

FRIENDSHIP AND POLITICS:
A DRAMATICAL READING OF PLATO'S PHAEDRUS

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FRIENDSHIP AND POLITICS:
A DRAMATICAL READING OF PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS*

by

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Abstract

Through a thorough examination of Plato's writing, particularly of its dramatic features, I aim to demonstrate that the *Phaedrus* exhibits a decidedly political dimension. Moreover, the political content of the dialogue is not explicated but enacted in the shared friendship of Socrates and Phaedrus. Socrates' concern for his friend compels him to accompany Phaedrus outside the city, from which he has symbolically been alienated in virtue of his enthusiasm for rhetoric. The two friends find themselves vulnerable when outside the city and come to identify the need they each have for one another if they are safely to return. The first half of the dialogue features Socrates' ironic mimicking of Phaedrus in order to bring him to self-knowledge. The second half, conversely, reveals the extent to which Socrates himself lacks self-knowledge. Through an attuned dramatical reading, the *Phaedrus* reveals that friendship and politics share an essential connection.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It is no secret that politics is an important issue for Plato; indeed, his two longest dialogues, the *Republic* and the *Laws*, deal with topics that are clearly political. However, both of these dialogues, as well as other political dialogues such as the *Statesman* and the *Crito*, are all very different from the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue that takes place outside the city and nearly an entire half of which is devoted to long monologues on love. Indeed, the *Phaedrus*, for these reasons, is decidedly different from any other of Plato's dialogues. Nevertheless, I want to offer a reading of the *Phaedrus* that is geared to emphasize its political implications. Doing so will involve some departures from the usual scholarly attention that the *Phaedrus* and other dialogues receive.

1.1 Plato's Writing

Plato's writing demands careful attention. This demand is even more pronounced when dealing with the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue in which writing itself is explicitly put at issue (274b-278b). My approach, now commonplace among interpreters of Plato, is to reject the assumption that everything out of the mouth of the character "Socrates" represents Plato's own position (*Seventh Letter*, 341b-c). Such an assumption has led to many interpretive problems, solutions to which are now being offered by alternative approaches.

My own approach consists of three main features. The first is increased attention to the dramatic element of the dialogue:

As dramas the Platonic dialogues contain non-linguistic elements... There are many references to deeds performed in the course of the conversation... Persons come on and off the "stage," sit in silence..., gesture and whisper to each other, [and] hide things under their cloaks... (Griswold, 2002, pg. 94)

Often a reader is left wondering why a particular character says a particular thing. Dealing with such a question often draws on more than just an analysis of the meaning of what is said; it often draws also on such dramatic features as how the characters have been developed and in what setting the exchange occurs. My reading will give special consideration to the dramatic structure of the *Phaedrus*.

The second main feature of my approach is to give special attention to the placement and use of certain words. For instance, some derivative of *philia*, the Greek word for "friendship," is placed at crucial junctures of the *Phaedrus*, such as at the very beginning and near the very end, and occurs frequently in the course of the conversation. As a result, the reader's attention is drawn to this particular word, its meaning, and its function in the dialogue. My treatment of this crucial theme (friendship) in particular, as well as to other repetitions and allusions in Plato's choice of language, will be apparent throughout this thesis.

Finally, my attention to irony in the *Phaedrus* constitutes the third main feature of my approach. There are serious questions about the nature and extent of the irony in Plato's writing. In fact, "we are uncertain about the Irony itself. For it lies in the nature of Irony that its occurrence in a text can hardly be proved to a reader who denies it" (Tigerstedt, 1977, pg. 95). This is no less the case in the *Phaedrus*. As a result, what I interpret as "ironic" may elude a neat and tidy criterion for "Irony" that sufficiently underlies every instance I single out. Though I have tried nevertheless to explain each instance of irony I treat of, the following passage from Griswold's "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues" (2002, pg. 88), provides a succinct expression of my overall treatment of Platonic irony.

Irony may be a way of speaking (or writing) which is meant to point to what is not spoken (or written); it cannot be exercised without suggesting that

something has been held back by its author, or as one might also put it, concealed by its author. ... Indeed, it is arguable that at least in Plato, irony is as much a way of revealing as it is of concealing, a way of teaching and motivating the reader/auditor to look further.

I will argue that, up until near the end of the *Phaedrus*, this account of irony applies to Socrates, who clearly intends to be ironic in the first half of the dialogue, as much as it does to Plato. Near the end of the dialogue, however, the irony will compound and thus provide the tense note that signals the climactic moment of the discussion.

One final feature, though not a central one, of my concentration on Plato's writing in my approach to the *Phaedrus* will be to limit my focus as much as possible to the *Phaedrus* itself and to avoid excessive references to Plato's other dialogues. I view each of Plato's dialogues as self-contained units that need not necessarily rely on other dialogues for interpretation. Though love is the central concern of the *Symposium*, what is said about love in that dialogue differs in important respects from what is said about love in the *Phaedrus*. A reader intent on interpreting the dialogues according not to their explicit content alone but to Plato's writing as a whole need not attempt to reconcile two differing accounts of a single topic. Each dialogue sets specific issues in a specific context and, as a result, one must often look deeper than the surface meaning of particular philosophical arguments. I have tried to limit my reliance on other dialogues to references that add justification to some comments. Generally, I have tried not to base my interpretation of any part of the *Phaedrus* solely on material derived from other dialogues.¹

¹ The obvious exception is my invocation of the *Phaedo* as the interpretive ground of the palinode in the *Phaedrus*. However, as I argue in Chapter 3, I believe the *Phaedrus* clearly indicates that the *Phaedo* should provide this interpretive ground.

1.2 The Politics of the *Phaedrus*

The first sentence of the introduction to Stephen Scully's recent (2003) translation of Plato's *Phaedrus* pronounces that "The *Phaedrus* is Plato's least political dialogue" (pg. vii). I have chosen to present my own reading of the *Phaedrus* as a response to and attempted refutation of Scully's assessment. My argument is that the politics is there; one simply needs to know where to look. I have already explained my wish to read the *Phaedrus* as a writing; that is, to consider every implication of its being a written work, and not just a work of philosophy.² What will emerge from my reading is that the *Phaedrus*' political dimension is almost entirely contained within the elements of the dialogue usually ignored by interpreters, but which nevertheless significantly alter the purport of the explicit speeches and exchanges that make up the dialogue.

The political side of the *Phaedrus* is intimately tied to the theme of friendship that runs all through the dialogue. As mentioned above, the Greek word for "friend," and its derivatives, are scattered all through the dialogue and in some cases placed very carefully at crucial points. The irony of the first half of the dialogue consists of Socrates' mimicking of Phaedrus, which is only possible in virtue of the friendship between the two. In the second half, friendship appears to be missing from the conversation, even though it remains enacted by the two discussants. Of course, none of this would be recognizable if it were not for the interaction and play between Socrates and Phaedrus, as well as other dramatic features, that suggest, without saying so, that the two are friends.

Friendship, I will argue, figures as the protagonist against the antagonist of enthusiasm. The conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus, through which Socrates

² Indeed, it is my contention that the philosophy of the dialogues can only be fully engaged once one has read them this way.

wishes to curb Phaedrus' enthusiasm for rhetoric, takes place outside of the city. This setting is meant to call to the reader's attention that the city is at all times in the background throughout the dialogue. Phaedrus' leaving the city symbolically indicates that he cannot safely remain inside so long as he retains his enthusiasm. Phaedrus' interaction with other citizens of the *polis*, i.e. his *political* interaction, is seriously compromised by this aspect of his personality. His friendship with Socrates will prove to be that which can safely guide him back into the city and, as well, friendship itself will be shown to point the way to being able adequately to deal with those in the city who wish to take advantage of enthusiastic citizens. The political dangers of enthusiasm are thus set against the political safeguard of friendship. Indeed, friendship itself is a necessarily political theme, as its very possibility calls for a sustained interaction between at least two people, an interaction enacted in the *Phaedrus*. Though what is here considered "political" expands considerably beyond mere government or public policy, it is an interpretation which is offered in the *Phaedrus* itself (261a-d) and thus requires consideration if the *Phaedrus*' political dimension is to be revealed.

So, through sufficient attention to all literary aspects of the *Phaedrus*, I will proceed to draw out the pervasive theme of friendship in an attempt to demonstrate the pronounced political thrust this theme uncovers in the dialogue.

1.3 Overview

Chapter 2 provides an interpretation of *Phaedrus* 227a – 234c, covering the opening scene of the dialogue as well as the speech of Lysias as recited by Phaedrus. That the dialogue is set outside the city indicates not that the *Phaedrus* is unconcerned with politics but that its

situation relative to the city will serve to properly frame the dialogue's political dimension (2.1.1). The opening line of the dialogue draws attention to the political themes by mentioning friendship and questioning Phaedrus' movement out of the city (2.1.2). We soon see that Phaedrus' enthusiasm for rhetoric is driving him from the *polis* and that his friendship with Socrates will guide him back (2.1.3). The myth of Boreas, the first signpost of the dialogue, thematizes self-knowledge and how a lack thereof can jeopardize political engagement (2.1.4). As Phaedrus reads Lysias' speech, we see that in undermining the values of the *polis* (2.2.1), Lysias' considerable rhetorical skills present a danger to those susceptible to his cleverness (2.2.2).

Chapter 3 provides an interpretation of *Phaedrus* 234c – 241d, covering Socrates' first speech and the preceding transition from Lysias' speech. Here Socrates (a) begins to mimic Phaedrus (3.1.1) and (b) offers a criticism of Lysias' speech that will prove pivotal in interpreting Socrates' first speech (3.1.2). As Socrates playfully offers to recite a speech of his own, Phaedrus' enthusiasm for rhetoric is powerfully pronounced (2.1.3). In an effort to provoke Socrates to make good on his offer, Phaedrus returns Socrates mimetic play, a signpost that hints at the role Socrates' first speech will play in Phaedrus' path to self-knowledge (3.1.4). As Socrates resists, however, Phaedrus' insistence indicates the underlying danger his enthusiasm presents to his friendship with Socrates (3.1.5), and thus to his ability safely to re-enter the city. To address this, Socrates comically forgets himself in his first speech in hopes of indicating to Phaedrus that he also has forgotten himself in his enthusiasm for Lysias' speech (3.2).

Chapter 4 provides an interpretation of *Phaedrus* 241d – 257b, covering the palinode³ and the preceding transition from Socrates' first speech. Socrates' abrupt cessation of his speech is an enactment of one of his criticisms of Lysias' speech and further adds to the comic self-forgetting of his first speech (4.1.1). As Socrates continues to mimic Phaedrus, the latter's enthusiasm becomes even more pronounced (4.1.2). Socrates' last attempt at ironic mimicry occurs when he proclaims his need for purification from his blasphemy of love, a signpost of the dramatic role of the palinode (4.1.3). In the last moments of conversation before the beginning of the palinode, allusions to the *Phaedo* abound (4.2.1). We can see, with help from the *Phaedo* (4.2.2), that the palinode provides purification from the misuse of language in the *Phaedrus*, as do the arguments for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo* (4.2.3).

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of *Phaedrus* 257b – 279c, covering the myth of the cicadas as well as the discussion between Socrates and Phaedrus that constitutes the second half of the dialogue. Phaedrus' reaction to the palinode demonstrates that he has achieved self-knowledge and is thus purified from misuse of language (5.1.1). Socrates' explanation of a politician's criticism of Lysias serves to demonstrate the irony involved in a contrast between what is said and what is done, and thus foreshadows the role such irony will play as the conversation nears its end (5.1.2). The myth of the cicadas proves to be a brilliant signpost, summarily indicating all the themes that are operative throughout the ensuing conversation. Here beauty, enthusiasm, philosophy, need, and friendship are all thematized in such a way as to properly frame the ultimate outcome of the dialogue (5.1.3). Socrates' and Phaedrus' subsequent discussion of the politics of speaking and writing

³ Though little attention is given to the explicit content of the palinode itself (see section 5.1.3), its dramatic role within the context of the *Phaedrus* is given extensive treatment in section 4.2.

expands the “political” to include all the interactions of the citizens of a city; this is to be kept in mind if the political dimension of the *Phaedrus* is to be unveiled (5.2.1). Finally, as Socrates’ enthusiasm for the dialectical method of collection and division grows (5.2.2), it reaches a point where, in the midst of condemning writing itself, he demonstrates the ridiculousness of his cherished method as he has explicated it. For, in its explication, Socrates has neglected to mention the supreme dialectical condition that has made the conversation in which he now participates possible: friendship. Friendship is thus shown to be conspicuously absent from the discussion yet present in the very occurrence of the discussion itself. Furthermore, that Socrates’ even goes so far as to ignore Phaedrus at the dialogue’s climax goes to show that, in act, he is neglecting the dialogical interchange that he is promoting in speech. Finally, through a layer of irony that suggestively points outside the dialogue, we find Plato outright defying Socrates’ criticisms of writing; for Plato is writing in a fashion (i.e. dramatically) that allows him to demonstrate the ridiculousness of Socrates’ condemnation (5.2.3). The *Phaedrus* ends by indicating to the reader the two central themes of the dialogue: (1) Phaedrus’ last remark before he and Socrates leave is meant to remind the reader that the enactment of friendship has compelled the movement of the entire dialogue; and (2) that the two friends have not yet re-entered the city at the conclusion of the dialogue serves to once again indicate the presence and absence of the *polis* (5.3).

