THE ARGUMENT AND STRUCTURE OF PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS*[1]

The *Phaedrus* falls by design into two distinct movements. The first movement includes three set speeches, one a written speech which claims to be by Lysias, the other two given *impromptu* by Socrates; the second then uses these speeches as the basis for a general discussion of rhetoric and of the value of writing as a medium of communication and teaching. Whatever else we may want to say about the structure of the dialogue, this much is clear enough. But there is a problem. So powerful is the impact of Socrates' second speech, with its eloquent account of divine love and the peregrinations of the immortal soul, that everything which follows it is likely to appear to any ordinary reader as mostly dull and insignificant by comparison. If Socrates suggests, as he does at 265c-d, that the only fully serious aspect of the speech was as a demonstration of the method of collection and division, the rest being 'really playfully done, by way of amusement', that looks merely disingenuous; for it is hard not to feel, with Ficino, that it is in this main speech of Socrates the 'principal mysteries' of the *Phaedrus* are contained.[2] Yet if this is so, the dialogue is intolerably misshapen. At the end of their discussion of Lysias' written λόγος, Socrates and Phaedrus agree on the principle that 'every λόγος should be put together like a living creature, as it were with a body of its own, so as not to lack either a head or feet, but to have both middle parts and extremities, so written as to fit both each other and the whole' (264c). If we accept Ficino's view, the *Phaedrus* seems to be in an even worse case than Lysias' *Eroticus*: instead of having no head, it will have two – a large one consisting in Socrates' speech, and a much smaller one, consisting in the final conclusions about speaking and writing.

The problem is essentially one of *scale*. Socrates' second speech takes up nearly a quarter of the total length of the *Phaedrus*, and only a tiny proportion of it is relevant to the methodological lesson which will later explicitly be drawn from it.[3] Indeed, Socrates has to work hard to extract that lesson from it at all.[4] In its original context, the speech presents a long and colourful version of Platonic themes, many of them familiar from dialogues like the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, and the *Symposium*; and none of these plays any obvious role in the second half of the dialogue, which for the most part considers only the form of the three speeches in the first half, not their content. But whereas the other two speeches in the series – Lysias', and Socrates' first – are well adapted to the role of rhetorical examples, this third speech seems altogether too large for it. Why, we may object, should

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Plato have bothered to assemble so rich a stock of ideas, and at such length, only then to make Socrates ignore it in favour of a point about method which at the time was scarcely visible to the naked eye? Granted, the speech connects clearly enough with what precedes it. It purports to represent a passionate recantation by Socrates of his attack on love in his first speech: having argued there for Lysias' thesis, that a boy should grant sexual favours to someone who is not in love with him rather than to someone who is, he now repents, and sets out to show that if it is of the right kind, love in fact brings the greatest benefit to both lover and beloved. This reversal is hardly unexpected – Socrates, of all people, could not plausibly be left in the position of opposing love.[5] But his first speech, and Lysias' piece, were both openly introduced from the beginning as illustrations of method (or, in Lysias' case, of the lack of it), and so contribute directly to the treatment of rhetoric in the second half. His new speech, on the other hand, looks more like an exposition of substantive ideas for their own sake; ideas which are not only not reflected in the ensuing discussion, but which actually seem to eclipse its results. Of course, this speech too does still function as an example of rhetorical excellence, in so far as it is the final outcome of Socrates' original agreement with Phaedrus to enter the lists against Lysias' speech. But that in a way only serves to make matters worse. Having put together so outstanding a performance (and even Phaedrus is impressed), why does Socrates then apparently proceed to ignore, and actually downplay, all those features which give it its power?

Thus on what may be labelled the traditional reading of the *Phaedrus* Socrates' second speech seems largely to stand outside the overt structure of the remainder of the dialogue.[6] We may in principle be tempted to explain this state of affairs in terms of simple negligence on Plato's part, or, more sympathetically, as a symptom of an unresolved tension between the poetic and the soberly analytical sides of his nature: the first being expressed in the lyrical excursus on love, the second in an official treatment of rhetoric which argues for an altogether more ascetic view of its requirements. But explanations of this kind should plainly be a last resort, especially in the case of a work which makes unity a *sine qua non* of excellence in written compositions. It would be churlish not to ask first whether there is any way of interpreting the strategy of the *Phaedrus* which provides for the proper integration of Socrates' second speech into the structure of the whole. Such an interpretation is in my view available for the asking. Its main outlines, I shall suggest, are already contained in the short but excellent introduction to Thompson's edition of the *Phaedrus*, published in 1868,[7] which confronts the issues I have outlined more successfully than anything which has been written on the dialogue since. Many modern scholars simply choose to ignore these issues, and content themselves with considering particular segments of the dialogue in isolation, with often fatal results for their conclusions;[8] and those few who have attempted to do justice to the complete work have done so with considerably less

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clarity than Thompson.[9] One of the aims of this paper will be to confirm and amplify his central insights, although I shall also introduce some important modifications, and my final results will be rather more ambitious than his – if not at ambitious as those of some others.

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The key point of Thompson's interpretation is that Socrates' second speech is to be understood as an example of the kind of oratory which is described in the *Politicus*: 'that part of oratory which persuades people of what is right, and so helps to guide behaviour in cities in partnership with the art of kingship', and which 'persuades the mass of the people, the crowd, through μυθολογία rather than teaching'.[10] Thompson discovers this general conception of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* by combining two passages: 276e, where he claims that Phaedrus 'describes the office of eloquence, as τὸ δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἄλλων ὧν λέγεις πέρι μυθολογεῖν',[11] and 270b, where Socrates talks of the orator as 'passing on to the soul whatever virtuous conviction you wish (πειθὼ ἣν ἂν βούληι καὶ ἀρετήν) by applying words (or 'speeches', λόγοι) and practices in accordance with law and custom (ἐπιτηδεύσεις νομίμους)'. This rhetoric, as understood by the *Politicus* and the *Phaedrus*, 'was to be the handmaid at once of Philosophy and Political, or what in the ancient view was the same thing, of Ethical Science'.[12] It thus has two essential features, firstly that it is *philosophical*, and based on a knowledge of the methods of dialectic, and secondly that it persuades its audience by means of μυθολογεῖν. Both features are found in Socrates' second speech (so Thompson's argument continues), in so far as it 'commences with a definition framed on dialectical principles', and is also '"a mythical discourse touching Justice and other topics of Socratic discourse"', which is how Thompson understands the clause at 276e:

