!—sometimes I see my phone blink and I'm disgusted before I even read the text. And these young Anglo girls were so typical of this age, people who have nothing of note to contribute because they're wholly devoid of any genius. They've never taken the time to contemplate deceit in a profound manner. That's their issue. It's really not that much to ask of a social companion, all we need is a particular genius. I despised those two Anglo girls and I despised both C and D, but C and D were both redeemed in a way by their particular genius. C caused so many issues for me, hurt me deeply in many ways, but the ingenuity in which she hurt me gave me no choice but to respect her. D was the most duplicitous person I've ever met, but her astounding dexterity in the midst of apparent things, her sublime methods with regard to her own recollection, I enjoyed every second of our time together even though she ultimately hurt me in a way that scarred me in more ways than I care to admit. She killed me in a significant manner, but I had no choice but to respect her artistically. This is a primary distinction. These two Anglo girls, they lacked the genius to injure me in any way, shape, or form, they could never injure me in a sui generis manner, their malice was blunt and entirely void of any artistic pretense, so I despised them for no reason. You're young, Demo, and you lack a nuanced conception of what our intellect is—the most brilliant

metaphysicians have always been at bottom intellectually stupid. Do you see how swiftly I move when I enter the field of metaphysics, Demo? Yet you know first hand how completely stupid I am. Have you ever met anyone who's acted more idiotically on a regular basis than I have? Yet I'm totally at home with metaphysics. My stupidity is an advantage here. My idiocy is weaponized when I enter the field of metaphysics. But you, being young and intellectual, you'll approach everything intellectually and youthfully, you'll note intellectual accomplishments and assume these accomplishments can be transferred to any and every other realm of understanding. But you'll overlook the most important fact of all—quite simply, that our perceptions are lies. Everything I see, hear, smell, taste, and touch is a lie. But the intellectual will never come to terms with this. This is his version of empiricism. Sense-based empiricism. The intellectual tastes an Asian pear and finds it tasty, and he rationally concludes Asian pears are tasty, never realizing the severe error of his methods. He's never taken the time to contemplate deceit in a profound manner. He's never spent intimate time with an authentic genius of deceit, and therefore he'll never succeed in the field of metaphysics. He writes papers that are exquisitely sound logically yet become utter nonsense within five years. But authentic experience can only be extra-sensory, which makes it totally useless intellectually. The intellect is a cute little snowglobe, it's a black hole with a voracious appetite, it's a series of infinite ocean waves, breaking upon themselves ad infinitum. It's beautiful at times, but it's also more or less useless. The progress we claim to have achieved intellectually is a joke, we keep robbing Peter to pay Paul and concluding we're improving our balance

sheet. But maybe this specific deceit is our particular genius as a species.

DEMO DEMISES: Who is that?

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Where?

DEMO DEMISES: Who's that guy with Coca-Cola bottle going up to people in the—

HORATIO DEMES: That's a bum on the street.

DEMO DEMISES: Oh, I thought he knew that—

HORATIO DEMES: No, they're all over the place downtown these days. The streets of downtown are increasingly inundated with bums, for better or worse.

ALCIBIADES: So many people despise bums, Horatio, and I've never understood why exactly.

HORATIO DEMES: There's nothing more absurd than despising a bum.

ALCIBIADES: What did a bum ever do to these people with the exception of lacking a home? Is that such a crime?

HORATIO DEMES: The median person buys a home and goes to whatever length they can to congratulate themselves on buying a home, so it should be no surprise these same people go out into our streets to denigrate bums. In a perverse way, it's another form of congratulating themselves on owning a home.

ALCIBIADES: A guy sleeps in the street and we act as if he murdered a man. Someone falls on hard times, begins drinking heavily, probably does a decent amount of drugs, he loses his job, his home, his wife cheats on him, he's reduced to begging people on street corners for dollar bills and sleeping in alleyways, and we act as if his hardship is an inconvenience for us. We're offended at his poverty. I've experienced more malice directed at bums in the past decade than any previous decade I can recall, the malice toward bums seems to be increasing in this country at an almost exponential rate.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: It's absolutely true. A litany of people who allege to be moral members of our society hate bums. They, in fact, despise bums.

HORATIO DEMES: They view it as a severe affront to their liberty that a bum—who sleeps in alleys and remains parked essentially at death's door day and night—should ask them for spare change.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Our society abjectly fails people, and people with alleged moral standing in our society can't even be bothered to even witness a bum, if they're forced to even minimally interact with a bum they view it as a sort of sacrilege.

HORATIO DEMES: Viewing a person without a home is considered an affront to good taste.

DEMO DEMISES: Some of these bums are probably at fault though.

HORATIO DEMES: At fault of what exactly though—for example, this person with the half-filled Coca-Cola bottle

is clearly inebriated, most likely on at least two to five narcotics, probably has a life expectancy of a middle-aged termite at this juncture of his life.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: We could certainly argue substance abuse is something a person could be guilty of.

ALCIBIADES: But who wouldn't throw a few extra back if they no longer had a home? Which came first?

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: There's no doubt that to some extent we—all of us—have failed these people in some way that's probably material.

HORATIO DEMES: It's one thing to be down and out—

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: But to be on the street drinking a half-filled Coca-Cola bottle filled with illicit substances, asking strangers for money, clearly only partially aware of where you are, that should, frankly, be shameful for all of us. Any allegedly respectable member of society, any self-described person with morals, who glances at a bum as an inconvenience is no respectable member of society, they're in fact entirely immoral, in my opinion. Anyone can become a crack addict. If the history of crack in this country has taught us anything it's that anyone can become a crackhead. We're all capable of becoming crackheads, given the appropriate circumstances. The whites of America laughed at the blacks of America during the crack era, as the United States government pumped crack into black neighborhoods, only to, decades later, find entire lower-class white communities turned into junkies, backed by the United States government, backed by the pharmaceutical companies who indiscriminately tossed heroin equivalents at any

lower-class white with a sprained ankle that went to their physician. The whites thought it was the fault of the blacks until just two decades later every lower-middle class neighborhood in the country was inundated with white junkies. An entire generation of white junkies emerged seemingly overnight, the laughter of whites cackling at crack cocaine undoubtedly resounding in the background. Yet just as the black population of America essentially had no choice but to become black crackheads, the white population of America has similarly involuntarily transformed into white junkies. Pharmaceutical companies have attained multi-billion dollar market caps almost exclusively by turning poor whites into white junkies. Yet no one wants to deal with white junkies while they're drinking wine and having appetizers. How did these people—these white junkies—get here, we ask. Oh God, this is just a tad inconvenient—to have this white junkie ruthlessly invade my line of sight while I'm waiting for my calamari, customers say, and the servers apologize profusely. The servers and the customers converse about what the city should do about the white junkies and black crackheads that invade the lines of sight of people who've driven tens of miles to stuff their faces with calamari and mozzarella sticks and jalapeno poppers, to drink craft beers and wine spritzers. These people just can't get enough trans fat, and they hate bums. These people spend hours a day examining the intricacies of craft beer but lack the temerity to even speak with a bum. It never occurs to any of these people that their own latent malice is directly responsible for the dilapidated state of their fellow citizens, that their complicity, their myopic and enduring idiocy has directly resulted in a state that's shamelessly produced white junkies and black crackheads. The state has produced nothing at higher rates than white junkies