2.1 Opening Conversation

2.1.1 Setting

That the *Phaedrus* takes place outside the city walls calls attention to the political element of the dialogue, even if in a negative way. Though several commentators (such as Scully, 2003, and Sallis, 1996) have taken this unusual setting as a dramatic indication of Plato's attempt to *exclude* political issues from the concerns of the *Phaedrus*, there are several points where Plato explicitly calls attention to the setting of the dialogue in order to emphasize its political implications. That Socrates and Phaedrus leave the city at the beginning of the dialogue and head back at the end serves to remind the reader where the dialogue is taking place and what it is taking place in relation to, i.e. the city. At 230c, Phaedrus remarks that Socrates "appear[s] to be totally out of place."¹ Socrates responds that "trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the town do" (230d). Here Plato not only calls attention to the fact that Socrates and Phaedrus are outside the city, but he explicitly characterizes Socrates as belonging in the city. Socrates seems especially out of place when we recall that even the threat of death could not compel him to leave the city² (Sallis, 1996). To infer, therefore, that Socrates' leaving the city amounts to his transcending politics or engaging in something extra-political is groundless. Given that Socrates is especially disposed to engage in human affairs, that this one takes place outside the city is all that makes the *Phaedrus* unusual with respect to politics. In fact, Phaedrus' preparation for political discourse, in which Socrates is engaged all through this dialogue, takes place outside the city from necessity. As we shall see, only in this way can it

¹ Unless otherwise noted, Hackforth's translation (1952) has been adopted for all references to the text of the *Phaedrus*.

² See the *Crito*, esp. 52c.

emphasize a contrast between Phaedrus' enthusiasm for rhetoric and the self-knowledge, soon to be acquired, that will cure him of this enthusiasm and thus allow him properly to engage with the rhetoricians of the city; for Phaedrus *must not* return to the city until he is adequately able to do so.³

2.1.2 The Opening Question

There is a reason why Phaedrus is leaving the city as the *Phaedrus* begins. The first line of the dialogue, "my friend Phaedrus, where are you going and where do you come from?" (227a; Sallis' translation (1996, pg. 105)), immediately brings our attention to Phaedrus, his movement, and his relation to Socrates. Phaedrus is on his way somewhere, both literally and figuratively. Literally, he is on his way outside the city walls to recite to himself the speech Lysias has written. However, this movement outside the city is compromised by the added presence of Socrates, a "lover of learning" who insists that the countryside, unlike the city, has nothing to teach him (230d). The reader is meant to ask herself *why* Socrates would venture outside the city if this is the case.⁴

That the opening line of the dialogue is a question asked of Phaedrus by Socrates indicates immediately that Socrates is interested in Phaedrus. The question concerns Phaedrus' movement; it is Socrates' first priority in encountering Phaedrus immediately to gauge his movement. He wants to know both where Phaedrus has been and where he is going. We now not only know *of* the movement but also the *direction* of the movement.

³ No other interpreter I have read sees this political implication of Socrates and Phaedrus leaving the city.

⁴ Based on Socrates' next remark, "Yet you seem to have discovered a recipe for getting me out [of the city]" (230d), Sallis surmises that "Socrates' attachment to *logoi* is stronger even than his bond to the city" (1996, pg. 117). Yet I will argue that Socrates is here beginning merely to mimic an attachment to *logoi* that is, in fact, Phaedrus', thus engaging in an irony that will soon become more pronounced (see Chapter 3). It is Socrates' attachment to his friend Phaedrus, not to *logoi*, that here leads him out of the city.

But why are the specifics of Phaedrus' activities important? Socrates eagerly agrees to join Phaedrus for his walk (227c-d). That this companionship comes so eagerly and so closely on the heels of Socrates' newly acquired knowledge of Phaedrus' movement should serve to alarm the reader: something is dreadfully wrong. No sooner does Socrates, out of obvious concern, learn where Phaedrus has been and where he is going than he eagerly agrees to accompany him out of the city. Furthermore, as noted above, Socrates has no interest in leaving the city. But he does have an interest in Phaedrus. Socrates, then, joins Phaedrus as a concerned friend, eager to join him on his path, to move with him. This close friendship, which endures throughout the whole of the dialogue, is signified by the very first words of the dialogue: "My friend Phaedrus..." (227a).⁵ Socrates' friendship with Phaedrus will prove to be a pivotal element in the movement of the dialogue.

We must keep in mind, though, that Socrates, in leaving the city, is not necessarily leaving the city behind. If Socrates truly is a man of the city, who has no interest in "trees and open country," then we can be sure that Socrates' concern for Phaedrus arises out of Phaedrus' movement out of the city.⁶ This is Phaedrus' figurative movement. Phaedrus is not so much leading Socrates outside the city as Socrates is concerned to prepare Phaedrus

⁵ Griswold interestingly points out that, "Socrates seems to extend the hand of friendship far more enthusiastically than does Phaedrus" because "he refers here to Phaedrus as *phile*, a gesture that Phaedrus does not return in his reply...", and thus emphasizes the lack of prominence of their friendship for Phaedrus as the dialogue begins. However, he (and every other interpreter I have encountered) fails *fully* to recognize how friendship initiates and compels the dialogue's movement, as I will try to do.

⁶ Sallis' discussion (1996, pgs. 105-9) of the full implications of Socrates' opening question comes very close to my own interpretation offered here. Yet he fails fully to explore the implications of the question with respect to Phaedrus, who after all is the friend, the lover of rhetoric, and the one who is leaving the city.

to re-enter the city.⁷ In other words, Socrates is going to guide his friend Phaedrus' movement back into the *polis*⁸.

2.1.3 Lysias and Phaedrus

Socrates' well-concealed alarm is triggered by Phaedrus' explanation that he has been with Lysias. Lysias was a famous attic orator who,

spent much of his early manhood at Thurii in southern Italy, where he is said to have studied rhetoric under Tisias; on his return to Athens in 411 he may have taught rhetoric and acquired by the composition of showpieces the reputation which he enjoys in the *Phaedrus*..." (Hamilton, 1973, pg. 13)

Taylor adds that, "Lysias...is now at the height of his fame as a writer of *logoi*..." (1960, pg. 300). It is not insignificant, then, that Socrates immediately begins asking about Lysias; first, where he is and, second, what Phaedrus and Lysias were doing. In fact, Socrates is so eager to know the answer to the second question that he immediately guesses, "No doubt Lysias was giving the company a feast of eloquence" (227b). If we take seriously the grave concern Socrates has for Phaedrus, we can perhaps infer that Socrates is not so much here giving his best guess as anticipating his worst fear. Given Socrates' attitude, in the rest of the *Phaedrus*, toward rhetorical speeches,⁹ we can here suspect that Lysias' reputation alone is enough to cause Socrates to fear for Phaedrus. Rhetorical speeches can be dangerous¹⁰, especially for someone as enthusiastic for them as Phaedrus. Thus, Socrates considers it "above all business" (227b) to accompany his friend. He even pledges, "I won't leave you even if you extend your walk as far as Megara, up to the walls and back

⁷ This assertion contradicts the opinions of commentators I have read, all of whom believe Socrates is as addicted as Phaedrus to rhetoric.

⁸ My repetition of the Greek word *polis*, "city," is meant to call attention to it as the origin of our "political" and its derivatives. The relation of the dialogue's characters to the city emphasizes the political in a way I explain further in section 5.2.1.

⁹ See also the *Gorgias*. See Griswold, 2005, for an outline of the treatment of rhetoric in these dialogues.

¹⁰ Socrates explains why at 260b-d (see section 5.2.1).

again..." (227d). Insofar as Socrates is willing both to leave the city and to walk quite a long distance¹¹, we are to understand the danger to be so imminent that Socrates is willing to take quite a risk for the sake of his friend.

Socrates (and the reader) is given even more reason for concern when Phaedrus refers to Lysias as "the ablest writer of our day" (228a). He even goes so far as to say that he would rather the ability to repeat long speeches by heart than come into a fortune. Here is one of the first signs that Phaedrus is madly in love with rhetoric. It also explains Socrates' alarm at Phaedrus' movement; not only is Lysias the "ablest" rhetorician of the day (which makes him, in Socrates' eyes, a dangerous man indeed), but Phaedrus has an "enthusiasm for discourse" rivaled only by Simmias of Thebes (242a-b). That these two men have spent the day up to this point together indicates that the danger of rhetoric is especially likely to have had an effect on Phaedrus.

It is fitting, then, that Socrates' next remark is a particularly strong statement of friendship with Phaedrus: "I know Phaedrus; yes indeed, I'm as sure of him as of my own identity" (228a). Socrates then proceeds to describe Phaedrus' psychology, how Phaedrus asked Lysias to repeat his speech, acquired a copy of that speech and studied it so carefully that he learned it by heart, and finally came upon another lover of discourse (i.e. Socrates)¹² and, though playfully reluctant, meant to repeat the discourse to him nevertheless (228a-c). Two things are noteworthy here: firstly, that Socrates does indeed know Phaedrus so well (Phaedrus does not deny any of Socrates' claims) is remarkable. Clearly, the two are close

¹¹ That the walk to Megara is a long one is indicated by Hamilton's note that Herodicus, who Socrates here cites as one who recommends a walk to Megara and back, is a physician who "particularly recommended long walks" (1973, pg. 22).

¹² Interestingly, Sallis concludes, based on this remark, that "by Socrates' own description of himself, he is a lover of *logoi*," thereby failing fully to acknowledge the playful, *ironic* reflection (for it is not Socrates but Phaedrus who is in love with discourse) in which Socrates engages here, and how Phaedrus returns this reflective play later in the dialogue (236c, see section 3.1.4).

friends indeed. Furthermore, that this emphasis on their friendship comes so near the very beginning of the dialogue stresses the role friendship plays in the subsequent movement of the dialogue. At crucial junctures¹³, it will be shown that the dialogue only proceeds in the way it does because of the closeness of the companions who take part in it.¹⁴ For now, it is enough to note that the emphasis on this connection at the beginning of the *Phaedrus* shows that it is Socrates' first recourse in beginning to combat the effects of Lysias' speech.

Secondly, if we can trust that Socrates does indeed know Phaedrus as well as he claims to, we are fully informed as to the extent of Phaedrus' enthusiasm for rhetoric, particularly that of Lysias. Indeed, that Phaedrus has already learned the speech by heart even before midday shows an obsession that is alarming in itself. Again, we can fully understand Socrates' concern for Phaedrus once we learn how susceptible Phaedrus is to the already persuasive rhetorical form. As Socrates has suspected all along, Phaedrus is in no position to participate in political discourse. He and others like him are merely enthusiasts for rhetoric. The task Socrates sets for himself is lovingly and attentively to guide Phaedrus' movement from being susceptible to rhetoric to being fully able to engage the rhetoricians of the city in critical discussion. Indeed, such movement will be necessary if Phaedrus is to safely re-enter the city. This political dimension of the *Phaedrus*, hitherto unnoticed as such by commentators I have read, shapes the entire dialogue.

¹³ Such as 243e (see section 4.1.3), 259a (see section 5.1.3), and 279c (see section 5.3).

¹⁴ I have read no interpreter as of yet who has identified the essential connection between the friendship presented in the dialogue and the movement of the friends. Griswold (1996, pgs. 32-3) makes some exceptionally sharp observations about both the movement and the friendship, but fails to connect the two in accordance with my present attempt.