> 'It relates to Justice: for that virtue, according to the Platonic Socrates, consists in the due subordination of the lower appetites to the Reason, aided, not thwarted, by the impulsive or irascible principle; and this subordination is figured by the charioteer holding well in hand the restive steed, while he gives the rein to his nobler and upward-striving yoke-fellow. It may also be justly said to embrace the other customary topics of Socratic discourse; for we recognise, under but thin disguises, all the peculiarities of the Platonic psychology: the immortality, antecedent and prospective, of the soul, its self-moving or self-determining properties ..., its heavenly extraction, its incarceration in the flesh, and the conditions of its subsequent emancipation; finally, that singular tenet of ἀνάμνησις which, in the *Phaedo* and elsewhere, is insisted on as one of the main props of the doctrine of immortality; and that not less characteristic doctrine of ideas or archetypal forms with which the

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theory of ἀνάμνησις is bound up. The speech is, moreover, manifestly psychagogic, to borrow Plato's term ... It is an instance of that species of rhetoric which alone seemed to Plato desirable or salutary: a rhetoric which, *mutatis mutandis*, answers sufficiently well to our eloquence of the pulpit, as distinguished from the eloquence of the bar, the senate, or the hustings. It is intended to prove, by a living example, that the art which, as normally practised, was a tool in the hands of the designing and ambitious, is capable of being turned by the philosopher to the better purpose of clothing in an attractive dress the results of his more abstruse speculations; and also of stimulating the minds of his disciples, if only working in them that wonder which, as Plato elsewhere says, and as Aristotle said after him, is the fountain of all philosophy. In one word, the Erotic Discourse may be regarded as a master-piece of its author's myth-making genius: the exemplary specimen of an art of which he has left us many other instances, but none so brilliant and elaborate.'[13]

The passage at 277b-c, where Socrates sums up the preconditions of a scientific rhetoric, is in Thompson's view 'a description of the ἐρωτικὸς λόγος and the principles on which it was framed'.[14] Socrates says there that the orator must know the truth of the subjects about which he speaks or writes; he must be capable of defining the whole by itself, and know how to divide it κατ' εἴδη μέχρι τοῦ ἀτμήτου; and having reached an understanding of the nature of the soul κατὰ ταὐτά, and of what kind of λόγος fits each nature, he must then arrange his λόγος accordingly, 'offering variegated speeches ... to a variegated soul, and simple speeches to a simple soul'.[15] Each of these conditions, Thompson suggests,[16] is met by Socrates' discourse, in so far as it defines and divides its subject, and is properly adapted, as a ποικίλος λόγος combining philosophy with μυθολογία, to the ποικίλος soul of Phaedrus, who constitutes its audience. If Socrates remains silent about its 'mythological' aspect, it is because that aspect contains all that is properly rhetorical about it, and Plato has deliberately chosen to evade any detailed discussion of the methods of rhetorical composition as such in order to 'exalt the art of Dialectic at the expense of Rhetoric'.[17] The final conclusion of the dialogue is that the living λόγος, sown by the expert dialectician in the soul of his hearer, is superior to anything written, however skilfully done. The knowledge-able man, we are told at 277c-d, will write παιδιᾶς χάριν, 'laying up a store of reminders both for himself, when he "reaches a forgetful old age", and for anyone who is following the same track'. This is the context of the remark by Phaedrus on which so much of Thompson's interpretation depends: in his rendering, 'Such pastime, Socrates, is as noble as those of the multitude are poor and contemptible: happy is he who is able thus to amuse himself, who can weave stories (μυθολογοῦντα) about Justice and the other matters upon which you discourse'. 'Yes, Phaedrus', Socrates replies, 'just so; but I think it is far finer if

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one is in earnest about them ...'[18] According to Thompson the effect of what Phaedrus says is to suggest the application of the conclusions about writing both to Socrates' speech and to Plato's compositions in general, whose essence it mirrors. 'In this passage [i.e. 276c – e] we may read Plato's explanation of his own purpose in writing, and of his practice of interweaving subtle dialectical controversy with discourses half playful, half serious, in which philosophical truth is blended with poetic fiction in varying proportions. Literary skill was not the attainment on which Plato most prided himself, or which he most admired in others. He wore it "lightly, like a flower", esteeming poetry and eloquence as dust in the balance when weighed against philosophic insight and dialectical subtlety'.[19]

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On Thompson's interpretation, then, Plato introduces Socrates' second speech as a sample of his own methods in writing, which represents rhetoric as it should be; in the sequel, he first demonstrates its superiority to current rhetorical models, but then finally sets a limit to the value of such eloquence by constrasting it with the living process of dialectic proper. This seems to me to provide the speech with a clear and suitably subordinate role in the argument of the dialogue, while simultaneously accounting for its scale. The message is that rhetoric requires to be reformed on scientific principles; but that even rhetoric of the best kind will still take second place to dialectic as an instrument of teaching.

But a number of objections may be raised. Firstly, Phaedrus' interjection at 276e is distinctly ambiguous. The clause δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἄλλων ὧν λέγεις πέρι μυθολογοῦντα could equally mean, and perhaps more naturally means, 'telling stories about justice and (the) other subjects *you mention*', i.e. the subjects Socrates specifically mentioned at 276c, the just, the fine and the good.[20] If so, the connection with Socrates' second speech is rather weaker than Thompson suggests: while it undoubtedly contained a μῦθος, and had more than a little to say at least about things fine and good, 'the just, the fine and the good' is not perhaps the most obvious way of summarising its subjects. Moreover, since he and Socrates are presently engaged in a discussion of the activity of writing, Phaedrus' point ought to be about how fine a pastime it is to *write* stories about justice and the rest, and from his standpoint within the dialogue Socrates' speech was a spoken λόγος, not a written one. We may also feel a certain unease about Thompson's treatment of 277b-c. While the initial premiss of the speech, that love is madness, might count as a definition along the lines suggested by 277b, what follows – despite Socrates' claims at 265b – is scarcely any sort of systematic process of division: rather, three other types of madness are introduced as *analogies* to the madness of love.[21] To this extent at least, the passage can only doubtfully be called 'a description of the ... principles on which [the ἐρωτικὸς

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λόγος] was framed'. That is, more or less, what it ought to be on Thompson's interpretation, but it is questionable whether it actually is.