and black crackheads. The city really needs to do something about these bums, they say. It's a shame THAT THE CITY isn't doing more, they say without a trace of irony. Then they discuss the tangerine aftertaste in an overpriced craft beer. Do you taste TANGERINE at all? No, I was getting more of a BARTLETT PEAR aftertaste. The people who drink craft beer, it seems to me, despite their advantageous and calculated poses of liberalism, are the most unapologetically capitalist criminals we have in this country. The craft beer drinkers are the true crony capitalists of this country. Yet I've never heard a craft beer enthusiast apologize for the idiocy of his calculated liberal poses. The craft beer drinkers instead maintain a transparent pose of benign liberalism, yet spend all of their time trying to detect the slightest trace of Bartlett pear in a Coconut India Pale Ale—as opposed to even attempting to help any of their fellow human beings. These people who support craft beer choose to buy brands that allegedly donate to Good Causes, they post to social platforms to make people they don't know aware that they buy The Socially Responsible Beers, knowing entirely well that all of these donations are essentially criminal, that none of this money ever reaches the people it needs to, which is readily apparent, because when they sit down to order said craft beer all they see are bums. Even the most dull-witted craft beer drinker is aware of this scam. The social responsibility scam. Only a craft beer drinker would assume that the most efficient way of helping his fellow human being is buying more craft beer. That actually having a simple conversation with a person who has literally nothing left in his life is something that should be put off indefinitely—that in place of this it's actually advisable to buy a \$14 four pack of small batch craft beer that

donates 1% of sales to a Good Cause that's been proven time and time again to be a total scam.

HORATIO DEMES: The reality is none of us know what to do with bums, we're privy to no bum solutions, yet we know all of these bums are essentially Anglo. The white junkie and black crackhead are both at bottom entirely Anglo.

DEMO DEMISES: Now he's asking another table over there.

HORATIO DEMES: He's just repeating Hello over and over.

DEMO DEMISES: And they have no idea of how to react.

HORATIO DEMES: They're waiting for him to give up.

ALCIBIADES: We don't know how to deal with bums in this country.

HORATIO DEMES: We know how to produce bums, but we have no idea what to do with these bums once we've produced them.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: We produce bums shamelessly, and then even more shamelessly we shun these bums from acceptable society.

HORATIO DEMES: Have you ever met anyone who used to be a bum? It never happens.

ALCIBIADES: You'll never meet a person at a restaurant downtown who used to be a bum.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: It's impossible for bums to re-enter into society, there's a wall, an insurmountable wall that's constructed around every bum in this country, between the streets of a downtown and the restaurants of a downtown. It's an insurmountable wall. A restaurant-goer can become a bum, but a bum will never become a restaurant-goer again.

DEMO DEMISES: Now he's asking the guy with the jean shorts something.

HORATIO DEMES: At least half a dozen people have refused to give him any assistance whatsoever, if not entirely ignored his explicitly verbal pleas.

DEMO DEMISES: But realistically—

HORATIO DEMES: Nothing will help.

DEMO DEMISES: It can't be good for his self-esteem.

ALCIBIADES: The harsh reality is that there's nothing we can do for our fellow citizens who've reached such dilapidated states beyond simply talking to them, and this is something anyone who's ever been in a dilapidated state knows to be profoundly true. The entire industry of strippers and whores, in fact, should be rehabilitated based on this point alone, because no one in our society gives the dilapidated person more time of day than the exotic dancer. It's undoubtedly true that, this century, the exotic dancing community has done more for the dilapidated person community than the Catholic church community. Strippers and whores have saved more dilapidated people than the Pope this

century, and it's not particularly close. Because strippers and whores innately give the dilapidated person the time of day, any stripper worth her salt instinctively knows how to speak to the dilapidated soul, the dilapidated person just needs someone to listen to them for a small period of time, for someone to care for a fraction of an iota of their day, to pretend to care in a way that's not grossly condescending in the classic bureaucratic manner. Yet there's this misguided notion that the stripper only talks to customers, when in fact the stripper speaks to infinitely more potential customers than actual customers—the successful stripper, in fact, has no more than a small handful of customers that pay her bills—and, in contrast, it's these potential customers who are infinitely more likely to be dilapidated. The actual customer is more likely to be opulent and jovial, unrestrained and decadent, while the potential customer is almost always entirely dilapidated. Giving this potential customer the time of day is almost a religious act on the parts of the strippers and whores. This is the true sin of the craft beer drinking community. Ignoring the people caught in a dilapidated state. And it's for precisely this reason I respect strippers and whores legions more than I respect craft beer drinkers. We believe craft beer drinkers are laudable members of our society, while we denigrate strippers and whores, but I actually find strippers and whores to be laudable members of our society, while I denigrate craft beer drinkers. If you give a bum ten dollars he'll buy a mood altering substance, no one will debate this, but taking two minutes out of your day and speaking to a bum could, conversely, save his life in a real way. Easily. Asking him what's wrong, what happened? There's only so much you can do for a guy who's become a bum on the street, and yes that's indeed a harsh reality, but giving

money to a bum on the street means nothing—I've given my fair share, more than a few decent bills to at least a few bums on the street in my lifetime. One particular bum approached me on a second date in an alleyway and referred to the girl I was with as my wife, and I gave him ten bucks, but even that ten dollars wasn't for him, that ten dollars was a disingenuous ten dollars, it was for the benefit of the girl I was with. I wanted to seem magnanimous. A really generous guy! Yet had that same bum approached me when I was alone, or for that matter at almost any other time in my life, there's almost zero chance I would have gifted him ten dollars, or even five dollars. Fifty cents. The greater probability is I'd have lied to his face and told him I didn't have any cash on me. That I'd have attempted to sound sincere in my wish to help him, but somberly explained that I didn't have any cash on me, despite the fact I had cash on me, cash I'd without a doubt spend on totally mindless activities. And these bums know the vast majority of people are shamelessly lying to their faces about not having any cash on them, which is why they become duplicitous and resourceful themselves. It becomes just another game of cat and mouse, between the bums on the street and the craft beer drinkers who eat calamari and mozzarella sticks and jalapeno poppers at downtown restaurants. Speaking to bums on the street, even for just a minute or two, is one of the most beneficial things you can do with your life. You need to speak to people in dilapidated states, largely because it's the only thing you can do for them that, at bottom, really matters. What happens to them will largely be fatalistic, it will be a matter of fate statistically speaking, but it's just utter cruelty to ignore them, to treat them as people who don't deserve the time of day, not even an iota of your afternoon, to complain to your waiter because a white junkie in your