2.1.4 The Myth of Boreas

When Phaedrus asks whether Socrates believes the myth of Boreas¹⁵ (229c), Socrates' response is a somewhat elaborate comparison of his attitude toward myths with those of the sophists.

I should be quite in the fashion if I disbelieved it, as the men of science do... For my part, Phaedrus, I regard such theories...as the invention of clever, industrious people... I myself have certainly no time for the business: and I'll tell you why, my friend: I can't as yet 'know myself', as the inscription at Delphi enjoins; and so long as that ignorance remains it seems to me ridiculous to inquire into extraneous matters. (229c-230a)

This diatribe of Socrates' anticipates the speech of Lysias and, thus, the first stage of the movement the *Phaedrus* traces. In fact, we will see throughout the dialogue that this introductory conversation as well as each of the "transitions" (that is, the conversations that occur in between the speeches and just before the final discussion of dialectic) serves to foreshadow the next stage of Phaedrus' movement. Furthermore, they are meant as "hints" from Socrates to Phaedrus as to the "lesson" he is to learn from the ensuing speech or discussion.¹⁶ Each of these "hints" serve as signposts for the next stage of Phaedrus' movement from enthusiast for clever rhetoric to participant in dialectical discourse.¹⁷

The discussion of the myth of Boreas, then, serves as the first signpost. Its first function is to indicate to the reader what about the upcoming speech of Lysias' is inadequate, as we will see. Its second function, however, is subtly to foreshadow the role of

¹⁵ Nehamas and Woodruff note that, "According to legend, Oreithuia, daughter of Athenian king Erechtheus, was abducted by Boreas while she was playing with Nymphs along the banks of the Ilissus River. Boreas personifies the north wind" (1995, pg. 4, n.10).

¹⁶ Of course, none of these lessons take the form of instruction or a teaching. In fact, we will begin to notice that Socrates behaves as if *he* is the one making the crucial movements that, in fact, Phaedrus is making. This gives added significance to that question of Socrates' that opens the dialogue. Socrates and Phaedrus are such close friends that, as the next-to-last line of the dialogue makes clear, their movements are one and the same. Socrates guides Phaedrus in his movement by moving with him.

¹⁷ To my knowledge, no other interpreter has noticed the signposts that reside in the transitions and serve to foreshadow the next stage in Phaedrus' movement.

myth in the dialogue. The mention of the Delphic oracle, as well as the question of whether Socrates is more or less like Typhon, the monster with a hundred heads, serves to show the role myth plays in his quest for self-knowledge (Sallis, 1996, pg. 116). Socrates' remark indicates that whether the myth of Typhon is true is of no consequence to him; rather, the myth serves as a frame with the aid of which Socrates can examine himself. The great mythic world of the palinode is here foreshadowed, as is the role it will play in allowing Phaedrus to know himself.

2.2 Lysias' Speech

2.2.1 Contradicting Convention

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of Lysias' speech, given Socrates' foregoing "lesson," is its basic thesis: the non-lover should be preferred to the lover. Ferrari (1987, pg. 92) finds that "there is a certain magnificent audacity in the non-lover's suggestion..." and notes that Lysias "violates social *mores* while staunchly maintaining a position of the strictest sobriety and decorum" (1987, pg. 252, n. 8). Griswold calls the non-lover's effort "singularly odd" (1986, pg. 45). It is evident that what Lysias proposes in his speech flies in the face of conventional wisdom about love.

In this context, we can see the relation between Lysias and those sophists whom Socrates spoke of as concerned with the truth of myths. Like them, Lysias concerns himself with cleverly explaining away the accepted beliefs of society. Those "men of science" whom Socrates says give scientific accounts of the traditional myths (229c) attempt to subvert accepted beliefs with scientific rationale. That Socrates does not attempt to participate, by reason of his inability to "as yet know myself" (230a), implies that, presumably, these men

of science would also do well to attempt to know themselves before attending to “the business” (229e). After all, they have yet to show any comprehensive success (229d-e).

Socrates prepares to bring Phaedrus through the first stage of his movement by revealing something about Lysias’ speech (even before it is read!): namely, that trying to explain away accepted beliefs can be time-consuming (it did, after all, take Lysias “weeks to compose at his leisure” (228a) his speech in defense of the non-lover) and largely unsuccessful. It is far more beneficial to examine oneself instead. In fact, as Socrates goes on to demonstrate, accepted myths and beliefs can be a lense through which one sees oneself more clearly.¹⁸

2.2.2 Profiteering

The persuasive power of clever speech, for which Phaedrus has been shown to have a particular affinity, is dangerous in a much more serious way, however. Ferrari sheds light on a way in which Lysias’ thesis in particular has quite a dangerous implication.

...[One] of the functions served by conventional erotic behaviour was to mark off sexual relationships between aristocratic peers from those commercially procured... Accordingly, the outrageous twist in the arguments of the non-lover is that by pooh-poohing the traditional agonies he comes close to using the boy as his whore. He is buying sex from him... And the rhetorical challenge he dares to face is to deck out this proposal in the finery of rational concern for their mutual welfare. (1987, pg. 92)

In essence, Lysias’ non-lover has attempted to break down the barrier between aristocratic *eros* and prostitution.

¹⁸ As we will see, the palinode is less a grand mythic adventure and more a genuine exercise in self-knowledge through myth. While several commentators, especially Griswold (1996), have given appropriate treatment to the theme of self-knowledge in the Phaedrus, none I have read succeed in fully exploring how the palinode does this in light of the remarks Socrates makes about myth here at the beginning of the dialogue. See section 4.2.3.

I agree with Ferrari when he notes that, “Lysias is made to reveal something of himself through his fictional creation” (1987, pg. 252, n.8). Lysias is a rhetorician at the height of his powers. It is implicitly indicated here (and elsewhere¹⁹) that this power to persuade can be quite effectively used to further one’s own interests. In the case of sophists, who make their living through rhetorical speeches, their main interest is to make money. Lysias “would have written this display-piece to attract new fee-paying customers for his service as speechwriter...thereby risking the opprobrium that he commercializes what should have no price” (Ferrari, 1987, pg. 252, n. 8). Thus Lysias does indeed reveal himself through his character, the non-lover: both are willing cleverly to reverse the norms of the time for the sake of profit.

Herein lies what is perhaps the greatest danger of clever, rhetorical speech. Socrates’ alarm upon hearing that Phaedrus had spent the day being entertained with one of Lysias’ speeches is precisely a consequence of his suspicion of rhetoric. As far as Socrates is concerned, those engaged in rhetoric, more often than not, have something to sell. Plato has revealingly attributed to Lysias a speech in which the speaker reflects the speech-writer; he is a man pursuing his interests through a clever twisting of the common way of looking at things. And, worst of all, he has been successful: Phaedrus is completely enamoured with Lysias’ speech. Socrates, upon first meeting Phaedrus and learning of his recent activities, instantly realizes that his friend is in no position to deal adequately with the profit-making rhetoricians of Athens; he is at risk of being sold something, merely in virtue of the fact that it is cleverly assembled, that could harm him. Phaedrus, in other words, is in no position safely to engage in the affairs of the city; his leaving the city to recite Lysias’ speech symbolizes his need for preparation before heading back. Now that Phaedrus’

¹⁹ See the *Protagoras*, as well as Gonzalez’s (2000) revealing commentary.

situation has been fully revealed through his attitude toward Lysias' speech, Socrates is in a position to begin guiding his movement so as to prepare him for safe re-entry into the city. As soon as Phaedrus finishes reciting Lysias' speech to Socrates, this preparation will begin.

3.1 Socrates Prepares to Offer a Speech

3.1.1 Irritation

Immediately after finishing his recitation of Lysias' speech, Phaedrus' enthusiasm for it is again emphasized. "Isn't it extraordinarily fine, especially in point of language?" (234c) After Socrates agrees, but only insofar as he enjoys it vicariously through Phaedrus and not on its own merits, Phaedrus exclaims, "Come, come! Do you mean to make a joke of it?" (234d). Both de Vries (1969, pg. 72) and Rowe (1988, pg. 149) notice that Phaedrus expresses some irritation at Socrates' reluctance to join in the praising of the speech. Indeed, after Socrates asks, "Do you think I am joking, and don't mean it seriously?" (234d), Phaedrus responds, "No more of that, Socrates: tell me truly, as one friend to another, do you think there is anyone in Greece who could make a finer and more exhaustive speech on the same subject?" (234e). Given the strong friendship between Socrates and Phaedrus, established earlier in the dialogue, it should be alarming both to the reader and to Socrates that Phaedrus would react this way. It is a testament both to the power of Lysias' speech and to Phaedrus' vulnerability to it that he would so suddenly turn against his friend. Plato is continuing to emphasize the danger Phaedrus is in, a danger that has driven him away from the city and threatens to drive him away from his friends.¹

In fact, when Socrates prefaces his next remark with "What?", he reveals some irritation of his own (De Vries, 1969, pg. 72). Yet that his irritation comes immediately after Phaedrus' own display of irritation serves to show the extent to which Socrates is

¹ Many commentators, such as White (1993) and Sallis (1996), regard the exchange between Socrates and Phaedrus during the transition to Socrates' first speech as simply playful. While the playfulness of the episode is apparent, I have read no interpretation that emphasizes the underlying danger of Phaedrus' behaviour, or what the source of that danger might be.

simply mimicking Phaedrus. After all, Socrates has just finished telling Phaedrus that he only enjoyed Lysias' speech because "I watched your apparent delight in the words as you read" (234c). Phaedrus and Socrates are so close that one's enjoyment gives way to the other's. Furthermore, it is only in virtue of their friendship that this is possible. As we will see, Socrates is only able to guide Phaedrus in his movement insofar as he is able to reflect Phaedrus in this way. Their friendship proves to be the basis for the possibility of movement. This makes Phaedrus' irritation with his friend all the more perilous.

3.1.2 Lysias and Adequacy

Socrates begins to criticize Lysias' speech: "[I]t really seemed to me that he said the same things several times over...In fact it struck me as an extravagant performance, to demonstrate his ability to say the same thing twice, in different words but with equal success" (235a). Perplexingly, Socrates says, "I couldn't think that even Lysias himself would deem it adequate" (235a). Why would Socrates remark that the author of the speech would consider it inadequate? Rowe (1988, pg. 150) suggests the following possible meaning of Socrates' remark: "'I thought Lysias was consciously struggling'." Struggling, that is, with finding things to say. White (1993, pg. 28) asserts that, "Surely if Lysias, one of the premier [sic] rhetoricians in Greece, would not have thought that its rhetoric was adequate, then he would have either withdrawn this speech or written another one." However, it seems that White has missed an important element here: Socrates can so easily find fault with Lysias' speech because Lysias never meant, in the first place, to write the speech in accordance with Socratic standards. It is, instead, Lysias' intention cleverly to reverse the accepted wisdom of the *polis* in order to establish himself as rhetorical master.

As we will see at the beginning of Socrates' first speech, however, Lysias does struggle against himself in a way that Socrates' first speech will illustrate further.

3.1.3 The Source of Socrates' Speech

At first, it would seem that Socrates has done very little to diminish Phaedrus' enthusiasm for pretty speeches. Indeed Socrates, in offering to recite another speech, seems only to be feeding Phaedrus' fever; he is so eager to hear this speech, in fact, that he is completely uninterested in its source. Yet, the source is unknown even to Socrates. "I am of course well aware it can't be anything originating in my own mind, for I know my own ignorance..." (235c). It is worthwhile, looking ahead, to note that this famous claim of Socrates' (*Apology*, 21b-23b) is not completely unrelated to the Delphic command to "know thyself." Socrates knows his own ignorance only as a result of his examination of himself. However, there is a thick layer of irony at work here. Firstly, the speech Socrates is about to give cannot be other than his own. His attribution of the speech to Sappho or Anacreon is comedic; "How on earth could Socrates have heard anything in praise of the *non-lover* from Sappho or Anacreon, of all people – two of the best-known love-poets of antiquity" (Rowe, 1988, pg. 151)? Furthermore, the whole passage where he denies authorship smacks of the usual, over-the-top Socratic modesty and self-deprecation. However, there is another level of irony here, which will be seen through an examination of the first speech: in that speech, Socrates demonstrates, on the surface at least, how *little* he knows himself – and he does this solely for Phaedrus' benefit.