The next objection is more fundamental. As we have seen, Thompson understands Plato in 276 as describing his attitude towards his own written works: the knowledgeable writer, composing 'for the sake of amusement', is none other than himself. This much is on the face of it plausible enough, whatever we may say about the claimed connection of the passage with Socrates' speech; for what other writer on the subjects of 'the just, the fine and good' would Plato be likely to recognise as knowing anything worth saying about them? There is much less plausibility, however, in Thompson's reading of the crucial phrase παιδιᾶς χάριν itself, that is, as referring specifically to the presence of mythical or poetic elements in the dialogues. In the text, the point about the unseriousness of written compositions is directly and explicitly derived from the fact that – as Socrates puts it at 276c 8-9, summarising the argument of 274-5 – they are 'incapable of arguing in their own defence, and incapable of adequately teaching the truth'. Certainly, writing might seem to be equated with μυθολογεῖν in Phaedrus' response at 276e. But if so,[22] this cannot be μυθολογεῖν in any ordinary sense: nothing that has been said entails that the writer will limit himself to *telling stories* about justice and the rest (and in fact, of course, 'stories' as such play only a relatively small role in the *Phaedrus* or any other dialogue).

Lastly, it has in any case been widely argued that the dialogues are immune to Socrates' strictures on writing, on the grounds that they possess the very capacities which the written form in general is said to lack. If so, the whole of Thompson's interpretation will fall.

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My next move will be to try to show that at least most of these objections can be met. I shall diverge from Thompson on some important points; but in broad terms the reading which will finally emerge will be recognisably similar to his.

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The effect of the first set of objections is to suggest a lack of clear textual support for the connection he claims between the final conclusions about speaking and writing and Socrates' second speech. I suggest, however, that there is much less ambiguous evidence for this connection in a further passage which follows shortly after the two to which Thompson ties his case. After having summed up his account of the true requirements of the orator in 277b-c, Socrates then gives his final verdict on 'the circumstances under which it would rightly be called a disgrace [to give speeches and to write them]' (277d). The starting-point

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for the whole discussion in the second half of the dialogue was provided by a report from Phaedrus that Lysias had been abused by 'one of the politicians' for being a mere speech-writer;[23] and Socrates now rounds off his conclusions on the issue by saying that disgrace attaches to a writer just in so far as he thinks that there is 'any great certainty and clarity' in his compositions, the right attitude being that of the man 'who thinks that there is necessarily much that is [merely] for amusement in a written λόγος on any subject, and that none has ever yet been written, whether in verse or in prose, which is worth much serious attention, or indeed spoken, in the way in which rhapsodes speak theirs, to produce conviction without questioning (ἀνάκρισις) or teaching, but that the best of them have really been a way of reminding people who know' (277e 5-278a 1). Now the description 'spoken ... to produce conviction without questioning or teaching' applies precisely to Socrates' second speech (and also, incidentally, to his first): it was a persuasive set-piece, parallel to Lysias', which both Phaedrus and Socrates treated as complete in itself. Socrates neither invited nor seemed to expect any questions about it, nor did Phaedrus ask any. Just as Lysias' speech is an illustration of the written λόγος, so Socrates' illustrates the kind of rhapsodic spoken λόγος referred to in the passage just cited; and I take it that that passage implicitly gives us Socrates', and Plato's, verdict on the speech – that however fine it may have been of its kind, it is ultimately 'not worth much serious attention' (that is, by comparison with the different kind of λόγος employed by the dialectician).

To return to Thompson's two passages: in its context, the immediate justification of Phaedrus' remark at 276e is perhaps just that story-telling is the most obvious way of amusing oneself in writing. But it is entirely plausible to suppose that Plato also intends an implicit reference to Socrates' speech: if it is a spoken μῦθος, from Phaedrus' point of view, equally from ours, as readers, it is a written one. If so, the reference will essentially be contained in the single word μυθολογοῦντα, since 'justice and the other things' merely represent what have been identified throughout as the *general* subjects of teaching and persuasion – if, that is, as I have argued, ὧν λέγεις looks back to 276c 3 ('justice and the other things you mention[ed just now]'). With 277b-c, the problem is created by Thompson himself: the passage does not say that a good speech must itself define and divide its subject, but only that the skilful speaker or writer must be able to do so, which allows the possibility that the results of these operations might be represented in other ways – just as they clearly are in Socrates' λόγος. As he goes on to tell us in the next part of 277, and as he has already argued at length, effective speaking will take different forms, depending on the kind of audience being addressed, and it is reasonable to assume that one of the relevant differences will be in the degree of logical rigour with which the speaker expresses his thoughts. It is in these terms, I suggest, that we are to understand the broad distinction introduced in 277c 2-3 beteween 'simple' and 'variegated' λόγοι.

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'Simple' λόγοι, for 'simple' souls, will be those which rely on logical argument alone, while the 'variegated' type, for 'variegated' souls, will achieve its ends through a varied mixture of logical and other means. 'Simple' souls, on this account, are those which are ruled by the rational element in them (compare Socrates' use of the same word ἁπλοῦς at 230a 5); 'variegated' souls those which are ruled by the irrational elements in them, and which therefore also require non-rational means of persuasion.[24] Socrates' speech, as Thompson suggests (though without fully arguing the case), is an example of the ποικίλος type of λόγος, fitted for the ears of the unphilosophical Phaedrus.