line of sight is ruining the Bartlett pear aftertaste of your ten dollar IPA. But this is what's happened to so many downtowns, these same downtowns I still go to, these downtowns that have my memories folded into them, maybe a decade or more folded into them—they've become inundated with craft beer drinkers. It's not the bums that offend me, Demo, it's the craft beer drinkers. It's the people who think twelve dollars for a beer is an appropriate price to pay for a beverage. It's the people who think discussing the aftertaste of hops is an appropriate conversation to have in public. It's the people who believe strippers and whores are people we should look down upon a priori—instead of as the people who almost single-handedly soothe the dilapidated populace of our country. It's the people who maintain all the socially appropriate opinions but display all of the most cowardly tendencies. Our downtowns are being ruined by these people, who have the correct opinions on every issue—at bottom all these people care about is maintaining the correct opinion on any issue at hand. Our downtowns were once great places to grab a slice of pizza—filled with bums and strippers and whores—but now our downtowns are inundated with craft beer drinkers and fried calamari and mozzarella sticks and jalapeno poppers. It's disgusting really. Whenever I walk the streets of a downtown I'm always a little let down. And I love to walk the streets of a downtown. There's something about a downtown that can draw you in for reasons you can't comprehend, I feel at home when downtown, I enjoy being downtown despite the fact there are a plethora of other streets I could or maybe even should feel at home at that I don't feel at home at. Downtowns have that character, especially cozy downtowns, sometimes I just want to squeeze a downtown until all my memories excrete from it and

then return to that same downtown and make more memories. But then you have home ownership. We're all encouraged to own homes, told there's no better investment than a home, yet home ownership kills downtowns except for only the most opulent among us. We gain a home but lose a downtown. Everyone I know who's succumbed to home ownership has subsequently decreased their time downtown if not completely abandoned downtown. Owning a home is an well-intentioned attempt to construct your own downtown, but once we acquire a home we immediately lose the community we would need to construct a habitable downtown, you can't make a home into a downtown, which is inevitably what people discover when they attempt to make a home into a downtown, they acquire the habit of calling people they know and inviting them to their home as opposed to going downtown, which is inevitably what everyone did prior to the financing of various homes—they went downtown. Yet for everyone without a home, they still have a downtown, and for everyone with a home, they want their home to become a downtown, but not every home can become a downtown, so inevitably a social tension develops between these competing milieus of the home and the downtown.

DEMO DEMISES: I don't necessarily disagree, yet I'd like to add something I feel is of note here.

ALCIBIADES: Of course you can, but am I boring you?

DEMO DEMISES: Absolutely not.

ALCIBIADES: I'm not boring you at all?

DEMO DEMISES: Not at all, hardly a tad, but I feel as though we're missing something here, despite the fact I more or less agree with all of our points here. All of you, as my rightful elders, have an attenuated yet legitimate connection with what we've deemed here to be authentic Greek culture, what we in the West generally deem Byzantine culture as perhaps opposed to Hellenic or Greek culture. You connect with Constantinople more intimately than Athens, although Constantinople did develop to some extent as an extension of Athens, and I respect that. You connect with Constantinople authentically, through blood, yet my case differs just slightly—because I have an even more attenuated relationship with the, for lack of a better word, Byzantine, the so-called Byzantine culture that authentically informs the culture of the so-called Modern Greeks, who of course aren't in fact Greek at all. People of my generation, well it almost goes without saying that this conception of Greek culture will need to be reinvented, as my generation's connection with this culture is attenuated in an even more extreme degree than your generation, as it may be the fate of the Greeks to be always small in numbers, but for just basic subsistence we'll need new recruits, so to speak, we'll need to delineate between the Hellenic misinterpretation of Greek culture and the Byzantine iteration we've been referencing to this point. And my generation is so far removed from this conception that the conception is essentially dead. But I only approached this Byzantine authenticity through music—this must be noted—through the so-called Smyrneika and Rebetika of Asia Minor and the Peloponnese, through learning the δρόμοι, the origins of the Arabic maqams and the Byzantine echoes. It was through the ταξιμί, the freeform improvisations of the δρόμοι, that I truly reconnected



with my authentic Byzantine past, Alcibiades. This is what I've withheld from you to this point. It was only through the ταξιμι and the δρόμοι that I became even remotely authentically Greek, had I never encountered and fervently studied both the δρόμοι and the ταξιμι I hardly have the ability to participate in this conversation. This discordant type of improvisation is perhaps my particular genius, it's what comes naturally to me, it's how I've become Greek, an authentic Greek, an apparent one, so to speak. I would go as far to argue the ταξιμι and δρόμοι are more crucial to the development of Greek Thought than the vast majority of texts we tend to allege to be essential. Because what we need to understand, and this is culturally important, it's not just music theory minutiae, it's actual natural philosophy, what we need to understand about the δρόμοι, the Echoes, the Maqam, is that they invert the entirety of Anglo music theory. Of Anglo culture perhaps. In America we learn music based on 12 notes—C, D, E, F, G, A, B, the white keys, the major scale, and then five quote-unquote accidentals, the five black keys, the five sharps and flats, C#, D#, F#, G#, A# and their flat equivalents. But the Byzantine Echoes, the Arabic Maqams, by contrast, divide single octaves into more than twelve notes, far more than twelve notes, the Byzantine Echoes, the Arabic Maqams deviate from the Anglo idea of being well-tempered, they in theory extend to up to sixty notes per octave. This division of the octave is significant, because when a particular octave is divided into sixty as opposed to twelve the way we approach the octave differs significantly—if you have sixty options instead of twelve options you'll approach these options in a fundamentally distinct manner. With twelve options you'll mix and match, you play the options simultaneously, you'll make things vertical, you'll stack and harmonize—whereas when faced with sixty options

you'll compose horizontally, to play notes simultaneously will be almost impossible, so you'll compose in an essentially two dimensional fashion. So of course everything must become melodic, everything must become monophonic, everything must become two dimensional, because the idea of playing three notes at once to make a chord becomes essentially impossible when you're dealing with sixty microtones as opposed to twelve well-tempered tones. Whereas Anglo music approximates tones and layers the approximations, plays them simultaneously, creates chords and harmonies, the music of the East molds everything horizontal out of necessity, achieving such precision and complexity in the playing of notes on a single instrument that the idea of chording and harmonizing even in a rudimentary sense would be beyond the greatest of virtuosos. I never understood the difference between the Greek world and the Anglo world until I studied music, Alcibiades. I—like you—always instinctively knew myself to be different in an essential and philosophical sense, but I understood nothing of essence or philosophy until I studied music. Specifically the Anglo and the Greek. Because the vast majority of music today, of course, almost all of it's Anglo. We listen to rap music and believe it to be cutting edge African-American music when it's, at bottom, essentially Anglo. We think of Jazz as the apex of American classical music, as truly groundbreaking music, a true break from European roots, when the vast majority of Jazz never remotely attempts to be anything beyond Anglo. We listen to noise punk and believe we're rebelling in a profound manner when we're being more Anglo than ever. A single instrument playing a complicated melody, a single vocalist singing a microtonal melody, you'll almost never hear that in the Anglo world outside of a Greek Orthodox church, outside