Phaedrus' response to Socrates' denial of authorship is to say, "I don't mind your not telling me, even though I should press you, from whom and how you heard it, provided you

do just what you say..." (235d). In other words, Phaedrus is simply itching to hear this additional speech. Sallis (1996, pg. 119) sees that "Phaedrus clearly recognizes that Socrates is being ironic on this point," and Hackforth (1952, pg. 36) notices that, "When Socrates says that he has stupidly forgotten the exact source of inspiration, even Phaedrus seems to see through the fiction." Both these authors may be correct as to whether or not Phaedrus is aware of Socrates' playful irony, but they also miss the point. Plato is trying to emphasize the extreme urgency with which Phaedrus is pressing Socrates to get on with his speech², an urgency that will become all the more pronounced in its desperation in a few moments. That Phaedrus is dismissive of the source of the speech altogether illustrates the extent of his enthusiasm.

3.1.4 The Self-Knowledge Signpost

Phaedrus next remarks that he will "undertake like the nine Archons to set up at Delphi a golden life-size statue, not only of myself but of you also" if Socrates delivers what he promises, i.e. a better speech than Lysias'.³ In short, the implication is that Phaedrus will have committed some transgression if Socrates is successful. Sallis' explanation of Phaedrus' remarks are excellent and worth quoting at length.

[I]f Socrates delivers a better speech, then Phaedrus must...have been convicted of breaking a law. But...what law would Phaedrus have broken? His reference to Delphi...and the fact that Phaedrus' promise comes immediately after Socrates'...statement...about his ignorance...strongly suggest that the law which Phaedrus would prove to have broken would be the Delphic command "Know

² See note 1, pg. 20, above.

³ Nehamas and Woodruff note that "the archons were magistrates chosen by lot in classical Athens. On taking office they swore an oath to set up a golden statue if they violated the laws" (1995, pg. 14, n. 31). Rowe adds that, "They [i.e. the archons] presumably have no expectation of having to fulfill their promise; and by going one better than them – two statues instead of one – Phaedrus underlines that neither does he. The bet is, he thinks, that Socrates will be unable to deliver" (1988, pg. 152). See also Thompson (1973, pgs. 21-22) for an elaborate explanation.

thymself.”⁴... Presumably, it would be on account of his having proved not really to know Socrates very well, in the sense of not knowing that Socrates can give...a better speech than Lysias’... This could be the case only if the two tasks, knowing himself and knowing Socrates, were not independent, only if there were an essential connection between them. (1996, pg. 120-121)

Sallis goes on to say that Phaedrus’ proposal to set up statues both of himself and of Socrates “amounts to a proposal to set up images through which to see himself and his beloved, and by coming to see his beloved he comes that much more to see himself...” (1996, pg. 121). Above⁵, we saw Socrates in the act of mimicking Phaedrus when he partook in Phaedrus’ delight of Lysias’ speech (instead of enjoying the speech on his own terms). Thus this reference to the statues Phaedrus will erect symbolizes the way in which the two friends will reflect each other throughout the dialogue. In fact, Socrates almost immediately engages in this reflection once again by re-enacting Phaedrus’ playful reluctance at the beginning of the dialogue. “Have you taken me seriously, Phaedrus, for teasing you with an attack on your darling Lysias? Can you possibly suppose that I shall make a real attempt to rival his cleverness with something more ornate?” (236b; see 228a, where Phaedrus asks, “Do you expect an amateur like me to repeat...the work of the ablest writer of our day...?”).

It is here that we find the next “hint,” the signpost that marks the next stage of Phaedrus’ movement in the dialogue. Socrates acts in this way, a way which reflects Phaedrus’ own actions at the beginning of the dialogue, in order to provoke recognition in Phaedrus.⁶ Indeed, Phaedrus takes the bait and capitalizes:

⁴ See section 3.1.3 above.

⁵ Section 3.1.1.

⁶ Though several interpreters of the *Phaedrus* notice that Socrates is openly mimicking Phaedrus in parts of this section, none, to my knowledge, notice the extent to which Socrates continues to mimic him all throughout this section, nor do they identify the function of such reflection as a guide to self-knowledge.

As to that, my friend, I've got you where I can return your fire. Assuredly, you must do what you can in the way of a speech, or else we shall be driven, like vulgar comedians, to capping each other's remarks. Beware: do not deliberately compel me to utter the words 'Don't I know my Socrates? If not, I've forgotten my own identity', or 'He wanted to speak, but made difficulties about it'. (236c)⁷

Thus it is indicated that the next stage of Phaedrus' movement will be to recognize himself in what others say. In other words, Phaedrus is acquiring self-knowledge. Thus, Socrates' first speech will serve as a "lesson" in self-recognition – i.e., self-knowledge.

3.1.5 Love of Speeches

However, though Phaedrus is successful in recognizing himself in Socrates' playful irony during this episode, we are immediately reminded that Phaedrus' feverish love of speeches is still affecting him. He threatens Socrates with physical force, saying "we are by ourselves in a lonely place, and I am stronger and younger than you: ...please don't make me use force to open your lips" (236c-d). When Socrates tries his trick again, referring to himself as an amateur as did Phaedrus at 228a, Phaedrus ignores him and comes up with an even more serious threat against Socrates. Clearly, Phaedrus' passion for rhetoric constitutes a risk to his close friendship with Socrates. White, in light of Phaedrus' final remark of the dialogue (279c), finds that,

in true friendship, there would be no need or inclination for the coyness characterizing the relation between Phaedrus and Socrates in their early exchanges on rhetoric; it is a measure of the distance separating Phaedrus and Socrates from true friendship that they initially bandy these speeches about in this way. (1993, pg. 31)

However, Plato has been at pains to emphasize the extent to which Socrates and Phaedrus are true friends, if only to emphasize the danger Phaedrus' susceptibility to pretty speeches,

⁷ Indeed, Phaedrus' attempt to parody Socrates here goes so far as to cause him, a moment later, to quote Pindar, as did Socrates near the beginning of the dialogue (227b). Phaedrus says, "mistake not thou my bidding," (236d) which we can identify as Pindar's from its use in the *Meno*, 76d (Rowe, 1988, pg. 152).

such as that of Lysias', presents to that friendship. In fact, they "bandy these speeches about" only because Socrates, in an attempt to provoke self-recognition in Phaedrus, has deliberately mimicked the way he behaved at the beginning of the dialogue. This attempted provocation, furthermore, is a function of Socrates' guidance of Phaedrus back towards the city, a guidance undertaken purely out of friendship, as we have seen (section 2.1.2). Thus, White (as well as any other interpreter with whom I am familiar) fails to see the crucial role friendship plays in this exchange.

Phaedrus finally threatens to "never again declaim or report any other speech by any author whatsoever" (236e). This turns out to be "the means of compelling a lover of discourse to do your bidding!" (236e). Socrates concedes and prepares to give the speech. It is interesting, however, in light of the speech to come, that Socrates' professed love of speeches turns out to be the weakness that leads him to deliver his speech. This seems also to be an attempt to mimic Phaedrus, whose love of speeches has been the launching pad of the entire dialogue; but, insofar as this is the case, it serves to frame the way in which Socrates' speech will guide Phaedrus towards self-recognition. Whether Socrates is accurately characterized as a speech-lover in other Platonic dialogues is not at issue here; in the *Phaedrus* he adopts this label only in order to enact the danger Phaedrus is putting himself in.⁸ White suggests that, "Socrates' shame is caused by the fact that he has allowed his love of discourses to overpower his natural modesty..." (1993, pg. 33). Recall that, at 228c, Phaedrus is revealed as reluctant to recite the speech of Lysias, "though he meant to do so ultimately," even after admitting being an "amateur" (228a). There, Phaedrus' love of speeches clearly overpowered his natural modesty. Socrates is continuing to mimic

⁸ All other interpreters, as far as I know, simply take Socrates' claim to be a speech-lover in earnest.

Phaedrus here⁹, but in a much more meaningful way. As he prepares to offer his first speech, Socrates has set it up so it can illustrate the danger Phaedrus' love of speeches presents.

3.2 Socrates' First Speech

3.2.1 Dramatic Setting

Socrates immediately prefaces his speech in a way Lysias did not. This preface provides a dramatic setting that will prove pivotal in the interpretation of the role this speech plays in Phaedrus' movement.

...[O]nce upon a time there was a handsome boy, or rather a young man, who had a host of lovers; and one of them was wily, and had persuaded the boy that he was not in love with him, though really he was, quite as much as the others. And on one occasion, in pressing his suit he actually sought to convince him that he ought to favour a non-lover rather than a lover. And this is the purport of what he said: (237b)

Both White (1993, pg. 37) and Sallis (1996, pg. 124) notice that Socrates is here making explicit what was implicit in Lysias' speech: that the supposed "non-lover" is actually only concealing himself as such. He is, "as much as the others," in love with the boy:

As Socrates intimated earlier, with regard to Lysias' speech..., so here it is explicit that the intention behind the speech, i.e., the end to which it is dedicated, has nothing to do with truth but only with persuading others in whatever way is advantageous to oneself. (Sallis, 1996, pg. 124)

Socrates, in adding this preface, is trying to illustrate to Phaedrus what he had expected all along: that Lysias' speech is not a genuine exercise in truth-telling but instead an ingenious ploy, executed for the sake of profit. Lysias' motives reflect the motives of the non-lover of his speech. This motive is the locus of the danger away from which Socrates is trying to steer Phaedrus. Also, however, the revelation of the true nature of the "non-lover" will

⁹ And White has overlooked this dramatic feature.

serve to frame the interpretation of the rest of the speech, which first seeks to define love and then to outline the disadvantage of granting favours to the lover. We will see that if we keep in mind that the non-lover is, in reality, a lover, a strange twist must be perceived in his words.

3.2.2 Definition

My boy, if anyone means to deliberate successfully about anything, there is one thing he must do at the outset: he must know what it is he is deliberating about; otherwise he is bound to go utterly astray. Now most people fail to realise that they don't know what this or that really is: consequently when they start discussing something, they dispense with any agreed definition, assuming that they know the thing; then later on they naturally find that they agree neither with each other nor with themselves. (237b-c)

On the surface, the need to find a definition (in this case, a definition of love) on which to deliberate seems to be a merely formal improvement upon Lysias' speech, which offered no such definition. This is what lay behind Socrates' earlier remark (235a; see section 4.1.2) that even Lysias himself would not have found his own speech adequate. Those who neglect adequately to define the terms on which they wish to deliberate find themselves agreeing "neither with each other nor with themselves" (237c). Lysias, in not including a definition of love in his speech, can plausibly be said to be in disagreement with himself in the same way that Socrates, in other dialogues¹⁰, causes internal disagreement amongst those who have not identified a definition on the basis of which they are arguing.¹¹

However, the attempt to define love, placed as it is at the beginning of the speech, sheds light on another aspect of the speech: it as an attempt to improve on Lysias' speech while treating of the same theme as Lysias. At the same time as he is trying to make

¹⁰ Such as the *Meno*, *Theaetetus*, *Republic*, etc., etc.

¹¹ To my knowledge, no other interpreter has noticed this eventual justification of Socrates' earlier remark that "I couldn't think that even Lysias himself would deem [his own speech] adequate" (235a).

explicit through his dramatic setting what is implicit in Lysias' speech (namely, that the non-lover is in fact a lover), Socrates must nevertheless keep his promise to deliver a speech on the same theme as Lysias. However, the dramatic setting serves to reveal the falseness of Lysias' speech: the non-lover is a concealed lover. Despite this revelation, the non-lover must define love in such a way as to be conducive to his argument that the beloved should favour the non-lover, in accordance with Lysias' thesis (236d). One might be tempted to ask why things must be so complicated; why does the non-lover not simply define love as best he can and unmask himself as lover? In this way, Socrates is at pains to demonstrate the utter ridiculousness of Lysias' speech. The improvement over Lysias' speech with respect to form serves to bring to light the implausibility of favouring the non-lover over the lover; it will inevitably reduce to an argument to favour the lover. Socrates' improvement in form accommodates this reduction more so than the implicit deception of Lysias' speech. In turn, the true motive of Lysias' speech has been revealed: to twist and turn the accepted norms of society in order to compose a speech the cleverness of which blinds speech-lovers to the falseness of its thesis.