Next, I turn to Thompson's interpretation of the notion of παιδιά in 276, and, by implication, in 277e, as referring to the mythical or poetic aspects of the products of the knowledgeable writer (i.e. Plato). 277e itself provides conclusive evidence against this interpretation, in that it explicitly says that any written composition (or rhapsodic speech) *necessarily*[25] contains 'much that is for amusement'. It is difficult in principle to see why mythical or poetic forms should be a necessary part of any such λόγος; and on the reading just adopted of 277c 2-3 they will in fact be a necessary part only of some (poetry, as *Republic* 10 tells us, is at least one of the forms of λόγος which speaks to the irrational in us). The relevant feature of the λόγοι in question, as the context makes plain enough, is that they all, and necessarily, give the spurious appearance of being clear and certain, when in reality every statement they contain requires to be questioned and defended; and it is his realisation of this fact about them that will prevent the writer or speaker, if he knows anything at all, from attaching any lasting value or importance to them. It is in this light that we should read what Socrates says about his speech (or again, more strictly, about both his speeches) at 265c-d: 'to me it seems that the rest really was playfully done (τῶι ὄντι ... πεπαῖσθαι); but by chance two principles of method were expressed'. The message is that in so far as the speeches were based on these principles, they were ἄξια σπουδῆς; the rest was παιδιά.

I suggest, then, that Thompson radically misidentifies the nature of the lesssons taught by the last part of the dialogue. He is nevertheless right in his more fundamental contention – more fundamental, that is, from a structural point of view – that those lessons are intended to apply to the 'erotic discouse', and give us Plato's own final verdict on it. What remains to be considered is his further general contention, that Plato uses that verdict on the speech in order to comment on his own activity as a writer.

The main part of Thompson's own argument for this, based on 276e, appeared at best unsafe. Nor does it obviously follow, just because the speech contains so many ideas which also appear in other dialogues, that what is said (or implied) about its limitations will apply to the presentation of the same or similar ideas elsewhere. After all, the issue is about form, not about content; and a speech is not the same as a dialogue. We here come back to the last in my list of objections

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to Thompson: so long as something is written in *dialogue* form, it is said, it will be immune to Socrates' general case against writing.

But this claim rings hollow. Why, if Plato means to make an exception for one written form, does he make Socrates insist, four times over, that it applies to *all* forms (258d, 277d, e, 287b-c)? Those on the other side will of course scarcely be impressed by this simple reply. But they should be impressed by the detailed case which is presented against them by Szlezák, in his recent book *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie*.[26] The combined weight of Szlezák's arguments is such that it is no longer possible to hold that the dialogues either can or are meant to escape Socrates' net. It would be superfluous to try to reproduce those arguments here; it will however be worthwhile to bring in one further important piece of evidence which Szlezák appears to have missed.

This is at 278b 7. 'So now', Socrates says there, 'we have had due amusement (πεπαίσθω μετρίως) from the subject of λόγοι'. The reference is to the whole discussion of rhetoric and writing, which has for the most part been a quite typical piece of Socratic conversation, containing a high proportion of apparently serious argument. What *Socrates* means by the remark is perhaps just 'but what's been said can't be taken too seriously, because of course I know nothing about the subject' – a claim which he makes several times in the *Phaedrus*, with ever decreasing plausibility. But that cannot be the whole of the story. The notion of παιδιά, as we know, has played a leading role in the immediately preceding context, and it is scarcely conceivable that Plato should have introduced it here without intending some reference to its role in that context. He is a writer who chooses his words carefully, and nowhere more so than in the *Phaedrus*. The real function of 278b 7 is to acknowledge to the reader that the conclusions about writing will apply to the very context within which those conclusions have been reached. In other words, Plato is positively inviting us to see the *Phaedrus* as reflecting on its own status as a written work; and, by implication, on that of his writings as a whole.

A recent writer, M. M. Mackenzie, discovers an 'antinomy' here, which allows a rather more subtle means of escape for the Platonic mode of writing. 'At 277e 7 Socrates says "No λόγος has ever been written, whether in verse or in prose, which is worthy of great attention ..." "Socrates" says it, but Plato writes it. If he writes to convince, he writes that writing should not convince us; if what he writes does convince us, it convinces us that it should not convince us'.[27] I claim, however, that this misstates Plato's case. He is not inclined to deny that a written work should *convince* us (persuade us), provided of course that it is skilfully done, and based on knowledge; only that it can *teach* us anything. If we cannot be taught,[28] it is still desirable that we should hold the right convictions,[29] and as 277b-c makes plain, writing as well as speaking is a legitimate and proper means to this end ('[it seems to me to have been demonstrated in fair measure that] until someone knows the truth of the things about which he *speaks or writes* ... – not

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until then will he be able to pursue the making of speeches as a whole in a scientific way ... whether for the purpose of teaching or persuading,[30] as the whole of our previous argument has indicated').[31] It would be odd if Plato should on the one hand tell the writer how to write persuasively, and on the other suggest to us, the reading audience, that we should resist. What he tells us is rather that we should not expect any 'clarity or certainty' to come from written works:[32] that is, that we should not regard them as containing knowledge, or as capable of imparting it. Some of the things an author says might turn out to be true – just as I think Plato would want to defend the truth of what he says about speaking and writing. But since he is not here to defend it, it too will be subject to the same sort of limitation as any other written λόγος.[33] I conclude that there is no antinomy here. Plato writes to convince us that what he writes can only convince us, not teach us. If this proposition (that writing cannot teach, only persuade) applies to itself, *qua* written, it does so in a quite unproblematic way; much more interesting – and, I suggest, more interesting to Plato – are the consequences for what he writes about substantive subjects like 'the just, the fine and the good'[34] (or, if these are not the same, the kinds of topic treated in Socrates' two speeches). The paradox which Mackenzie discovers enables her to treat the dialogue as an application of the techniques of 'classical dialectic', of the kind expounded by Zeno:

> 'Here a proposition and its contradictory is exhaustively explored ... so that all options are exhausted. And if, moreover, each arm of the dilemma concludes as an antinomy, the reader is suspended between the arms, and forced to question the very structure of the argument – or else let reason slide into contradiction. So this method of ἀντιλογία triggers speculation – about the logic of the dilemma, about its content, and about its theoretical underpinnings. Whether he solves the dilemma or not, its victim finds himself doing metaphysics ... That *activity*, I suggest, is what the *Phaedrus* tries to provoke.'[35]

The claim is that by this means the dialogue form transmutes reader into interlocutor, directly questioning him, engaging his opinions, and incorporating his views. 'The paradox ... embraces the entire work, and demonstrates that the written word is unequivocally alive.'[36] But if there is no paradox, then we must return to the duller alternative, which is to accept that Plato means what he says: namely that written works – including, I take it, his own – are 'not worth much attention' because they are unable to answer the questions which any reader who is not simple-minded[37] will want to put to them. Only the spoken word can do that, under special conditions; and only under those conditions, if at all, can we acquire knowledge and understanding in place of conviction.