of an exceedingly rare performance of Arabic classical music. Because it should be noted the Arab world has retained a more fundamentally Greek character than even the Greek world. The Arabs are, in fact, essentially more Greek than Greeks are—while the Greeks have disappeared into apparitions, squished between the Muslim East and Anglo West, the Arabs, by contrast, remain authentically Greek in ways Greeks can hardly comprehend. The Greek world is, in fact, fundamentally Anglo when compared to the Arab world. Yet, even still, this essential musical difference is perhaps the only way for us to understand the fundamental difference between the Anglo world, which is everywhere, and the Greek world, which is essentially nowhere. The *αἰωνέδες* are no longer performed, yet they're a perfect crystallization of Byzantine metaphysics. A dead language, but perhaps a language we need more than ever. All attempts to delineate metaphysics without an understanding of music—of the *δρόμοι* and the *ταξιμί*—will fail completely. We can't begin to study metaphysics until we understand the divisions of music—the polyphonic and the monophonic. But I knew none of this until I actually studied music, Alcibiades, because my experience of being Greek was even more attenuated than your experience. But maybe through that attenuation, knowing that I was perhaps the last link, perhaps the last chance for this culture I was so ruthlessly descended from yet also not descended from, that my ancestors fought in the mountains for for hundreds of years, maybe that in the end worked to my advantage when it came to understanding this culture, the metaphysics of this culture—the *δρόμοι* and the *ταξιμί*. Musicians play in C in a distorted and atypical way, but they never play in a way that isn't essentially Anglo. Composers write in D in an avant-garde and experimental pose but they

always write in an avant-garde and experimentally Anglo manner. We understand nothing of metaphysics until we understand music—I instinctively understood the plight of Saint Gregory Palamas the instant I heard Antonis Dalgas Diamantides sing his *αμανέδες*, this much I know for sure. I heard Rita Abatzi sing Pseudo-Dionysius in a way even a baboon could understand. You speak mellifluously, effortlessly, it's a particular genius of yours, but when I speak I speak in the *ταξίμι*, my speech in and of itself is a form of the *αμανέδες*—it's only in this way that I can perform Byzantine metaphysics, Greek metaphysics, Arab metaphysics. We can't become Byzantine scholars by writing Anglo essays, this much we agree on. But allow me to go further and say that it's not enough to be mellifluous, we need our speech to become *αμανέδες*, this might be absolutely necessary, our diatribes perhaps must become the equivalents of these vocal improvisations, Alcibiades, this is the only way we can perpetuate our metaphysics in the face of the suffocating Anglo syllogism. And your speech is naturally performed in this way, perhaps it actually emerges from your blood, it's entirely possible that's why it's so effortless, why you've never put any effort or thought into anything you've ever said. Because when we start to speak syllogistically, in compartmentalized sentences, in verbal harmonics and advanced chording, then we lose touch with the *αμανέδες*. We become incapable of speaking authentically, neutered and unable to overturn anything, divorced from the *αμανέδες*. This was the true error of the Anglo interpretation, removing the mode, shunning the *αμανέδες*, changing the method, and expecting the result to remain unchanged. I've memorized the *δρόμοι* in a tyrannical fashion—the Niaventi, the Hijaz, the Hijazkiar, the Sabah, the Ousak, I've purchased the *tzouras* and the *trichordo bouzouki*

from the finest shops in Piraeus, and when I perform a τὰξιμῖ I become a metaphysician again in the artistic sense of the word. For years, Alcibiades, I've squandered myself, my youth is nearly extinguished, my youth is officially gone, I've meandered, knowing all too well I have a philosophy to perform, but refusing to perform my philosophy in the appropriate manner, knowing all too well that my rubrics have been always been corrupted, my rubrics have always been compromised and essentially worthless. Everything I've thought has been trapped in a prism that immediately destroys my thought, and in doing so I've found myself destroying myself—by thinking within a prism that destroys my own thought I've destroyed myself time and time again. By thinking harmonically, in chord progressions, my thought has folded onto itself, in a totally self-destructive manner, in a vertically destructive manner, and with my thought destroyed I've sought to destroy myself as well. It was only when I bought my tzouras from Piraeus, when I learned the Niaventi, the Hijaz, the Hijazkiar, the Ousak, the Sabah, that my thought was unleashed into a rubric—the appropriately horizontal rubric—that allowed it to breathe, to subsist for a period of time. It's why I've remained silent for so long, all of these years you and Horatio and Dionysios have spoke so eloquently, so confidently, so properly about our culture, ruthlessly denigrating the Anglo world, I've remained silent, my thought trapped in a prism that destroyed my thought on sight. I've sat silently and listened to my elders speak in a way I instinctively understood but was incapable of perpetuating, I've silently waited to destroy myself at every instance I was given the chance, I've destroyed myself over and over, my only redeeming quality being the refusal to allow this prism of thought to stifle me. To become accustomed to being destroyed and in turn

resigned to being destroyed. I've never allowed myself to become accustomed to self-destruction, I've always destroyed myself with a greater goal in view. I've destroyed myself, aware every time that this destruction could be fatal, knowing every time I destroyed myself that it could be the last time I destroyed myself, it was a necessary risk, I destroyed myself knowing I would either be destroyed once and for all by this prism of thought—this vertical Anglo thought—or that I would somehow manage to escape this prism and flourish. With an ability to think on my own. Which only occurred once I performed the δρόμοι on the tzouras from Piraeus. The monophonic composition of the Byzantine and Arabic δρόμοι rescued my thought from the vertical Anglo prism—the twelve note octave—that previously ruthlessly destroyed it. My entire thought became a vocal improvisation that created a metaphysics that was truly Palamitean in character, yet until that point my thought only sought the abyss, my thought attempted to throw spears at an Essence it could never reach, passing out of exhaustion, essentially destroyed. But then I bought a tzouras from George Polydorou in Piraeus. It was only then—when I discovered the ταξιμι and αμανέδες of the Asia Minor musicians, Rita Abatzi and Antonis Diamantides and Kostas Roukounas and Roza Eskenazi and Stratos Pagioumtzis, of our ancestors' ancestral homeland—it was only then that I could think in peace, when my thought took its proper form, its essentially monophonic form. My thought's essentially horizontal form. My thought's essentially two dimensional form. It was only through the tzouras of George Polydorou in Piraeus that I'm now able to speak to you at all, that I've ceased to destroy myself intermittently, glancing at my thought fold onto itself in a suicidal manner. If it wasn't for George Polydorou in Piraeus and his tzouras it's no

stretch to say I'd be still mute at this moment, recurrently destroyed and eventually destroyed once and for all. Kaput.

ALCIBIADES: Demo, truly—I commend you. Because, really, it's just such a valid point, and it's one that, frankly, Horatio, Dionysios and I tend to gloss over—we tend to grossly overlook the monophony of Eastern music, despite the fact most of us are ex altar boys, exposed to the exact same two dimensional Byzantine Chants that go back millennia to Romanos the Melodist, the initial Syrian master of the horizontal. This very conversation is essentially, if we're being honest with ourselves, little more than an iteration of the ταξιμι and αμανέδες so routinely practiced in Ionia, in Smyrna, and eventually on the Peloponnese at the turn of the 20th Century. If it's not that, what is it really? I has to be just an iteration of the ταξιμι and αμανέδες, does it not?