3.2.3 The Comedy of Self-Forgetting

Socrates' speech proceeds to explore the perils of favouring the lover. The lover, for instance, will take pleasure in defects of mind such as ignorance, cowardice, poor speaking, and slow thinking (239a). Furthermore, the lover will prevent the boy from, first, "consorting with others" and, second, pursuing "divine philosophy" (239b). What is most noticeable here is how much the boy, if (presumably¹²) he is to favour the non-lover over

¹² Socrates, in lieu of listing the benefits of favouring the non-lover, simply says that, "to each evil for which I have abused the one party [i.e. the lover] there is a corresponding good belonging to the other" (241e).

the lover, will resemble Socrates. Socrates' wisdom (*Apology*, 23b), bravery (*Symposium*, 220e; *Laches*, 181b), eloquence, and quick-mindedness (these last are displayed in his speeches in the *Phaedrus*, both of which are not only brilliant but are composed on the spot) are well-known attributes of the man. Furthermore, Socrates is also quite famous for consorting with others (*Apology*, 23b) and is the very paradigm of the philosopher.

With respect to concerns of the body, Socrates' non-lover goes on to say that the boy, if he is to favour the lover over the non-lover, "will be of a physical type which in wartime, and other times that try a man's mettle, inspires confidence in his enemies and alarm in his friends, aye and in his very lovers too" (239d). Again, this situation would presumably be reversed if the boy were to favour the concealed non-lover. Insofar as Socrates is known to have a tough body (*Symposium*, 220b-c) and to be an exceptional soldier (*Symposium*, 220d-221c), we can say that the boy would again resemble Socrates.

Socrates' non-lover continues and, with respect to property and possessions, remarks that the lover will try and deprive his beloved of "father and mother, kinsmen and friends" and "will want his beloved to remain as long as possible without wife or child or home..." (239e-240a). A boy with many friends and with a wife and child will, again, resemble Socrates, whose many friends are interlocutors in various dialogues and whose wife and child appear in the *Phaedo* (60a; 116b).

It is obvious by now that there is a sense in which Socrates' concealed non-lover wishes to cultivate his beloved in such a way that the latter will develop a character that is strikingly similar to that of Socrates. Thus, the boy who favours the non-lover will turn out the most Socratic. But the non-lover is actually a lover – and so is Socrates!¹³ Hackforth

¹³ See 227c.

recognizes this¹⁴ when he mentions that, “we see the lover peeping through the disguise...the true lover as conceived by Socrates and Plato” (Hackforth, 1952, pg. 40). Socrates, through the mouth of his deceptive non-lover, is recommending that the boy favour the non-lover and not the lover. By extension, the boy should not favour Socrates.¹⁵ Insofar as this interpretation is correct, it can now be seen how Socrates has turned the ludicrousness of Lysias’ thesis into a comedy. Socrates has just composed a speech in which he condemns himself, a lover, as a suitable companion. He has forgotten himself.¹⁶

But this self-forgetting serves to illustrate an important stage in Phaedrus’ movement. The comedy of Socrates’ first speech is an illustration of how forgetting oneself or failing to recognize oneself – to know oneself – can go hand-in-hand with one’s vulnerability to those who wish to dress up false speeches in fine language (234c). After all, Socrates forgets himself only as a result of his effort to maintain Lysias’ thesis, now proven false. As such, Socrates’ first speech dramatically emphasizes the dangerous self-forgetfulness that Phaedrus risks. The signpost just before Socrates’ speech consisted in an exercise, for Phaedrus, in self-recognition. Then, in playfully neglecting to recognize himself in his own speech, Socrates hopes to provoke Phaedrus to recognize this self-forgetting. Finally, if Phaedrus can recognize this, he may also, by extension, recognize Socrates’ continuing mimicry; Socrates’ playful self-forgetting mimics Phaedrus’ own self-forgetting in his overly-enthusiastic receptivity to Lysias’ rhetoric. Once Phaedrus has learned to recognize himself – that is, to know himself – he has achieved a crucial first step in engaging with a

¹⁴ Yet he fails to draw out the implications, as I will now try to do.

¹⁵ Socrates’ non-lover insults the “elderly lover” (240c) by lamenting the boy’s “extremity of discomfort...as he looks upon a face which years have robbed of its beauty...” (240d-e). Socrates explicitly refers to himself as “elderly” (227c) in the *Phaedrus*, and his notorious ugliness is acknowledged in the *Theaetetus* (143e), as well as in other extant sources (Nails, 2005).

¹⁶ I have yet to read an interpreter who notices this ironic self-forgetting of Socrates’ first speech.

polis composed of those who wish to exercise their influence through clever yet false arguments.

4.1 Transition

4.1.1 Continuing the Speech

That Socrates' speech ends rather abruptly is indicated by Phaedrus' thinking it was only "half-way" through (241d). The reason why Socrates refuses to go on to describe the virtues of the non-lover hinges on Socrates' very first observation concerning Lysias' speech. At 235a, Socrates observes that Lysias "said the same things several times over... In fact, it struck me as an extravagant performance, to demonstrate his ability to say the same thing twice, in different words but with equal success." Now, however, instead of committing this error himself, Socrates says,

I therefore tell you, in one short sentence, that to each evil for which I have abused the one party there is a corresponding good belonging to the other. So why waste words? All has been said that needs saying about them both." (241e)

So, Socrates' refusal essentially to repeat himself is another improvement upon Lysias' speech with regard to form¹, a complement at the end of the speech to his addition of a definition of love and a dramatic setting at the beginning of the speech. However, these additions proved fatal to the speech, as it forced Socrates comically to forget himself for the sake of the thesis he promised to maintain (see section 3.2). Likewise, we can see that this last improvement to Lysias' speech with regard to form, the refusal to say the same thing differently, is equally harmful to Socrates' speech. If Socrates had felt comfortable explaining the virtues of the non-lover, if, that is, it would not be a matter of repeating himself to do so, it would have been pivotal in upholding his thesis that "surrender should be to one who is not in love rather than to one who is" (227c). So far, Socrates has merely

¹ I have read no other interpreter who notices that Socrates' ending his speech this way falls into accord with his earlier criticism that Lysias repeated himself.

explained why one should not surrender to the lover; explanation of why one should prefer the non-lover is far more to the point. Furthermore, it would not have been adequate to reverse the order – to argue why the non-lover should be preferred before arguing why the lover should not. Love is defined at the beginning of the speech "so that we may have it before our minds as something to refer to while we discuss whether love is beneficial or injurious" (237c-d). So Socrates must first explain why love is injurious rather than beneficial, which involves explaining why the lover is to be avoided. Thus Socrates' refusal to explain the virtues of the non-lover, because it would involve his repeating himself as did Lysias, serves to further undermine the credibility of his comedic first speech.

4.1.2 Enthusiasm

Of course, there is yet another reason why Socrates decides not to continue the speech: he fears the impending madness of possession to which he is at risk while giving it (241e). That Socrates is clearly wary of this possibility is an indication of the danger he believes himself to be in, as is his intention to "take myself off across the river here before you drive me to greater lengths" (242a). In actuality, though, given that Socrates is continuing to mimic his friend Phaedrus, the reader realizes that Socrates himself is not in any danger; it is rather Phaedrus who is at risk of what Socrates fears. As a result, this section of the dialogue, leading up to the palinode, conveys a strong sense of urgency and is dramatically much more serious. This seriousness is thematized in Socrates' response to Phaedrus' pleas that Socrates not leave; "Let us wait and discuss what we've heard..." (242a). Socrates says, "Phaedrus, your enthusiasm for discourse is sublime, and really moves me to admiration" (242a). This "admiration" is, of course, purely ironic, for it is exactly what

Socrates feigns to admire, Phaedrus' "enthusiasm," that presents the danger of which Socrates is so wary.² It will be the palinode's function to finally break the spell of this enthusiasm for discourse; and, once broken, the discussion of "what we've heard" that Phaedrus requests can finally commence. As expected, Phaedrus reacts to Socrates' announcement of yet another speech with, "[it] might be a lot worse!" (242b); "a humorous understatement to express his delight," according to Hackforth (1952, pg. 53). His enthusiasm, the reader can see, has not subsided.

4.1.3 The Signpost

Socrates' explanation as to why he must offer the palinode foreshadows the "lesson" contained in the palinode. All of a sudden, the language here becomes noticeably more religious. First of all, Socrates explains that his *divine* sign kept him from crossing the river "until I had made atonement for some offence to heaven" (242c). Secondly, Socrates relates his belief that,

the mind itself has a kind of divining power; for I felt disturbed some while ago as I was delivering that speech, and had a misgiving lest I might, in the words of Ibycus,

By sinning in the sight of God win high renown from man. (242c-d)

Lastly, Socrates condemns the two speeches as "somewhat blasphemous" (242d) for they treated love, "a god or a divine being" (242e), as evil. "That then was their offence towards Love, to which was added the most exquisite folly of parading their pernicious rubbish as though it were good sense because it might deceive a few miserable people and win their applause" (242e-243a).

² Though commentators differ on how to interpret this crucial transition between Socrates' first speech and the palinode, none to my knowledge have read it as a continuation of the mimetic play between Socrates and Phaedrus that began before Socrates' first speech.

All these references to the gods and to blasphemy serve to foreshadow the strong theological content of the palinode. The huge mythic landscape of that forthcoming speech depicts the gods in their own domain, “the revolving heaven” from which they observe the “regions without” (247c). The souls of human beings, some of whom have caught a fleeting glimpse of these regions, are in a position to recollect “that which truly is” (249c). The specific recollection on which the palinode focuses, however, is that of true beauty (249dff.), foreshadowed by Socrates when he vows to recite his palinode “no longer veiling my head for shame, but uncovered” (243b); he can recite a speech about beauty because the sight of his beautiful companion allows for recollection. Thus it is the myth of true beauty and its proper recollection that constitutes the “lesson” that Phaedrus will learn from the palinode, and will prove decisive in breaking the spell of his enthusiasm for discourse.

However, there is a pronounced political side to this aspect of the palinode. “Renown from man” (242d) is identified as a dishonorable motive for speechwriting. Indeed, speeches motivated in this way are shown to give way to blasphemy and offence. Here we perhaps have the *Phaedrus*’ most straightforward condemnation of rhetoric for rhetoric’s sake, and *why* such rhetoric is so “terrible” (242d) is of pivotal importance for interpretation of the movement of the *Phaedrus*. The human beings of the *polis*, whom rhetoricians like Lysias hope to persuade through speech, are shown in the palinode to have only the faintest hope of even a glimpse of “that which truly is” (249c). Thus, Socrates’ quotation from Ibycus is quite appropriate; speeches written for the sake of “applause” and “renown” amount to a sin “in the sight of God” because humans have no knowledge of the standards against which speeches can be adequately judged.

It is for this reason that Phaedrus' self-knowledge has been such a crucial issue up to this point in the dialogue. Such knowledge, once achieved, can finally allow Phaedrus to recognize his all-too-human inability to judge the adequacy of the speeches he hears in the city. It is an issue, though, that takes a significant step toward resolution when Socrates asks, "Where is that boy I was talking to? He must listen to me once more, and not rush off to yield to his non-lover before he hears what I have to say" (243e). Though literally Socrates is referring to the fictional addressee of his first speech, Phaedrus clearly recognizes that he himself is the true addressee of the coming palinode when he responds, "Here he is, quite close beside you, whenever you want him" (243e). Phaedrus here, with a direct connection to Socrates' first speech, shows that he is now finally coming to know himself.

4.2 The *Phaedo* and the Palinode

4.2.1 Allusions

As we approach the palinode's beginning, there are several noticeable allusions to the *Phaedo*. To start with, Socrates characterizes Phaedrus' enthusiasm for discourse, which it will be the task of the palinode to tame, by remarking that "no one...has been responsible for more [discourses] than you...with one exception, Simmias of Thebes" (242b). "Simmias of Thebes" (*Phaedo*, 59c) is listed as one of the interlocutors of the *Phaedo*; indeed, he is one of the two *main* interlocutors (along with Cebes) and Hackforth mentions that "his determination to thrash out the subject under discussion to the bitter end is forcibly expressed" (1952, pg. 54) in that dialogue (*Phaedo*, 85c). That Simmias'

enthusiasm is at issue in the *Phaedo* suggests that the way it is dealt with there may provide a key to the way Phaedrus' similar behaviour is dealt with here.³

Next, Socrates notes that "the mind itself has a kind of divining power" (242c). Here, "mind" translates the Greek word "*psyche*" (Thompson, 1973, pg. 37), the immortality of which is precisely what is at issue in the *Phaedo*. Furthermore, Socrates' remark here foreshadows the human soul's "divine" ability to recollect "that which truly is," of which it caught a glimpse before embodiment. This mythical telling of the plight of the soul, and the ability of recollection which results from its journey, is closely tied thematically to the immortality of the soul. In fact, Socrates briefly asserts the soul's immortality before launching into the palinode. Thus, the *psyche*'s "divining power" is thematically linked with the *Phaedo*.