To return to my main argument: I claim that from the point of view of the argument of the *Phaedrus* itself the *form* of writing adopted makes no difference;

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and identical considerations are said to apply to both written works and set speeches. If so, then Socrates' attitude towards his speech will exactly parallel Plato's towards his dialogues: neither will regard what he has composed as 'worth much serious attention', or believe that it contains 'any great certainty or clarity'. Since at the same time Socrates' speech includes a fairly representative selection of the ideas contained in Plato's (other) written compositions, the judgement passed on it will in fact be directly applicable to those compositions – that is, in so far as they present the same or similar ideas in what is for the purposes of the *Phaedrus* the same form. The speech can then plausibly be seen – as perhaps Thompson means to see it – as a stand–in for the written Platonic λόγος within the fictional context of a live conversation. Within that context, Plato cannot of course refer directly to his own written products as written, especially since they include the *Phaedrus* itself. Such a reference therefore requires subterfuge. He first gives Socrates a speech which has rich connections with other dialogues; he then makes him embark on a *general* discussion of the value of writing, the conclusions of which turn out to apply in identical fashion to speeches like his.

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Only one specific kind of Platonic writing is of course represented in that speech. But it is one that is peculiarly fitted to illustrate the final lessons of the dialogue. A μῦθος is by its very nature something playful (though it may at the same time have a serious purpose), and something which will normally be incapable of being taken quite at face value. Socrates explicitly recognises both these consequences for his own μῦθος at 265b-c: '... by expressing the experience of love through some kind of simile, which allowed us perhaps to grasp some truth, though maybe it also took us in a wrong direction, and mixing together a not wholly implausible speech, we sang a playful hymn in the form of a story ... to my master, and yours, Phaedrus – Love, watcher over beautiful boys'. He will later argue that the same features belong to all rhetorical λόγοι,[38] whatever their form; but that they belong to μῦθοι requires no argument.

By casting Socrates' speech as a μῦθος Plato is thus in a sense already preparing the way for his formal conclusions about the value of rhetoric. He also achieves the same effect by other means. If the speech is playful *qua* μῦθος, there is also playfulness in it of another kind. This is in its use of irony, in the sense defined by A. W. Schlegel: '... a sort of confession interwoven into the representation itself, and more or less distinctly expressed, of its overcharged onesidedness in matters of fancy and feeling, and by means of which the equipoise is again restored'.[39] The main thrust of the speech is undoubtedly serious. But its seriousness – as I shall attempt to show – is counterbalanced by the admixture of a number of lighter elements. It is not, in the end, quite the solemn piece it pretends to be: as de Vries comments in another context, 'Plato holds himself ironically aloof even in his

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highest flights'.[40] But this is no more than consistent with Socrates' own expressed feelings about his performance. He has been forced into giving the speech by Phaedrus; if there was any value in it, the gods of the place are to blame, or the cicadas.[41] In other words, he himself sets no great store by it. No doubt his attitude is partly a matter of false modesty. But for the rest it is just what we should expect from someone who is 'sick with passion' for a different and more serious kind of λόγος.[42]

Socrates' argument, in outline, is as follows. All lovers are mad. Ordinary human forms of madness are bad; but the madness of the true lover is god-given, and god-given madness is responsible for the greatest goods, as is shown by the cases of the seer, of an obscure class of sufferers from inherited curses, and of the poet. The blessing of the madness of true love is that it leads a man to discover the benefits of philosophy. The beauty of his beloved reminds him of things once seen (the Forms); after both have subdued the evil horse of appetite, they live a blissful philosophical life together, and having done so three times, they achieve final escape from the body. The argument is at the very least striking, since Plato normally treats the philosopher's state of mind as diametrically opposed to that of poet and seer; what is more, it appears to come close to implying that the philosopher, who ought to be the most rational of men, is actually mad. But not everything Socrates says is as it seems. The philosopher, like the poet and the seer, is divinely inspired: as the Muses and Apollo are to them,[43] so Love is to him, both in so far as it is love which first reawakens his memory of the Forms (and of his role-model, Zeus),[44] and in so far as that memory continues to move him. But he is not mad, at least when he has begun living the philosophical life in the full sense. The conception of madness which is in play in both of Socrates' speeches and in Lysias' is the same: a person is mad if he has lost rational control over his thoughts and actions. Thus the ordinary lover is mad because desire has overcome his capacity for judgement, while the poet and the seer are so because their rational powers have been extinguished under the influence of their respective patrons.[45] Now in the first stage of his development the philosophical lover also loses control over himself;[46] and this is the chief basis for the treatment of his brand of love as one of the species of madness. He is thrown off balance by a combination of the memory of Beauty Itself, aroused in him by his beloved's beauty, and his own failure to understand what is happening to him.[47] But the remaining part of the story is about the gradual reassertion of control by the rational element in him, until its victory is complete.[48] His brand of inspiration is thus of a peculiar kind, and radically different from that of poet or seer. For them, being inspired means being out of their mind; whereas for him it rather brings a heightened rationality. The many may call him disturbed or crazy (παρακινῶν), but in doing so they miss the essential nature of his condition, which is that of someone in contact with the divine.[49] They recognise inspiration in other cases; so much the more, Socrates implies, should they recognise it in this

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case, since 'this is the best of all kinds of inspiration, and from the best of sources'.[50] Just how superior he thinks it to poetic and mantic inspiration is shown by the list of types of life in 248d-e: the lives of the seer and the poet are placed fifth and sixth in value, below even those of the politician and business-man, the trainer and the doctor. In other words, while maintaining the analogy between the two states of mind, the speech simultaneously restates the familiar Platonic view of them as essentially *contrasting*,[51] both in themselves – the one being (mostly) rational, the other irrational – and in respect of their relative worth. The analogy itself is real: the philosopher's state is genuinely described as resembling inspiration in its recognised forms, and his madness at the onset of love is a genuine madness. But there the resemblance ceases. Any compliment which seems to be paid to seers and poets by the comparison of them with the philosopher is implicitly retracted in the course of the detailed account of his progress.