DEMO DEMISES: I would argue that it does.

ALCIBIADES: Without relatively intense study of the monophonic there's absolutely no doubt in my mind we'll fail miserably to even begin to understand ourselves.

HORATIO DEMES: But, Alcibiades, help us understand? How does this—or can it?—relate to those Anglo girls in the Magdalena Room, whom you despised for no particular reason? Or does—

ALCIBIADES: It's actually quite simple Horatio—I came over here, to your very well kept flat, right downtown, where there's apparently an intensifying issue with regard to the number of homeless persons left

unrequited in the streets, to have a few glasses of wine, and we're indulging in a few glasses of wine, which I love, and to have a brief discussion regarding these two anonymous Anglo girls whom I offended so seriously just a few years ago, who I just recalled, it was almost as if the event never even occurred, that's how deep my forgetfulness with regard to it ran. I wanted to tell you all about it, because I had an inkling you were there, for one, but more importantly because my hatred for them was so innate, so utterly senseless. Yet it felt so right on an almost divine level. I felt a divine hatred run through my veins as I told these petite Anglo girls all about dolphin sex. We write a piece of music in the key of C, yet regardless of whether it's rap, disco, punk, jazz, it's inexplicably Anglo. We improvise a section in the key of D and we want it to be free jazz or no wave or proto-noise but it remains inexplicably Anglo. We can't escape it. Our entire world isn't mathematical as much as it's musical, that much should be understood—and it's Demo's particular genius to note it. We teach ourselves to speak Greek, but we'll always speak without the appropriate accent, we're too far removed, we'll continue to employ out of date slang from our grandparents—the Greek world itself has divorced itself from itself, the Greek world was born by noting the essential apparency of everything, and it's concluded by divorcing itself from itself. I'm not sure this is fully understood yet. Everything we describe, Horatio, remains elusive and essentially inexplicable, so we try to employ allegorical techniques, but these techniques—they're just symbols, and these symbols only obfuscate the issue further. I think Demo is on exactly the right path here, there's something musical, something monophonic, something improvisational and instinctual at play here, something essentially two dimensional, a horizontal wail of sorts,



this is perhaps the only way I can truly get my point across. Having said that, my experience differs just slightly. My inexplicable hatred for these two Anglo girls. Yes, I stood there and I told them all about the fundamental mechanics of dolphins fornicating, and yes they were innately disgusted with me, just as yes I was innately disgusted with them. The three of us were disgusted with each other, and it felt innate and correct. But there was also something deeply stochastic about the entire interaction as well. You see, it was only through my stochastic hatred that I was forced to face, once and for all, my stochastic opposite, the Anglo world, and it was only via my stochastic opposite that I was forced to discover where my stochastic essence truly resided, in the concept of Byzantium. It was only via the concept of Byzantium that I found the residence of stochastic essence, yet Byzantium exists only in contradistinction to the Anglo world. Without the Anglo world the Byzantine world would cease to exist. So, yes, these Anglo girls—they're absolutely my point, Horatio, just as the tzouras and the ταξιμι and αμανέδες are Demo's point, they're the exact reason we're over here drinking all this wine. Where could we possibly begin if not with innate hatred? It would be absurd to begin anywhere else. I see something Anglo, and apparently I'm innately disgusted. The Anglo world, the very Anglo world I was raised in, in an Anglo neighborhood, in an Anglo town, in an Anglo region of America, it thoroughly disgusts me, apparently. I think of my Anglo youth, and I'm disgusted. This Anglo world that has ruthlessly thrown dirt on my name for decades, that has recklessly placed me in ethnic categories I have no business residing in, the contempt, the audacity of this Anglo world. And then they go read Plato. The Anglo world jacks off to Aristotle and calls me an Arab, do you understand that, Horatio? These Franks

were serving squirrel medium-rare before they were taught the Attic dialect. How could I not be disgusted, Horatio? I'm sorry, but I'm just a little disgusted. My apologies, but I became a student of history, and then I became a tad disgusted. Dolphin fornication was just the tip of the iceberg. Yet without this Anglo world, I can't help but admit—I wouldn't exist as such. It would have been impossible for me to reconcile myself to my roots in the concept of Byzantium if not for the existence of this Anglo world I despise. Sans the Anglo world the Byzantine has no existence—the Anglo world created the Byzantine as its diametric opposite, so, while I'm disgusted by the Anglo world, I also paradoxically admire it. In a very real sense I love the Anglo world. My innate hatred was, in a sense, stochastic, but it led me to my opposite, which was the Anglo world, and only through my utter opposite, through the Anglo world, was I able to possess my own being. Whereas Demo possessed his being via the monophonic tzouras, the ταξιμι and αμανέδες, I possessed my own being by discovering my diametric opposite. It was only through my innate hatred that I was directed toward my innate opposite, whereas the Anglo world represents everything rational, everything distinguished, I was only able to reconcile myself via the Byzantine, which only recognizes the essential apparency of everything. So, yes, the two Anglo girls are the point here. This I'm not going to deny. Innate hatred. Our opposite must, in a sense, be stochastic, and it's only through our opposite that we, as essentially stochastic, ephemeral creatures, can possess being. There's nothing to interpret here, Horatio, this is monophony, my anecdotes are only two dimensional—Demo's correct. To look for symbols within the anecdote, isn't that the most Anglo thing of all? Puerto Ricans in this country are Anglo, we know

this. White junkies and black crackheads are all essentially Anglo. We sit around in America and bicker over who's white and who's not, who's a person of color and who's not, who's oppressed and who's not, who's to blame and who's not, who should be taxed and who shouldn't, who should be a citizen and who shouldn't, who owns privilege and who doesn't, we dice ourselves into a million meaningless ethnicities when the reality is every single one of us is Anglo. Illegal aliens are essentially Anglo. The cultures of the Near East have been unable to assimilate, they've been intellectually contorted by the Anglo world—we've spent almost a century intervening in the Middle East without cessation, and no one in this country is taught an iota of the history of the Middle East. Byzantine is a nonsensical term, Horatio. But let's avoid obsessing over the past. Even us, the Makriyannis few, the last Greeks, the extinct Byzantines, haven't we also essentially succumbed to this sickness, this Anglican sickness? Is it possible, if not probably, if not entirely certain that we too are Anglo?

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Does anyone have a tzouras handy?

HORATIO DEMES: It's essentially too late.

DEMO DEMISES: It might be too late.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: With or without a tzouras, it's most likely too late.