In this connection, that Socrates discusses the soul's immortality near the beginning of the palinode is a remarkably direct allusion to the *Phaedo* in itself. The key thing to note here, however, is that Socrates' discussion of the soul's immortality in the *Phaedrus* is different in subtle yet important ways from that in the *Phaedo*. These differences have given rise to many of the problems encountered by interpreters who wish to derive a single, coherent philosophy from Plato's dialogues. However, *that* the two proofs differ is an important interpretive detail in itself. As we will see, both "proofs" are shaped so as to be appropriate to their respective situations; their purpose is not to provide a single, coherent argument for the immortality of the soul.

Lastly, and most importantly, Socrates expresses the need to "purify" himself after his first speech. Of course, the irony of Socrates' attempts so far simply to mimic Phaedrus is

³ Rowe (1988, pg. 164) notes that "A reference to the *Phaedo* here would not be out of place, since the *Phaedo*'s main theme is the immortality of the soul, which is shortly to form the starting-point of Socrates' second speech on love," but fails fully to explore this connection, as I will try to do.

meant to show the reader that it is Phaedrus who is truly in need of purification. Yet, purification is the key thematic issue of the *Phaedo* as a whole. Socrates' dying words, "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; pay the debt and do not be careless" (*Phaedo*, 118a; translation from Madison, 2002, pg. 435), are representative of this; the cock is owed to the god of purification because those present have been purified of *misology*.⁴ Misology, hatred of argument, "is a danger that we should be on our guard against" (*Phaedo*, 89c). Socrates thus urges his companions to "take my advice...; if you think what I say is true, then accept my conclusions; if not, you must oppose me with every argument you can muster; otherwise I might lead both you and myself astray through my *enthusiasm*" (*Phaedo*, 91b-c, italics added). From there, Socrates engages in one more extended attempt to prove the immortality of the soul and, at the end, everyone seems persuaded by it.

Everyone, that is, except *Simmi*as.

4.2.2 Misuse of Language in the *Phaedo*

'I can assure you', said Simmi^as, 'that I find it as impossible as you do to feel any doubt arising from our arguments; nevertheless the great importance of the matter under discussion, together with a poor opinion of human fallibility⁵, forces me still to remain doubtful about our assertions.' (*Phaedo*, 107a-b).

Socrates responds, "You are quite right there, Simmi^as,...and I would add this: our original assumptions, acceptable as they are..., ought nevertheless to be more precisely examined" (*Phaedo*, 107b). The "assumptions" to which Socrates refers are,

the existence of a beautiful that is in and by itself, and a good, and a great, and so on with the rest of them; and if you grant me them and admit their existence, I hope they will make it possible for me to discover and expound to you the cause of the soul's immortality (*Phaedo*, 100b).

⁴ See Madison, 2002, for an extended argument for this unorthodox interpretation of Socrates' last words.

⁵ See section 4.1.3.

Thus, the soul's immortality has not actually been proven at all! Yet, this was never the purpose of the "proof;" it was, instead, meant to bring Socrates' companions back from the brink of misology. How this misology, hatred of argument, could have come about is indicated in the last scene of the dialogue. Crito asks Socrates how *he* (Socrates) is to be buried and Socrates scolds him for thinking that *he* (Socrates) is to be buried when, "...I have been maintaining this long while...that when I have drunk the poison I shall no longer be with you" (*Phaedo*, 115c-d). His point is that, "misuse of language is not only distasteful in itself, but actually harmful to the soul. So you must be of good cheer, and say that you are burying my body..." (*Phaedo*, 115e).

Plato's dialogues⁶ often center on an interlocutor's "misuse of language." They often start with a definition, which Socrates inevitably proceeds to turn inside out. In the end, the interlocutor turns out to have no idea what was meant by the definition in the first place. In this respect, the *Phaedo* is no different; its purpose is to unveil a misuse of language. When one says that *Socrates* is dead, that statement automatically entails a number of deep and extensive metaphysical assumptions about the nature of death, the nature of the soul, and what happens to soul during and after death. It is these assumptions that constitute this misuse of language and, in their place, Socrates offers a second set of metaphysical assumptions, one upon which he bases his argument for the immortality of the soul. Yet this argument is itself admittedly faulty and requires reexamination of the very assumptions Socrates introduces. And it is precisely the reluctance to reexamine, the utter lack of faith in argument, that threatens the group that is gathered to watch Socrates (or his body) die.

So why offer an argument that is admittedly faulty for the immortality of the soul? *It is precisely what is needed in order for the discussion to continue.* When misology

⁶ See *Meno*, *Euthyphro*, *Theaetetus*, and Book 1 of the *Republic* for example.

threatens to overtake them all, Socrates insists on offering this argument and challenges them to oppose him if they can. Otherwise, the argument will come “to a dead end” (*Phaedo*, 89b) and cannot be “brought back to life” (ibid.), and this is “the worst thing that can befall a man” (*Phaedo*, 89d). Socrates expresses concern to defeat those “who are quite unconcerned about the truth of any question which may come up in debate, but devote all their effort to persuading the company to adopt their own thesis” (*Phaedo*, 91a) And he urges his companions also to have this concern “out of regard for your remaining lifetime” (*Phaedo*, 90e). After all, misuse of language is “harmful to the soul” and it is the care of the soul to which Socrates refers when, dying, he says “do not be careless.”

4.2.3 Misuse of Language in the *Phaedrus*

That Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, is concerned to defeat those who, unconcerned with truth, engage in persuasion provides the obvious link to the *Phaedrus*. So far, Lysias has been characterized as just this sort of person; his speech was in no way formed in order to best express the truth (lacking, as it did, a definition of love and insisting on repeating itself) and we already know that he is a sophist, a rhetorician, a speechwriter who aims merely to be clever. Lysias, we can see, is clearly unconcerned about the truth.

Yet, *so is Socrates*. Near the very beginning of the *Phaedrus*, when Phaedrus asks Socrates whether he believes the myth of Boreas to be true, Socrates responds that he is not concerned with the truth of myths but instead explores how they make him better able to know himself (229c-230a; see section 2.1.4). Indeed, in the *Phaedo* passage (91a) above where Socrates expresses concern to defeat those unconcerned with truth, he prefaces his concern by saying, “very possibly it is not a love of wisdom that I am showing on this

present issue...” (*Phaedo*, 91a). The urgency of Socrates’ impending death forces him to neglect “love of wisdom” for the sake of his companions, who are in very real danger. However, in the *Phaedrus*, though the seriousness of Phaedrus’ leaving the city is as pronounced as ever, the urgency is not so. The two are taking a leisurely walk outside the city and Socrates is in no hurry to direct his friend back in; on the contrary, Socrates does *not* want Phaedrus to re-enter the city until he is fully capable of dealing with those, like Lysias, who threaten to take advantage of his enthusiasm for discourse.

Thus, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates can take a much more confident and prolonged philosophical stance in dealing with his endangered companion. In so doing, and in virtue of their close friendship, Socrates can disclose his lack of concern for the truth of myths to Phaedrus. Indeed, Socrates finds it *necessary* to express this to Phaedrus; Socrates is less concerned with truth than with the extent to which he knows himself and it is Phaedrus’ self-knowledge that is precisely at issue in the first half of the *Phaedrus*. Furthermore, even though Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, expresses distaste for those who wish to persuade others of their own thesis, he nevertheless, in the *Phaedrus*, is concerned through the palinode to persuade Phaedrus of what he is saying. Yet we must stop and consider the implications of these two aspects of Socrates’ character (lack of concern for truth and willingness to persuade) in this dialogue. Even though, if he is persuaded by Socrates’ palinode, Phaedrus will come to believe and hold as true those things expressed in the palinode, Phaedrus has *also* been shown by Socrates *not* to be concerned with the truth of myths. If Phaedrus is persuaded by the palinode, it will not be of its “truth;” it will be of some other aspect. Indeed, that Phaedrus is not fully convinced of the truth of the palinode is evidenced by his first remark once it is finished: “*If that be our good, Socrates, I join in your prayer for it*”

(257b, italics added. See section 5.1.1). Firstly, Phaedrus' "if" shows that he harbors some doubts about whether the palinode does indeed express the truth. Secondly, though, and more importantly, that Phaedrus proceeds *not* to discuss the palinode and the preceding speeches (as he expressed his wish to do at 242a) but to discuss the principles of speechwriting itself shows that he is indeed unconcerned with the palinode's literal truth.⁷

In the *Phaedo*, the arguments Socrates puts forward for the immortality of the soul were meant to purify his companions of their impending misology and allow the discussion to continue. Similarly, the palinode in the *Phaedrus* serves to purify Phaedrus of the opposite of misology; *enthusiasm* for discourse.⁸ Significantly, both misology and enthusiasm for discourse, though they are opposites, spring from the same source: misuse of language. Phaedrus' misuse of language is constituted by his inability to examine the arguments he hears. He simply sits in awe of the cleverness of it all and seems to be convinced of the truth of such arguments on that basis alone. In other words, Phaedrus' misuse of language resides in the fact that he gives it too much credit; fine language is taken for granted as the criterion for truth, and his own judgment of the fineness of a discourse is sufficient. But, as Socrates demonstrates in the palinode, the "renown of man" should be of no consequence in evaluating the truth of arguments. Human beings who know themselves know that they know nothing; they are no standard by which to judge the truth of arguments. The sooner Phaedrus recognizes this, the sooner he can more adequately deal with the sophists and speechwriters of the city.

⁷ I have yet to find a similar exploration of the implication of Socrates' attitude toward myths (229c-230a) on possible readings of the palinode.

⁸ Though several commentators, such as White (1993, pgs. 55-57), Hackforth (1952, pg. 54), and Rowe (see note 3, pg. 38, above) notice the allusions and connections to the *Phaedo* throughout this section of the *Phaedrus*, none that I have read come to these conclusions about the nature and extent of the link between these two dialogues.

5.1 Transition

5.1.1 Phaedrus' Reaction

With the completion of the palinode, Socrates has broken the spell that had gripped Phaedrus up to this moment: enthusiasm for rhetoric. This is evidenced by two things that Phaedrus says right away as Socrates finishes. His first comment upon completion of the palinode's finishing prayer is, "If that be for our good, Socrates, I join in your prayer for it." That Phaedrus is not entirely convinced by the speech he has just heard, that he is not persuaded by it, is apparent given his non-committal "if," which contrasts sharply with the enthusiasm that had previously gripped him after reading Lysias' speech and hearing Socrates' first speech. Also, given the immense beauty and power of the palinode, Phaedrus' reluctance to compliment it as liberally as he did the previous speeches is especially surprising.¹ Thus, Phaedrus is no longer susceptible to the clever rhetoric of speech-writers.

Secondly, Phaedrus' comment that "I shall find Lysias cutting a poor figure, if he proves to be willing to compete with another speech of his own," is but further evidence that Phaedrus is no longer a lover of speeches. After Phaedrus read Lysias' speech, Socrates remarked at Phaedrus' "apparent delight in the words you read" (234d). Now, however, after listening to Socrates' palinode, Phaedrus expresses doubt as to whether Lysias can compete. Thus, through his palinode, Socrates has broken the spell which Lysias' "terrible" (242d) speech had on Phaedrus.

¹ Griswold describes Phaedrus' reaction to the palinode as "abysmally poor" (2002, pg. 97), but such a description fails fully to explore the thematic issues surrounding that reaction, as I will try to do.

Yet, something else has changed as the palinode ends. Indeed, Hackforth notices a “lowering of emotional tone” (1952, pg. 116); as does Griswold, who comments on the “sudden shift in style and tone here, as well [as] a turn to questions of method and techne [sic] from questions about eros [sic]...” (1996, pg. 159). Phaedrus now introduces a topic of discussion noticeably sober in comparison to what has so far been at issue. As we will see, the enthusiasm for speeches about love that Phaedrus previously exuded has been replaced by a rather cold interest in the technicalities of speech-making. The sudden change of tone is noteworthy for dramatic reasons and Plato is accentuating it here for a distinct purpose. Love, which has been at issue from the beginning of this dialogue, will become more and more noticeably absent from the discussion about to commence.