In fact, Socrates has prepared his position even before the speech, by showing that he himself has no use for any of the three kinds of divine madness which he will suggest as analogues to love. He is his own seer, and is able to work out for himself both the nature of the error in his first speech, and how to make proper expiation for it.[52] True, his divine voice has intervened, to prevent him from leaving without making amends; but as he claims, he had already half realised his mistake even while he was speaking. Again, when beginning his first speech, he appealed for inspiration from the Muses,[53] but when he felt it actually coming on he treated it as a threat to be averted rather than as a benefit to be welcomed.[54] The second speech is thus set in a context in which the rational inspiration of the philosopher (as embodied in Socrates) has already been compared with, and implicitly preferred to, its irrational forms.

If all this is so, then there is more than sufficient justification for taking at least the preamble to the speech, which introduces the three kinds of madness, as less than completely serious – or as ironic, in a more ordinary sense of irony than the one defined above. There is confirmation of the correctness of this view in the passage itself. Socrates begins his treatment of mantic madness and its blessings by referring to the priestesses of Delphi and Dodona, who 'when mad have done many fine things for Greece ..., but little or nothing when sane'.[55] He will not spin things out unduly by mentioning the Sibyl and all the others who have set people straight with respect to the future. But one piece of testimony *is* worth bringing in. The ancients too agreed that no shame attached to madness; otherwise they would not have given this finest of the τέχναι its original name of 'manic', which less sophisticated moderns have corrupted to 'mantic'. Mantic is then contrasted with the inferior τέχνη of oionistic: 'oiōnistic' is similarly a corrupted form of 'oiŏnoïstic', from a combination of οἴησις, νοῦς and ἱστορία, which reflected the purely human nature of the art; and the fact that the ancients reserved 'manic' for 'the more perfect and more valuable' of the two τέχναι shows how much finer

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they thought divine madness than human sanity.[56] Can any of this be seriously meant? Agreed, μαντική and μανία may in fact be etymologically related;[57] and the fancifulness of the second etymology is no strict guarantee that Plato did not believe it. But he certainly does not believe, as he makes Socrates say, that mantic is 'the finest τέχνη', since on his assumptions it will not count as a τέχνη at all. (For Plato, in the *Phaedrus*[58] as elsewhere, τέχναι are essentially rational capacities; and there will be a special paradox about the suggestion that 'manic' belongs to the class). If there is irony here, that will tend to confirm our already reasonable suspicions about the rest, especially in view of the fact that the proposition in question is one of the main premisses on which Socrates' argument – if it can be called that – in this section seems to depend. The same contrast between τέχνη and μανία is also central to the treatment of the poets in 245a, which strongly recalls the theme of the *Ion*: the poet as Bacchant, able to produce nothing of any value when sane (as in the case of the unfortunate Tynnichus of Chalcis).[59] But there will then also be doubts – if they are not already raised by the section on mantic – about the seriousness of the general thesis of the preamble, that the products of madness are superior to those of sanity; a thesis which, as I have argued, is in any case overturned by the main body of the speech.

This tendency to combine or juxtapose the serious and the merely mock-serious (irony in Schlegel's sense) is characteristic of the speech as a whole. I give just two further examples from many. *1.* Not long after the proof of immortality, Socrates argues as follows: 'the natural property of a wing is to carry what is heavy upwards, ... to where the race of the gods resides, and in a way, of all things belonging to the sphere of the body, it has the greatest share in the divine, the divine being noble, wise, good, and everything which is of that kind; so it is by these things that the plumage of the soul is most nourished and increased ...'.[60] The argument is patently playful. If someone held that Plato thought otherwise, he could not be refuted; but it is at best improbable, from the author of the careful and clever argument for immortality. Even one of the copyists was embarrassed.[61] (Can birds, then, like cicadas, do without physical nourishment?) If it is said that different standards of argument apply in the case of myths, I should happily accept that suggestion.[62] *2.* While the other eleven Olympians traverse the heavens, Hestia alone, the goddess of the hearth, remains at home.[63] The only interpretation which seems capable of deriving anything serious from this idea is the astronomical one, which identifies the other gods as star-souls, and Hestia as the earth.[64] But why, as de Vries reasonably asks, should she alone be deprived of enjoying the divine feast?[65]

The speech is undoubtedly a fine and persuasive piece of writing. If we, like Phaedrus, are inspired by it, Plato means us to be; it is after all openly presented as a paradigm of skilful speaking. But he does not mean us to be *too* impressed. A careful reading, as I have suggested, shows it to be more or less what Socrates says it is: while it illustrates important lessons, for the rest it is something 'really

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playfully done, by way of amusement'. (Much the same might be said of the other parts of the *Phaedrus*, which is by common consent one of the most exuberant of all the Platonic dialogues.) It would of course still count as unserious, according to the criteria laid down in 266-7, even if there were no traces of lightness in it. Its status as a παίγνιον, from the point of view of the *Phaedrus* itself, does not derive from these, but rather from its very nature as a set piece. If anything, the reverse relationship holds: Socrates indulges in play just because he is aware of the limitations of the form which Phaedrus has forced him to adopt. But it is important for Plato's purposes that at the same time Socrates should *pretend* to be consistently serious. The consequence is that the speech turns out – once more – to be just like a book: claiming to be ἄξιον πολλῆς σπουδῆς, when in fact it is not.[66] In this way it subtly illustrates and underlines the overt doctrine of the dialogue.