ALCIBIADES: What dies might get reborn, but it'll be reborn in a different iteration. To die and be reborn the

same is just cruel, it's an absurdity as well as a monstrosity, it's nonsensical but it's also grotesque.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: In a manner of speaking of late I feel the blood of my ancestors percolating within my bloodstream—regardless of what modern sciences attempts to convince us of, I believe this to be true, that my ancestors, at least to some extent, speak through me in I hope just as mellifluous a manner as you speak, Alcibiades. Even despite the fact we're speaking separate languages, I can feel them speaking through me. Yet then again even Greek changed substantially over the centuries, and the Ancient iterations had varying dialects, and even today there's a Greek Language Question just as there's an Eastern Question, the ethnicity of the world is really just an endless series of questions with an equally endless series of dubious answers. Endless questions that are through ancestral means percolating through myself and perhaps all of us. It's all very elusive, I don't disagree. All around us we find questionable phenomena, phenomena we can't seem to put our fingers on. With every demarcation we make we perform violence on the essential Bleeding Into of the world. Between Europe and Asia there's a Bleeding Into we can't reconcile, which is of course where we reside ancestrally. Even between, say, Summer and Autumn there's a Bleeding Into that's equally irreconcilable—there's, in fact, a feeling I can't quite grasp when I engage in summer activities in September. On a small boat with my Uncle fishing for bass stripers the day is undeniably beautiful, indistinguishable on its surface from a breathtaking day in mid-July, or even late-August, yet there's something unshakably solemn I can't seem to grasp in the atmosphere. It's still technically summer, but it no longer feels like

summer—mid-July feels majestic, and I bask in its majesty; there’s something sacred about a late-August afternoon that conjures the most profound reflections from me annually, yet a comparable September afternoon is blasé and anticlimactic. I feel indecent—somehow, impalpably, tainted by the fact I’m on a boat in the month of September. Sitting on the North Providence town beach on a perfect Sunday afternoon, I’m severely lacking in glee—my glee is dissipated, I’m desperately searching for glee and discover none. I think about wearing a fleece, how I should be wearing a fleece in mid-September, not shamelessly basking in the sun laying on the North Providence town beach. There aren’t even any lifeguards on the beach—I almost hope for an immediate twenty degree drop in temperature. Why? This sensation is impalpable, and I find it completely intangible—is it muscle memory from my youth, where school traditionally restarted in September, and summer activities subsequently ceased? My schedule is now indistinguishable from January through December. Summer extends from approximately June 21 through September 21. I should enjoy these mid-September Summer days, view them as unanticipated gifts and pleasant surprises—instead I feel a vague sense of shame, a touch of embarrassment indulging in late Summer; if I engage in the same acts in late-August I think If only this moment could last forever—I love this time of year, the twilight of summer! If I perform the same act, under the same weather, less than one month later, in mid-September, the profundity’s dissipated—I no longer wish any of it could last forever, I’m totally indifferent to the ephemera I perceive, I almost want it to get cold.

HORATIO DEMES: It's entirely possible we're now incapable of thinking outside of the rubric of Anglicism.

ALCIBIADES: That this entire conversation is just a perpetuation of Anglicism.

HORATIO DEMES: I'm actually leaning heavily toward that possibility, Alcibiades, and I'm of course disgusted by it to some extent, but it's probably true that the entirety of Anglicism is, functionally speaking, the entirety of our world, in perhaps a Wittgenstein-ian sense, and that even the attempted resuscitation and/or perpetuation of the Byzantine Fathers and Philosophers is now only understood, only can be understood, through the prism of the Anglo world, that—

ALCIBIADES: That the only true exegesis of my anecdote with the two Anglo girls was, in fact, that the entire encounter was an example of Anglo-on-Anglo violence, that in spite of my artful diatribes to the contrary I only signify something increasingly Anglo, that the Anglo world has become a monad with, in essence, no divisibility? Well, Horatio, I find the hypothesis intriguing, maybe even astounding, perhaps I even wish that I'd thought of it myself, but ultimately I have to reject it, because these pantheistic-adjacent types of philosophies are always at bottom absurdist. They can only be partially true. The Anglo world is hegemonic, I'll grant that, but I retain there are still divisions within it, even if it's not dualist in nature. There are Others outside of this Anglo monad, even if at this point they're essentially contained to some degree within the Anglo. But of course all rationalism is little more than absurdist propaganda. Of course they're possible, these pantheist theories, and I'll even grant you that it's possible they're

even plausible, but experientially they seem absurd. We've already deduced ad nauseum the flaws in our sense-perceptions, so I won't reiterate ad nauseum that we're not speaking experientially of sense-perceptions but of the, for lack of a better word, ἡσυχία—because, after all, the pantheist-simulation theory is a thoroughly rationalist theory. So it's only by rationalism, an essentially Anglo concept, that we find ourselves in a prism where everything is Anglo, where we can't escape the Anglo, and this is undoubtedly true insofar as we limit ourselves to rationalist-theories, and there's no theory more rationalist than the pantheist-simulation theory. God is everything, and everything is simulated. But of course this is absurdist propaganda. We know these theories not to be false through knowledge, but through profound ignorance we realize these Simulation Theorists are essentially bozos. In truth, the Pantheists have always been assholes. But what can we do? All of it pales in the face of death, we can't deny this—it's only when we attend the funerals of close friends who die absurdly young that we realize this, that whether pantheist or monist or dualist we still must contend with death. Only people who attend these funerals experientially understand this. We realize not just the absurdity of these conversations but the absurdity of ourselves—Demo, have you attended any of your peers' funerals yet?

DEMO DEMISES: I'm still waiting, as the vast majority of my peers are still alive to the best of my knowledge.

ALCIBIADES: Well, even in my case, it was only a few years ago when a good friend of mine finally, after years of ceaseless suffering, gave in to late stage brain cancer. The entire ordeal was criminal, and to be clear I was

perhaps one of the most criminal. My social criminality has perhaps never been more acute than during this period of my life. My friend was diagnosed with late stage brain cancer and moved back in with his parents where, not long after, he suffered a seizure while driving, ruined his car, and was from then on forbidden to drive. So naturally, being a good friend, being actually a better friend to him than even a few of the friends he'd had for decades, a better friend at least in terms of time spent, I took it upon myself to drive to his house multiple times per week, after work, where I already had a decent commute, which wasn't an insignificant drive, to his parents' house, to hang out with him, to pick him up and then drive him to other places where we'd hang out for a reasonable amount of time, where afterward I'd drive him back to his parents' house. This was a difficult ordeal for my friend as you can imagine, and there were various series of ups and downs—had I been born into wealth I'd have done whatever he asked, but being a working stiff there was only so much that I could do for him at times, there were times he wanted to get an ice cream cone and I, unfortunately, had to do laundry. A young man with late stage brain cancer, essentially a death sentence, wanted to buy me a mint chocolate chip waffle cone, but I had to politely decline because I needed to wash my boxer briefs, because I no longer had a single pair of clean underwear in my drawer. It wasn't easy. In any case his girlfriend, who was younger than the two of us yet still firmly residing within young adulthood, left him not long after. In short, she ruthlessly dumped him—a young man with late stage brain cancer. From this we concluded that apparently waiting for him to die was too much of a burden on her, which in retrospect I suppose is fair enough, not everyone has the patience to wait for someone to die, a