5.1.2 Said and Done

Phaedrus next (257c) recalls that a politician was recently “railing at [Lysias] and reproaching him..., constantly dubbing him a ‘speech-writer’; so possibly we shall find him desisting from further composition to preserve his reputation” (257c). Socrates insists, instead, that perhaps the politician did not mean this as a reproach. Curiously, Socrates compares Phaedrus’ lack of understanding of the relation between politics and speech-writing to his lack of understanding of the phrase “Pleasant Bend,” which “comes from the long bend of the Nile” (257d-e). However, Nehamas and Woodruff note that this phrase is “a familiar example of something named by language that means the opposite – though called “pleasant” it was really a long, nasty bend” (1995, pg. 49, n. 124).

Socrates wishes to draw Phaedrus’ attention to how language can be used to say one thing but mean something completely different. Needless to say, it would not be obvious to

whoever heard the phrase “Pleasant Bend” that the bend was, in reality, quite unpleasant. “[P]eople sometimes mean just the opposite of what they say. That, suggests Socrates, is the case with Phaedrus’s [sic] abusive politician” (Hackforth, 1952, pg. 114). Upon the ensuing examination, it appears that no politician would reproach someone for writing speeches, since, in reality, politicians often place great weight on the speeches they write (258a-c).

However, there is another dimension to this exchange between Socrates and Phaedrus. The politicians *do* mean what they say about Lysias as a reproach, but Socrates suggests that this cannot be the case, since politicians often do exactly what they are accusing Lysias of doing. As a result, Socrates is pointing to the difference between what is said and what is done. Language can be misused and, thus, misleading; one must look beyond it in order to derive some meaning from it. Looking beyond it, of course, means judging whether and how it loses its meaning. In a few moments, Socrates will point to how “contending with words is a practice...which enables people to make out everything to be like everything else...” (261d-e). So, describing a nasty bend as “pleasant” means imposing synonymy between nastiness and pleasure, and doing so prevents a listener from deriving meaning, since “nasty” and “pleasant” are antonyms. However, a listener who attends to what is *not* said as much to what is *said* (see section 1.1) will undoubtedly recognize the sarcastic irony of calling a nasty bend “pleasant.” Similarly, a listener who hears a politician harass a rhetorician for speech-writing will clearly recognize the irony once he or she looks beyond the politician’s words. Once the politician is shown to be as much a speech-writer as the rhetorician, the listener will comprehend the irony (even if the politician does not!).

Plato is here foreshadowing the irony of the discussion of rhetoric and dialectic that will soon commence.² The irony will take a similar form to that involved in calling a nasty bend “pleasant,” or in a speech-writing politician’s accusing someone of speech-writing; namely, there will be a difference between what is said and what is done. In order to derive meaning from the discussion of rhetoric and dialectic that constitutes the *Phaedrus*’ second half, we must look beyond what is explicitly said within that discussion. We will have to inspect whether what is enacted in that discussion differs irreconcilably from the discussion itself.

5.1.3 The Myth of the Cicadas

The discussion, however, is preceded by a myth, told by Socrates, which foreshadows the key issues of the subsequent discussion. This, the myth of the cicadas, constitutes the final signpost of the dialogue.

The story is that once upon a time these creatures were men...of an age before there were any Muses: and that when the latter came into the world, and music made its appearance, some of the people of those days were so thrilled with pleasure that they went on singing...until they actually died without noticing it. From them in due course sprang the race of cicadas, to which the Muses have granted the boon...of singing from the very first,...until the day of their death: after which they go and report to the Muses how they severally are paid honour amongst mankind, and by whom... To the eldest, Calliope, and to...Urania, they tell of those who live a life of philosophy and so do honour to the music of those...whose song is the noblest [*kallisten*] of them all. (259b-d)

Socrates also remarks that,

[T]he cicadas overhead, singing after their wont in the hot sun and conversing with one another, don’t fail to observe us... So if they were to see us two behaving like ordinary folk at midday, not conversing but dozing lazy-minded under their spell, they would very properly have the laugh of us... If however

² To my knowledge, no other commentator has so interpreted this discussion of the politician’s reproach of Lysias.

they see us conversing and steering clear of their bewitching siren-song, they might feel respect for us... (258e-259b)

This myth of the cicadas serves to collect and highlight the issues of the palinode that will be operative in the ensuing discussion.

There is accentuated within this myth a sense of need. The fate of the cicada-men is not to be desired; why else would Socrates characterize his conversation with Phaedrus as “steering clear of their bewitching siren-song”? The prescription for so steering-clear is something that would not be possible if the two discussants were not both present to so converse; that is, Socrates and Phaedrus can avoid the lull of the cicadas’ song only by engaging in something that necessarily involves both of them: conversation. Indeed, conversation requires more than just the involvement of each of them; it requires an involvement characterized by *direct engagement* with each other. Without the possibility of such engagement, the two would almost certainly succumb to a deadly sleep.

On that note, it is worth pointing out that Socrates here indicates that he and Phaedrus are equally susceptible to the singing cicadas. The irony in the first half of the dialogue that signaled Socrates’ comic mimicking of Phaedrus is no longer present. There, Socrates attributed qualities such as enthusiasm for rhetoric, which were obviously Phaedrus’, to himself; here, however, he is referring to the situation in which they *both* find themselves: in need of each other if they are to avoid the lulling song of the cicadas. In addition, the deadly seriousness of the myth impedes a reader’s possible interpretation of it as comic. The danger that has been hiding in the drama of the *Phaedrus* up to now is tensely felt here. Socrates and Phaedrus are both depicted as at serious risk if they do not engage each other in conversation. But what is the risk they run?

While Hackforth's translation of the myth of the cicadas contains the word "noblest," the Greek word is actually "*kallisten*" (Thompson, 1973), which is derived from the Greek for "beauty."³ The palinode describes the moment in the soul of a lover when he encounters his beloved:

At that sight the [chariot] driver's memory goes back to [the] form of Beauty...
[Then] in awe and reverence he falls upon his back, and therewith is compelled
to pull the reins so violently that he brings both steeds down on their haunches.
[The bad horse], contriving to recover his wind after the pain of the bit and his
fall, bursts into angry abuse... (254b-c)

However, "if the victory be won by the higher elements of mind guiding them [i.e. lover and beloved] into the ordered rule of the philosophic life, their days on earth will be blessed with happiness and concord...: they have won self-mastery..." (256a-b). Finally, the palinode concludes by assuring us that such a pair are the dearest of friends (256c).

The most beautiful [*kallisten*] song is sung by the cicadas who report, to the muse of philosophy, "those who live a life of philosophy" (259d), the life that the palinode describes as "blessed with happiness and concord" (256b). Yet beauty has already been depicted as ultimately dangerous, as leading to an enthusiastic thrill that can turn deadly. The key to this dilemma is contained in the palinode, where we are told that a philosophical life between friends achieves victory over the bad horse's overenthusiastic reaction to the recollection of beauty (256c). A philosophical interaction between friends, an interaction through conversation as Socrates prescribes, constitutes a recollection of beauty guided "by the higher elements of mind (256a). An undisciplined reaction to such a recollection, one

³ Rowe (1988) translates *kallisten* as "most beautiful."

that becomes so enamoured with the beautiful as to attempt to engage it directly, can have deadly consequences.⁴

Friendship is the key to self-mastery. This conclusion of the palinode makes explicit what has been enacted all through the first half of the *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates has led Phaedrus to self-knowledge in virtue of their friendship. As the *Phaedrus* began, the friendship was at serious risk; Phaedrus' enthusiasm for beautiful rhetoric blinded him to his friend's efforts to act as guide back to the city. However, the myth of the cicadas makes no explicit mention of friendship, even though friendship is clearly the key to avoiding the dangers that that myth describes. This myth, then, is the final signpost of the dialogue; but it is not a signpost erected by Socrates for Phaedrus' benefit. Rather, it is erected by Plato for the reader's benefit. As we will see, the myth of the cicadas brilliantly foreshadows everything that goes wrong in the second half of the *Phaedrus*.⁵ For, as the discussion progresses, Socrates will himself display an enthusiasm, in the midst of which he neglects his friendship, that puts into serious question his own degree of self-mastery.⁶

⁴ The palinode depicts the human soul as "confounded by her steeds" such that "she has much ado to discern the things that are...and by reason of her unruly steeds sees in part, but in part sees not" (248a). It is fitting, then, that since the human soul is not allowed more than a fleeting glimpse of true beauty the living human being risks his or her life in trying to directly engage earthly beauty.

⁵ Hackforth offers several interpretations of the myth pertaining to its role in the dramatic development in the *Phaedrus*. That it provides "a temporary relaxation of the reader's mind by means of a charming little myth" (1955, pg. 118) is, I feel, entirely mistaken. If anything, the myth of the cicadas, the last signpost, requires a *great deal* of strict attention. However, another of Hackforth's suggestions, that the myth "[appeals], under cover of a warning by Socrates to Phaedrus and himself against lazy-mindedness, for a renewal (or continuance) of the reader's attention" (ibid.) is much more fitting. In thus drawing the reader into the discussion, Plato highlights an aspect of his writing that will soon be at issue in the dialogue itself.

⁶ That Socrates, in the second half of the *Phaedrus*, may lack the heroism interpreters usually attribute to his character in all of Plato's dialogues, was suggested to me by Dr. James Bradley.

5.2 The Discussion

5.2.1 The Politics of Speaking and Writing

The issue Socrates and Phaedrus mean to discuss is “the nature of good and bad speaking and writing” (259e). When asked whether “a good and successful discourse presupposes a knowledge in the mind of the speaker of the truth of his subject” (ibid.), Phaedrus responds that a speaker only needs to know what will be thought true by his or her listeners; it is on this “that persuasion depends” (260a). Phaedrus’ remark about persuasion and about the necessity of the speaker’s knowledge of truth provokes Socrates to present an argument that is perhaps Plato’s strongest hint about the danger inherent in susceptibility to clever rhetoric. Comically, Socrates hypothetically proposes that, while not knowing what a horse was but knowing that Phaedrus thinks a horse is that which fits the description of a donkey, he try to persuade Phaedrus to acquire the “horse” and to use it for carrying equipment and riding on into battle. When Phaedrus repeatedly refers to such a proposal as “ridiculous” (260b-c), Socrates asks, “Well, isn’t it better to be a ridiculous friend than a clever enemy?” (260c). Though at first glance this may seem like just another instance of ironic self-deprecation on Socrates’ part, it is more than that; Plato is showing his hand here in order to foreshadow what is coming. What will make Socrates a ridiculous friend is his forgetting of friendship altogether.⁷ Though here the ridiculousness of this situation reminds the reader of the intentional self-forgetting that constituted the comedy of Socrates’ first speech, the absence of friendship in the discussion as it progresses will grow more and more serious.

⁷ No other interpreter with whom I am familiar has noticed this meaning of Socrates’ description of himself as a “ridiculous friend” within the wider context of the second half of the dialogue.

Socrates' next question is a succinct expression of the danger that has so far threatened Phaedrus, and has provoked the entire dialogue.

...[When] a master of oratory, who is ignorant of good and evil, employs his power of persuasion on a community (*polin*⁸) as ignorant as himself, not by extolling a miserable donkey as being really a horse, but by extolling evil as being really good: and when by studying the beliefs of the masses he persuades them to do evil instead of good, what kind of crop do you think his oratory is likely to reap from the seed thus sown? (260c-d)

The political implications of this question are undeniable and it is perhaps the most explicit expression of the political dimension of the dialogue.⁹ Politics, in fact, remains at issue as Socrates and Phaedrus proceed to investigate speaking and writing as they occur in "public affairs or private, whether in the verse of the poet or the plain speech of prose" (258d).

Socrates' first question to Phaedrus on this topic is,

Must not the art of rhetoric, taken as a whole, be a kind of influencing of the mind by means of words, not only in courts of law and other public gatherings, but in private places also? And must it not be the same art that is concerned with great issues and small, its right employment commanding no more respect when dealing with important matters than with unimportant? (261a)

Thus Socrates' first priority is considerably to widen the arena in which rhetoric *as* rhetoric, and writing *as* writing, can be said to take place. Phaedrus is reluctant, insisting that these only take place in lawsuits and public speeches (261b). That Socrates subsequently (261bff.) spends a little time convincing Phaedrus otherwise reflects what Plato wants to do here. As we will soon see, speaking and writing have strong political associations. In widening the application of the terms "rhetoric" and "writing," Plato is

⁸ Both Rowe (1988) and Nehamas and Woodruff (1995) translate *polin* as "city."