* * * * *

On the interpretation suggested, as on Thompson's original version of it, the *Phaedrus* emerges primarily as a kind of sustained *apologia pro vita auctoris*. The erotic discourse plays a central role in a complex strategy which is designed ultimately to explain the writer's conception of his products. The final attitude which Plato intends us to adopt towards it – and so, by implication (as I claim), towards anything he writes – is perhaps indicated by the attitude which Socrates announces himself as taking towards the μυθολόγημα of Boreas and Oreithuia in 229b-230a. He does not disbelieve the story, and try to give some rationalistic account of it, like the σοφοί; he is content to accept 'what is commonly thought' in such matters, and turns instead to a more pressing subject of investigation – himself, to see what kind of creature *he* is. It is surely no accident that this question relates closely to one of the major issues touched on in his own μῦθος, about the nature of the human soul. We should not actively disbelieve that story, Plato perhaps tells us, or press it for answers which it cannot give; and the same will apply to his books. What we should do is to continue to discuss the substantive issues which they raise, by means of the Socratic 'science of dialectic'.[67] Like any other writer or speaker, he aims to convince. But unlike others, he realises that conviction is not enough.

* * * * *

Finally, some brief remarks about dating.[68] There is at present no clear consensus on the question: some regard the *Phaedrus* as belonging with the middle dialogues; others group it with late dialogues like the *Theaetetus* or the *Politicus*. I make the following observations. *1.* Those who hold the first view usually at least implicitly rely on the close resemblance between some of the main

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ideas contained in Socrates' speech and those of the *Republic*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phaedo*: including, most notably, the idea of separated Forms and that of learning as recollection. What has not been sufficiently recognised is that these ideas appear in the *Phaedrus* exclusively in the framework of a μῦθος. If no μῦθος is to be taken as literally true (see p. 116 above), the result will be to throw immediate doubt on their status. In general, the *Phaedrus* seems to expound middle-period ideas only to recommend them for scrutiny. If so, it has more in common with the critical musings of the *Parmenides* than with the optimistic constructions of the middle dialogues themselves. *2*. Socrates argues that skilfully constructed λόγοι will be based on the procedures of collection and division (264e-266c, 277b-c). If, as I suggest, Plato has in mind his own works as models, this will connect the *Phaedrus* especially with the *Sophist* and the *Politicus*; and I believe that it contains an actual parody of the sort of elaborate definition which results from the divisions in both these dialogues (I refer to Socrates' 'dithyrambic' definition of love at 238b-c, in his first speech).[69] *3*. The *Phaedrus* rejects the conception of gods as a combination of soul and body (246c-d): such a conception of them is present in the *Timaeus* (38e, 41a-b), but – *pace* Cornford – absent from *Laws* 10.[70] *4*. Other clear connections with *Laws* 10, as has long been noticed, are to be found in the argument for immortality (245c - 246a). *5*. But a comparison of the ways in which Plato introduces the figure called Theuth in the *Phaedrus* (274c-275b) and in the *Philebus* (18b-d) convinces me that the *Philebus* passage is later. I conclude that Plato wrote the *Phaedrus* at a time relatively close to, but still some distance from, the end of his life.

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NOTES

1. An early version of this paper was read at a research seminar in Bristol, and I am grateful for comments and suggestions received on that occasion. The version presented here is substantially that offered to the Society at its meeting in February, 1986, but has benefited from discussions begun or continued at that meeting and since: especially with Myles Burnyeat, Geoffrey Lloyd, Mary Margaret Mackenzie (judiciously performing two separate roles, one as editor of the *Proceedings*, the other as protagonist in an important part of the argument), and Neil O'Sullivan.

2. See Michael J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran charioteer* (1981). This is the view implicitly adopted e.g. by Martha C. Nussbaum in her paper 'Poetry, goodness, and understanding in Plato's *Phaedrus*' (in *Plato on beauty, wisdom, and the arts*, ed. J. Moravcsik and P. Temko (1982); reprinted in revised form as chapter 7 of her new book *The fragility of goodness* (1986)). Elegant though the paper is, its conclusions are undermined by the absence of any account of the latter part of the dialogue, which contains Plato's own reflections on the performances of Lysias and Socrates.

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3. I.e. at 265c-d (collection and division). The lesson is in fact drawn from both speeches, which are for the moment treated as one: collection and division are introduced as the means by which 'the λόγος' was able to 'pass over' from castigating love, as Socrates did in his first speech, to praising it, as he did in his second (265c 5-6).

4. The claim is that the second speech 'discovered' divine love by dividing divinely-inspired madness into four parts (266a 6-7, 265b 2-5). What it actually did (or purported to do: see pp. 110 and 117-19 below) was to bring in the other three 'parts' of madness as analogues of the fourth, in order to show in a preliminary way the possible benefits of a madness which comes from the gods. For the point behind the redescription in 265-6, see p. 113.

5. Especially if, as is usually supposed, the *Phaedrus* is written against the background of the *Symposium*. John D. Moore's arguments for placing *Phaedrus* before *Symposium* ('The relation between Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*', in *Patterns in Plato's thought*, ed. J. M. E. Moravcsik (1973), 52-71) are not persuasive. But the eroticism of the Platonic Socrates – the *Lysis* notwithstanding – is well established even apart from the *Symposium* (*Protagoras* 309a-c, *Meno* 76c). For some brief remarks on the general question of the dating of the *Phaedrus*, see pp. 120-1 below.

6. Cf. Mackenzie (article cited in n. 9 below) 66.

7. W. H. Thompson, *The Phaedrus of Plato, with English notes and dissertations.*

8. Cf. n. 2. Most favoured are Socrates' second speech (as in Nussbaum's case), which seems to offer rich and easy pickings over a wide range of topics; and the last few pages, in the context of the debate on the 'unwritten doctrines'. This is a bad way to treat any work, but – as I shall suggest – more than usually unfortunate in the case of the *Phaedrus*.