terminal illness, for some people, can just be a bit too inconvenient. At the time I didn't think much of it, my friend was fairly torn up about it, and who could blame him?—but, again, with the exception of consoling a person in a more or less generic way there's not much we can realistically do. We can tell our dying friend that his ex-girlfriend is a terrible person, that he deserves better, but the reality is there's almost nothing you can tell a young person who, in all likelihood, will die a slow death, there's almost nothing you can tell him that will comfort him when his attractive girlfriend ruthlessly leaves him. It's great to say, it's an appealing idea to think that we can show up at the door of a dying young man and change his life for the better, but it's a lot more difficult than you might think, in practice it's more or less an impossibility. You imagine at the time that you're saying something uniquely enlightening when in reality you're just mindlessly spewing generic condolences. Generic condolences that are hardly of any help at all. Having said, in my day-to-day routine I thought almost nothing of his ex-girlfriend, I left it at that, I thought she was taking the easy way out, there's no doubt about that, but I didn't necessarily curse her name in my personal time, I felt as though it was her decision, and ultimately if she felt as though my friend wasn't the person she wanted to wait for, in a terminal sense, then I supposed that to be her decision, that there was little any of us could do other than respect her decision and speak poorly of her behind her back. I didn't think much of it at all until the following weekend when I was at a bar around closing time with a good friend and felt a tap on my shoulder—it was this ex-girlfriend of my dying friend. She just wanted to say hi. No big deal, she said. Just saying hi, she said. Just meekly saying hello to me, a good friend of her dying ex-boyfriend. So I said hello. Now was it an

enthusiastic hello? I doubt it. Not at all, because it was entirely unenthusiastic. How could it be enthusiastic, given the circumstances? For me to give an enthusiastic hello would have been a direct affront to my relationship with my dying friend, saying hello enthusiastically to the girl who just left him to die alone, to think that you'd receive an enthusiastic hello from me at the time, under those conditions, was pure lunacy. Only a true imbecile, a person operating at the height of idiocy, would expect an enthusiastic hello from me at that time. In fact, I could argue that even saying hello to me period, a friend of the dying young man she just decided to dump, was borderline inappropriate. I might even argue it was a total affront to good taste, just the simple act of saying hello to me. A few moments later I receive another tap on the shoulder. The ex-girlfriend's friend was now standing in front of me. She went on to tell me that I was kind of rude to my dying friend's ex-girlfriend. That I could have said hello just a little more cordially. This friend of my dying friend's ex-girlfriend actually had the audacity to stand there and with all sincerity speak these exact words to me. To proclaim that it was actually me, that I was the person who was committing the faux pas here, that I was the one just a little out of line. That my less than enthusiastic hello was the true affront to good taste, as opposed to her friend ruthlessly dumping my friend as he was arduously dying of late stage brain cancer, and then having the audacity to say hello to me at a crowded bar late in the evening, expecting an enthusiastic response. I suppose you could say that I lost my temper slightly, that I informed them both of my feelings on the matter, that I perhaps informed them of my feelings in an acerbic manner, in perhaps the most acerbic manner I could imagine at the time. That I let them know in no uncertain terms who I believed was

committing the true faux pas at this bar, late in the evening, where we were all inebriated. A few moments later I receive another tap on my shoulder. The bouncer of the bar stood in front of me, rather apathetic, and informed me that I needed to leave the premises because quote-unquote the girl over there claimed that I physically assaulted her. A girl who just dumped my dying friend says hello to me. Then she had her friend verbally assault me for not being enthusiastic enough when I returned her hello. Then I verbally assaulted both her and her friend for concerning themselves with enthusiastic greetings as opposed to people dying arduous deaths. Then she falsely accused me of physically assaulting her. The problem for her was the accusation was essentially nonsensical—the bar was more or less at capacity, there was simply no time when the three of us weren't surrounded by hoards of people, so had I in fact laid my hands on her in any manner there would be no shortage of witnesses to corroborate the fact. In fact, had I laid my hands on her in any manner it's almost inconceivable that the bouncer would have required any alert in the first place, it's more or less inconceivable that the ensuing ruckus from the litany of patrons objecting to and intervening with a person shamelessly hitting a female wouldn't have made the situation completely obvious. This notion that a person punched a female in a venue crowded to that capacity, yet managed to land a punch so clandestinely absolutely no one noticed was absurd to all parties involved. So obviously I vigorously plead my case. What choice did I have? Submit to this false accusation in a public venue? I'd never plead guilty when innocent. I vigorously defended my name against what I correctly interpreted to be a total defamation of my character, against this tasteless character assassination, Demo, a legitimate

assassination attempt, all—unbelievable as it may seem—as a result of me withholding an enthusiastic hello. An unenthusiastic hello nearly turned me into a convicted felon, Demo. And as I'm defending myself vigorously, perhaps even excessively vigorously, the ex-girlfriend ambles over with her degenerate friend and admits that her claim was entirely fabricated, that it had absolutely no basis in reality—and then the ex-girlfriend and her degenerate friend, the true Nazi of enthusiast greetings, drive off, admitting in so many words that they were in the business of assassinating the character of anyone who failed to say hello to them enthusiastically. That they equated a less than enthusiastic greeting with physical violence. The next morning I received a call from my sick friend. Now he essentially—well, he doesn't say it outright—but it's clear to me simply by dint of the fact that he's still defending this person, who, to begin with, dumped him while he was dying of cancer, and to end with falsely accused me of striking her in a public venue—it's clear to me that he's, for lack of a better phrase, taking her side. In my mind at the time this defense of this person is synonymous with taking her side, which in retrospect is of course an asinine notion. But it was my notion at the time, unfortunately. Well, it almost goes without saying my forays after work to pick my friend up and drive him from place to place ceased after that. It was a bit of an imbroglio, I found myself slightly flummoxed, because now I found myself essentially abandoning my dying friend as well. I gave his ex-girlfriend an extended harangue regarding her abandonment of my dying friend, then just days later I found myself also abandoning him. It was regrettable. And eventually we'd see each other, myself and my dying friend, we'd spend limited time together here and there, of course, our

friendship didn't cease completely, and it was fine, there was no bitterness, but our friendship, frankly, was never the same. It was terrible. Horrific even. His ex-girlfriend abandoned him, then she felt as though I gave her an insincere hello at a bar, then I gave her my true thoughts on her character, her despicable character, her ruthless abandonment of my dying friend, then just days later I also ruthlessly abandoned my dying friend. It took years for him to die. He lost his sight, he was almost entirely blind, he was admitted to hospitals in a terminally intermittent fashion, visiting with high-priced specialists that brought nothing but financial ruin to his family, and eventually he was confined to his room almost day and night, in his parents' house, an only child, abandoned by both his girlfriend and his good friend. Four years later I heard that he'd entered hospice, on his deathbed, and I arranged to visit him the next morning with my cousin, and he died that night. Days later, his mother noted to a mutual friend that she'd prefer his impending funeral to be a Small Ceremony, that she didn't want it to be a Big Crowd, and I considered not going, but I was ultimately convinced by a mutual friend to attend. Against my better judgment I attended the funeral, yet the second I saw his made-up corpse in the coffin, the second I stepped into the funeral home, a bout of intense regret came over me, and I realized I had no business attending this funeral. I abandoned my dying friend, and then I had the audacity to attend his funeral, essentially against his mother's wishes. Not explicitly against his mother's wishes but implicitly against his mother's wishes. There was no doubt his mother most likely would have preferred I not attend. There was no doubt, if pressed, his mother would have at least been agnostic vis-a-vis my attendance, which, considering her preference was a small ceremony, is tantamount to preferring my absence.