⁹ Hackforth observes that "behind the immediate subject of discussion Plato has in his mind what is seldom long absent from it, namely contemporary public morality, good and evil, justice and injustice in the [*polis*]" (1952, pg. 122). I could not agree more with this comment, though I would add that it applies to the entire dialogue, if not all of Plato's work. Hackforth's further comment, "but this line of thought is not here pursued" (*ibid.*), shows, I think, a lack of depth in Hackforth's reading. Here he is correct with regard to the explicit discussion, but the underlying theme is as political as Plato gets.

simultaneously widening the reader's conception of politics. Indeed, we have seen all through the *Phaedrus*¹⁰ that the city itself constitutes the political background of the journey the two friends are taking outside its walls. It is not just the politicians and lawyers that engage in politics; it is *everyone* in the city *in virtue* of their living in a city, i.e. insofar as those living in the city are forced to encounter and engage in conversation with other people. "...[Contending] with words is a practice found not only in lawsuits and public harangues but, it seems, wherever men speak..." (261d-e). Thus Plato "prompts us to rethink what we construe as 'political', and to reconsider our implication in its life via the various kinds of discourse that constitute the *polis*" (Scott, 2005, pg. 204).

5.2.2 Collection and Division

Socrates asks if we are misled "when the difference between two things is wide, or narrow" (261e). Together, Socrates and Phaedrus reach the conclusion that "the art of speech displayed by one who has gone chasing after beliefs, instead of knowing the truth" (262c) will be "comical," since such a person would themselves have no knowledge of the distinctions between things and so would have no ability cleverly to confuse such distinctions for the purposes of persuasion. Thus someone who had obtained such knowledge, and hence such ability, could make use of

a certain pair of procedures... The first is that in which we bring a dispersed plurality under a single form, seeing it all together: the purpose being to define so-and-so, and thus to make plain whatever may be chosen as the topic for exposition. (265d)

The second procedure is "the reverse of the other, whereby we are enabled to divide into forms, following the objective articulation..." (265e). Socrates asserts that anybody "able

¹⁰ And also in the *Republic* and the *Apology*.

to discern an objective unity and plurality...I call [a dialectician].” A little later on, the procedure is again given articulation:

...anyone...who seriously proffers a scientific rhetoric, will, in the first place, describe the soul very precisely... [Secondly] he will describe what natural capacity it has to act upon what, and through what means, or by what it can be acted upon... Thirdly, he will classify types of discourse and the types of soul, and the various ways in which souls are affected,...suggesting the type of speech appropriate to each type of soul... (271a-b)

And, once more, at 273d-e:

unless the aspirant to oratory can on the one hand list the various natures amongst his prospective audiences, and on the other divide things into their kinds and embrace each individual thing under a single form, he will never attain such success as is within the grasp of mankind.

Quite a lot of time is given to laying out the specifics of this procedure. It is obvious that Plato wishes to call the reader’s attention to it and, furthermore, he wants to emphasize that this procedure deserves such careful attention as is recommended in the myth of the cicadas. Many scholars have indeed given careful attention to the method of collection and division and have taken it as one of the fundamental tenets of Platonic thought. Indeed, for Plato the method is essential.¹¹ But its presence in the *Phaedrus* plays a role more dramatic than philosophical.

5.2.3 Absence of Friendship

At 271c, Socrates rejects anyone’s claim, “to write scientifically until they compose their speeches and writings in the way we have indicated.” When Phaedrus inquires as to what specific way has been indicated, Socrates avoids answering it: “To give the actual words would be troublesome; but I am quite ready to say how one ought to compose if he means

¹¹ The method is given further consideration, though in different contexts, in the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the *Philebus*.

to be as scientific as possible” (ibid.). From there, as Hackforth notes, Socrates “further [elucidates] the theory of oratory which he has already adumbrated” (1952, pg. 148, n.2). That Socrates chooses to repeat himself rather than give an example of the dialectical method he has so far described is meant to make the reader suspicious: why would Socrates refuse to describe as exhaustively as possible such an important method? A little further on, after asking “whether the delivery and composition of speeches is honourable or base” (277d), Socrates answers himself by saying, “our earlier conclusions have, I think, shown-” (ibid.). Here Phaedrus interrupts: “Which conclusions?” (ibid.). However, “Socrates continues his sentence as though there had been no interruption” (Hackforth, 1955, pg. 161, n.2): “They have shown that...” (277d).

In this instance, Socrates appears to be engaging in a conversation with himself and, to make matters worse, does not even *acknowledge* Phaedrus’ interruption. Here, in the climactic moment of the dialogue, it is made clear to the reader exactly what has happened: Socrates has been overcome with *enthusiasm*; namely, enthusiasm for the method he is now ranting incessantly about. The reader may recall that, during the myth of the cicadas, Socrates insisted on conversation, as that was the only safeguard against submission to the lulling song of the cicadas (259a-b; see section 5.1.3). In that myth, it was suggested that those involved in conversation would be reported with favour, by the cicadas, to the muse of philosophy (259c). Socrates, in ignoring his friend (and also his friendship), has strayed from conversation and, thus, from philosophy.

We must stop and consider the multiple dimensions of this moment.

The topic of conversation thus far has been philosophy. The method of collection and division, which Socrates has been describing through most of the discussion, is the method

of the lover of wisdom (278d). However, any mention of “love,” the locus of discussion in the first half of the dialogue, is conspicuously absent. The last discussion of love in the dialogue occurred in the palinode where the most philosophical form of love was identified as friendship (256c). All through the dialogue, right up until the myth of the cicadas, friendship has been portrayed as the condition of the possibility of the conversational interaction of Socrates and Phaedrus. Thus, in the second half of the dialogue, ignoring friendship in the explicit discussion suggests an irony foreshadowed by the discussion of the “pleasant bend” (257d-e; see section 5.1.2). Socrates’ exposition of the dialectical method fails to meet the essential requirements of that method: the real dialogical interchange that can take place between friends. The irony here unites the dialogue in that what was explicitly present in the first half of the dialogue is explicitly absent in the second half of the dialogue. Yet, explicit discussion aside, “love,” specifically the philosophical love known as friendship, has been non-verbally present throughout the dialogue and is present here in that it is *conspicuous* in its absence.

But there is more: at the crucial climactic moment of the dialogue, the irony collapses. The tension reaches the breaking point when Socrates, in ignoring his co-discussant and thus exposing himself to enthusiasm, ignores friendship in what he says *as well as* what he does. We must recall that the entire first half of the *Phaedrus* is shaped by Socrates’ efforts to guide Phaedrus to self-knowledge so he may safely re-enter the city. Recall also that the palinode refers to friendship, the most philosophical form of love, as “self-mastery” (256b). Socrates, in here posing a risk to his friendship, exposes his own need for self-knowledge (230a) and, by extension, his own need for preparation before re-entering the city.

An additional dimension to this moment, and perhaps the most crucial one, is the topic of the discussion during which the climax takes place. Socrates has just spent some time explaining why writing is inferior to speaking. His pursuit of, and obvious enthusiasm for, the philosophical method of dialectic has led him to exclude writing as a worthwhile endeavour. The ultimate irony here, noticed by dozens of commentators but never, to my knowledge, fully analyzed, is that Socrates' own spoken criticisms of writing lack all the dialogical interchange for which he criticizes writing. Writings, when spoken to, do not answer (275d); neither, apparently, does an enthusiastic Socrates when Phaedrus asks some important clarifying questions. Socrates' ridiculousness has reached the point where he is doing exactly what he condemns.

It is here, however, that the *Phaedrus* further compounds the irony of its climactic moment by pointing directly at its author and, in so doing, decisively pointing past the text. Given that Socrates throughout the second half of the dialogue has been falling victim more and more to a genuine self-forgetting, we can interpret his criticism of writing as Plato *himself* pointing to Socrates' inability adequately to interact with the citizens of the city so long as he retains his enthusiasm. Yet this point is not explicitly written in some discourse or speech; rather, it is *enacted* all through the *dramatic* dimension of the dialogue. The *Phaedrus* highlights Plato's attempts to write *dialectically*, and, in doing so, he has decisively surpassed Socrates' criticisms of writing. In fact, this feature of Plato's writing proves more engaging than is Socrates at this climactic moment. As we about to see, the dialogue ends on a note of uncertainty, of *aporia* (as do all of Plato's dialogues); in so doing, the *Phaedrus* urges its reader's interaction and close attention to the text. In other

words, the reader of the *Phaedrus* must engage it as one might engage a friend in conversation.

5.3 The End

And so the *Phaedrus* ends, moments after a climactic tension that is not resolved. The reader is meant to take this tension with him or her as (s)he leaves the dialogue. However, Plato gives the reader one more nudge, a hint about the true concerns of the *Phaedrus*. After Socrates offers a prayer to the gods of the place they have occupied nearly all through the dialogue, Phaedrus requests that he, “Make it a prayer for me too, since friends have all things in common” (279c). Phaedrus’ acknowledgement of friendship, and particularly of *this* friendship between Socrates and Phaedrus, is an indication that he has at least begun to catch on to what has been happening all around him since he left the city. With this comment, it has become apparent that Phaedrus is engaged in a healthy movement back toward the city. Indeed, Socrates replies “Let us be going” (ibid.). As Phaedrus’ mention of friendship serves to thematize what has been enacted, from start to finish, throughout the dialogue, so does Socrates’ response indicate that the friendship shared by Socrates and Phaedrus has provoked and sustained their movement through the entire discussion (see section 2.1.2). And again, here at the end of the dialogue, the two friends continue their movement, and that they do so immediately after an explicit acknowledgement of their friendship is far from insignificant.

Yet the dialogue ends as the two remain outside the city. This is most significant, and it is a feature that does not even become fully apparent until after the reader has finished the dialogue. Only after all the words have been read can the reader fully grasp that the

dialogue has ended before a safe re-entry into Athens. Socrates simply says “Let us be going” and the dialogue is over. This is Plato’s strongest hint that the issues are far from resolved. The *Phaedrus* began inside the city, but the two friends have not yet made it all the way back when it ends. The political side of this dialogue has never been more pronounced; that the two men do not make it back inside the city walls before the end of the *Phaedrus* is a strong indication that the issues presented all through the dialogue need further consideration and discussion before re-entry can be possible.

The *Phaedrus*’ political dimension stems from that fact that all through it the *polis* is simultaneously present and absent; though it has been largely absent from the explicit content of the dialogue, it has been unquestionably present in the dramatic elements that frame the dialogue. Furthermore, especially at the end, the city is conspicuously absent; for the reader is left wondering whether the two friends make it back inside its walls.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

A reading of Plato's *Phaedrus* that takes into account all of its literary aspects reveals elements of the work that are not identifiable in the explicit discussion that constitutes the dialogue. I have shown that Plato takes great pains to integrate the setting, the choice of words, the characters and their actions, and even himself as author, in order to point to issues that lie outside the text itself. Specifically, these aspects add a distinctively political dimension to the dialogue. All through it the city lies in the background; its walls loom behind the characters, who are engaged in a sustained effort to prepare themselves to return to the city. This preparation itself, as the dialogue makes clear, is only possible insofar as friendship is present between the two characters. As soon as this friendship is forgotten, the friends risk never being able adequately to engage with each other and so with those in the city. The city, the *polis*, is only such insofar as its citizens interact with one another; without that interaction the *polis* ceases to exist. Thus, a citizen who neglects to acknowledge and embrace his or her need for the other citizens of the city, and to realize that that need is the condition of the possibility of the city, is in a bad way politically. Friendship, insofar as it entails the acknowledgement of need, is necessarily political.

My reading of the *Phaedrus* is of course a limited one; these limits, in fact, are self-imposed by my examining primarily the literary aspects of the dialogue. No great work of literature is done justice to by a single reading. Thus, I cannot present my reading as final or decisive.

Yet, at least in respect of the *Phaedrus*, I do hope to have *shown* what is so often merely *said* of Plato: that in his work literary form and philosophical content are inseparable.

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