9. Among the members of this category are W. C. Helmbold and W. B. Holther ('The unity of the *Phaedrus*', *University of California publications in classical philology* 14.9 (1952) 387-417); Mary Margaret Mackenzie ('Paradox in Plato's *Phaedrus*, *PCPS* n.s. 28 (1982) 64-76); and G. R. F. Ferrari, *Plato's Folly*, Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation (unpublished), 1983). I think it fair to say that at the various levels of explanation at which these scholars work many aspects of the structure of the dialogue remain puzzling. (On Dr Mackenzie's paper – to which she has now published a sequel, in 'Putting the *Cratylus* in its place', *CQ* n.s. 36 (1986) 124-50 – see pp. 114-15 below). The two commentaries which have appeared since Thompson's, those of Hackforth (1952) and de Vries (1969), are strangely reticent about larger structural issues; more helpful is Robin's introduction to the Budé edition (1933). The main groundwork for the analysis offered in the present paper is provided by my own commentary on the *Phaedrus*, to be published during 1986.

10. 303e 10-304a 2; 304c 10-d 2.

11. Understood as 'telling stories about Justice and the other matters upon which you [i.e. Socrates, habitually] discourse': Thompson xvi, xxii (see below).

12. Thompson xvii.

13. xvii – xviii.

14. xviii n. 1.

15. 277c 2-3.

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16. xviii n. 1, with 163. Not all of what I attribute to Thompson here is explicitly said by him; but it is, I think, a legitimate interpretation or extension of what he says.

17. xxi.

18. 276e 1-5.

19. xxii.

20. These *are*, of course, the things which Socrates habitually talks about. My point is merely that Phaedrus does not here clearly refer to them under that description.

21. Cf. n. 4 above.

22. I shall myself suggest a different explanation of this aspect of what Phaedrus says (p. 112). The point of comparison between written works (in general) and μῦθοι is just that – as Socrates has argued – writers ought to regard themselves, like story-tellers, as composing 'for the sake of amusement'. But there will then be important consequences for the way in which their products are to be *read*: see p. 120.

23. 257 c.

24. For a more extended justification of this interpretation of 277c 2-3, see my forthcoming commentary *ad loc.*

25. ἀναγκαῖον, e 5.

26. Thomas Alexander Szlezák, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie: Untersuchungen zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen* (1985); especially Anhang I.

27. 'Paradox in Plato's *Phaedrus*' (n. 9 above) 65.

28. Real intellectual progress can take place only in the context of the interchange between the knowledgeable dialectician and his pupil, who must possess a 'fitting' soul (276e 6) – i.e., presumably, one that is 'philosophical by nature' (252e 3); and Socrates suggests that there will only be a small minority of such souls (see especially 249e – 250b). It seems to follow that most of us will in fact be strictly unteachable.

29. If it were not, the whole long discussion of rhetoric would be without point (which is, incidentally, how Mackenzie's reading seems to leave it). The proposed new science of speaking will be a science precisely of the production of conviction (270b).

30. That is, not only will he be unable to teach (which is in any case beyond the capacity of his medium), but he will not even be able to persuade anyone. Persuasion, unlike teaching, is a *one-sided* process, requiring input only from the speaker or writer: see especially 261e - 262c.

31. I claim, in fact, that Plato consistently treats (public) speaking and writing, in their ideal form, as essentially *the same activity* – not only sharing the same function, and governed by the same rules, but subject to the same limitations (see pp. 111-12 above). This claim is integral both to Thompson's interpretation and to mine.

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32. 275c 6-7 (paralleling the description of the proper attitude of the author at 277d: p. 112 above).

33. That is, it will still need to be questioned, and will be incapable of answering by itself. So for example when he lays out the rules for the composition of a λόγος (264b), or for skilful speaking/writing as a whole, these rules may be good ones, but the apprentice will still need to ask how they are to apply in the particular case (268a – 272b).

34. Plato warns us that these items – which constitute the special subject-matter both of rhetoric (259e – 260a) and of dialectic (276c) – are inherently slippery (263a - c); statements about them will then perhaps be particularly insecure (cf. 277d 6 - e 2). We are reminded of what the *Politicus* says about the shortcomings of law as a basis for government (*Politicus* 294a - 299e).

35. Mackenzie 69.

36. Mackenzie 72.

37. 275 c.

38. That is, to all λόγοι (spoken or written: see n. 31 abve) other than those of the dialectician.

39. Quoted (in Black's translation) by D. C. Muecke, *Irony* (1970) 18.

40. G. J. de Vries, *A commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* (1969) 190 (on 258 e 4-5).

41. 242a - b, 257a; 262d.

42. Cf. 228b.

43. 265b.

44. 253a.

45. 231d, 241a; 244a-b, 245a.

46. 250a.

47. 251d-e, 250a-b.

48. 256a.

49. 249c-d.

50. 249e 1-2.

51. Cf. especially *Ion*, and *Meno* 99c-d.

52. 242b-d.

53. 237a-b.

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54. 238d, 241e.

55. 244b 1-3.

56. 244a-d.

57. Cf. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the irrational* (1951) 70.

58. See especially 261a, one of many echoes of the argument of the *Gorgias*.

59. It will follow that I reject Martha Nussbaum's claim (*The fragility of goodness*, 201) that 'the style of Socratic philosophizing now [i.e. in the *Phaedrus*] fuses argument with poetry'. If Plato rehabilitates poetry, it is as part of a new programme for *rhetoric*, not for philosophy (dialectic).

60. 246d 6 - e 2.

61. That is, if Burnet and others are right in taking ψυχή in d 8 as a gloss (as they surely are).

62. My intention is simply to stress the way in which Plato seems consistently to *exploit* this aspect of 'story-telling' (while also combining it with deeper levels of meaning, which no ordinary 'story' would contain). It is as if he were simultaneously challenging us to believe and to disbelieve: see p. 120 below.

63. 247a.

64. References in the commentaries of Hackforth and de Vries, *ad loc.*

65. Further examples (on which see my forthcoming commentary): 251c 1-5; 252b 1 - c 2; 252c 4-7; 255c 1-2 (with 251c 6-7); 256e 1-2.

66. There is of course no implication that it – and books – are not worth reading at all; just that we should not expect more from them than they are capable of giving.

67. 276e 5-6.

68. For the most recent discussion of this topic, with full references, see Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness* 470-71 (n. 5 to ch. 7).

69. See my commentary *ad loc.*

70. F. Cornford, *Plato's cosmology* (1937) 112 n. 1.

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