Via the procession line, it was clear his parents clearly didn't remember me or chose to forget me. In my seat I ceaselessly speculated whether they didn't remember me or chose to forget me. Alcibiades—the guy who used to always go pick up their son, what a great guy, I used to go pick their son up more frequently than even his childhood friends, he's such a nice guy, yet eventually of course I stopped, I abandoned him like we all eventually abandon the terminally ill, and subsequently his parents probably forgot all about me, and rightfully so. It would have been distasteful for them to remember me. The moment I witnessed in my dead friend's father's eyes that he either intentionally or unintentionally forgot my identity I knew attending this funeral was a grave mistake. I sat back down in my black fold out chair and said to myself This is the last funeral I'll attend, because attending a funeral is always a mistake, it's the most insipid mistake we can make. Attending a wedding may be a faux pas but attending a funeral is always an inane mistake. We all gather around, all friends and family, to gaze idiotically at a stiff corpse—then we go eat at a local restaurant. We mindlessly stare at a dead body—then we have a nice meal. This tradition is egregious. There's really no other word for it, it's sickening, it's an error of the highest order. The people crying tears disgusted me, even his parents didn't shed a tear, I can only imagine their level of disgust, because they had to be even more disgusted than I was. The people who bawl at funerals when the parents of the deceased are dry-eyed are truly disgusting people. They're reprehensible. They're the true tyrants of our era, Demo. I was disgusted with myself, yet my disgust with myself suddenly found itself competing with my disgust for the people shedding tears at a young man's funeral. There's nothing more disingenuous than a funeral, and the most disingenuous

funerals are those held for the young. An essentially interminable disease, but the medical professional made a significant fortune on him. A career's worth for the working class, no doubt. They extended his suffering, the suffering of his family, the suffering of everyone around him, then allowed him to die. And then they cashed out. How many hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions of dollars, were spent, only to do every single thing a humane medicine should never do—extend a man's suffering and still allow him to die young. But of course they still accepted payment. You never get an A for effort in this country, unless you're a medical professional. Fail miserably, yet still collect a check. It's only doctors who have the audacity to extend a son's suffering, watch him die, and still ruin the family financially. It's really the height of criminal activity if you take just a second to think about it. Even a politician would blush at this rubric. We think so highly of doctors in this country, yet it seems to me that doctors are greater charlatans now than they've ever been, but of course I attended the reception as well, where the disingenuous nature of the entire event really came into focus. The disingenuous nature of the entire ordeal naturally reached its apex at the reception, as it became just another social event. A young man's tragic death. Another social event. A lurid social event. And of course I took part in it all. We had some eggplant parmigiana, oh, it was delicious, we started drinking vodka sodas before noon hit, we went out after, we had more vodka at Rocco's—I took a shit at a strip club with a slurred tongue, we went across the street to smoke a hookah, then we all ended the night entirely incoherent, completely discombobulated. It was a grotesque affair in every way. It's impossible to have an iota of respect for yourself or the society you participate in after attending

an event of that magnitude. Our way of life is rationalist yet entirely absurd. Rationalism is nothing more than absurdist propaganda, Demo—this I tell you for certain. Sitting in that black fold-out chair, staring at my dead friend's heavily made up corpse, it failed to occur to me then—I was too consumed with disgust for myself—but in retrospect my only conclusion from that day is just that. That rationalism is nothing more than the most lurid form of absurdist propaganda. We've constructed a rationalist Anglo world that has not consumed everything—not yet—but that's still entirely objectionable, just as the mystic Byzantine world, it's natural opposite, was, in its essence, also entirely objectionable. And the doctors who treat our dead friends, prolonging their suffering and buying homes in the Hamptons with the criminal proceeds, they're objectionable in every way. And the people who assassinate our characters because they feel as though we're not enthusiastic enough when we say hello to them at bars, they're criminals of the highest magnitude. But we ourselves are just as objectionable as any of these actors, we're also criminals of the highest magnitude, Demo. We're perhaps the most objectionable. We astutely recognize our opposites as criminal because we exist as parts of the same criminal whole. We don't know how to deal with death anymore. We've become completely inept at interacting with death. We think our scientists and our doctors are progressing, that they'll eventually progress to a state where they finally understand death once and for all when the reality is we've never been more primitive with regards to interacting with death. We're essentially an indigenous population when it comes to interacting with death. We're zealots of progress. And as such we're ill-equipped to interact with any sort of profundity, because we're



suspended in progress, we're stuck waiting for our scientists and doctors to give us the word, to give us the word that they've finally gotten to the bottom of death. Once and for all. Just let us know when you've got to the bottom of death. Until then we'll put our proclamations on pause. We'll avoid profundity like the plague. Previous generations spoke profoundly in the face of death. Our generation serves cole slaw and chicken parmigiana at funeral receptions. Previous generations understood death in a profoundly general sense if hardly at all in a specific sense. We consume mozzarella sticks in the face of death. We eat jalapeno poppers in the face of death. We drink craft beer with tangerine aftertastes in the face of death. It's become an utter impossibility to attend a funeral in our era.

HORATIO DEMES: What else can be said on the matter, Alcibiades?

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: "By examining the nature of sensible things, these people have arrived at a certain concept of God, but not at a conception truly worthy of Him."

HORATIO DEMES: "For if a worthy conception of God could be attained through the use of intellection, how could these people have taken the demons for gods?"

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: "But for the oriental monastic tradition . . . 'unknowing' [agnoia] denotes self-emptying, a voiding of the mind, so as to be filled with the grace of supernatural understanding . . . [T]hese two modes of cognition (mystical and intellectual) correspond to two different human cognitive faculties: the Nous, the spiritual mind or intuitive intellect,

capable of direct apprehension of the truth of things; and the *Dianoia*, the analytical and discursive intellect that works out problems by logical stages and knows about things.”

ALCIBIADES: But—you know something?

HORATIO DEMES: “It should be remembered that no evil thing is evil insofar that it exists, but insofar as it is turned aside from the activity appropriate to it.”

DEMO DEMISES: Isn't your wife British, Alcibiades?

HORATIO DEMES: They've been married for years.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: Claire is great. Just great.

HORATIO DEMES: If Alcibiades didn't marry Claire, then I think I would have made a move myself, if I'm being honest.

DIONYSIOS FIRFIRIS: She's a beautiful soul is what she is.

HORATIO DEMES: She's definitely the best thing to ever happen to Alcibiades, there's no doubt about that.

ALCIBIADES: I would say, just generally speaking, I do find Anglo women quite attractive.