

The Denial of *Eros* in Lysias' Speech: Discourse and Desire in Plato's *Phaedrus*

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In her recent study of intertextuality in the Platonic dialogues, Andrea Wilson Nightingale writes:

Plato uses intertextuality as a vehicle for criticizing traditional genres of discourse and, what is more important, for introducing and defining a radically different discursive practice, which he calls "philosophy."¹

In other words, by appropriating, or parodying, within his own texts, the various genres of discourse that operated within the literature of his day, Plato sought not only to extend the repertoire of the unique discursive practice known as "philosophy," but also to bring their respective strengths and shortcomings to display. Of particular interest to Plato was the *encomium*, a rhetoric of praise that played itself out on the basis of simplistic, formulaic, and mostly unqualified juxtapositions and exaggerations, designed to forcefully state a position and bring about an auditor's assent or acquiescence. Apropos to this, Isocrates (a rhetorician of the fourth century B.C.), presents a number of rhetorical strategies for transforming simple, uninteresting truths into arresting, dramatic ones. Thus will the rhetorician exaggerate the facts: "[I]t is necessary for those who wish to eulogize a person to represent him as possessing a greater number of good qualities than he actually possesses"; or "reason [on the basis of] what is probable," or merely "credible," as that opens up some room for conjecture, which he can direct to his rhetorical objectives; or, to improve the position of the object he

¹Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the construct of philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

wishes to single out for exaltation or praise, set up "comparisons" between it and others of clearly inferior status or worth; and, generally speaking, deploy whatever strategy could have the effect of enhancing the public perception of the goodness, nobility, or worth of the *laudandum*, taking special care to avoid what does not.² The primacy, within the operation of such strategies, of persuasion over knowledge, of probability and credibility over truth, was especially emphatic in the case of the *paradoxical encomium*, a rhetorical device for valorizing a "person or thing generally held to be unpraiseworthy, if not despicable."³ For to achieve his objective, the encomiast had to be supremely indifferent to the truth, or, what for Plato amounted to the same thing, committed to "the relativity of all values." Indeed, "to suggest that any object, no matter how base, can be exalted by an artful manipulation of rhetoric is to suggest that there is no absolute standard to the proper conferral of praise."⁴

Plato constructs an example of the paradoxical encomium in the *Phaedrus*, in the form of the first of three speeches on love. This is the speech Lysias has composed for Phaedrus, who, although he is the secret object of Lysias' affection, is strongly advised by him to strike up a relationship, not with the lover, but with the non-lover, for the reason (which he argues) that the relationship in which love does not figure is superior to the one in which it does. The ensuing conversation between Phaedrus and Socrates, of course, is pure parody on the part of Plato, a parody, precisely, of the paradoxical encomiast's lack of all *eros*, his inability to rouse in anyone a desire for the truth, precisely because he speaks in such bad faith. As a case in point, Plato evokes the historical Lysias (whose work as a ghostwriter of Athenians embroiled in legal battles with one another—he was non-Athenian himself—had earned him a reputation of distance and aloofness), the absentee author of a speech on *eros* that Phaedrus must read for him to figure in the dialogue at all, the figure of Lysias in the *Phaedrus* is of a person who is just as uninvolved. Notwithstanding his youthfulness, Phaedrus similarly comes off as a person who not only is low on erotic energy, but

²Quoted in *Genres in Dialogue*, p.103.

³*Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 102.

who, precisely on account of that, operates mainly along the lines of a utilitarian rationality.⁵ It is to this figure that we presently turn.

The figure of Phaedrus shows up in two places in the Platonic corpus: as the "father of the speeches," and as Lysias' youthful proxy in the *Phaedrus*. In the *Symposium*, it is on his suggestion that they pay tribute to the god, Eros, in the form of individually composed speeches of praise. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates encounters him practicing the delivery of Lysias' speech on *eros*, to anyone with ears to hear.⁶ It is speeches that keep Phaedrus busy in both places, and in both places the subject is love. Socrates, Phaedrus' dialogical partner in both places, is similarly interested in speeches and in the subject of love. Indeed, Socrates' claim in the *Symposium* to possess a privileged understanding of *eros*⁷ hangs with Phaedrus' assertion in the *Phaedrus* that Lysias' speech on *eros* would be "quite appropriate for ... [him] to hear."⁸ It must be noted as well that it is on the strength of Phaedrus' promise of speeches that Socrates temporarily forsakes Athens, to undertake with the younger man a walk through the unfamiliar and somewhat wild Attic countryside.⁹

Still, there is a particularity to Phaedrus' outlook on both *eros* and rhetoric that differentiates it from Socrates'. For as much as Phaedrus is an enthusiastic follower of Socrates, like so many others in his generation, he has come under the influence of Sophistry, and tends, as such, "to be lured by all the latest sensational fads."¹⁰ Indeed, theirs is a world

⁵Plato's conception of philosophy, as Nightingale sees it, went beyond a conception of it as a mere intellectual discipline: "When Plato set forth a specific and quite narrow definition of this term [philosophy], I will suggest, he created a new and specialized discipline. In fact, 'philosophy' as Plato conceived it comprised not just an analytic inquiry into certain types of subjects but a unique set of ethical and metaphysical commitments that demanded a whole new way of living" (*Ibid.*, p.10).

⁶Plato, *Symposium* 177a-d. *Phaedrus*, 242b. On Phaedrus' claim that Eros is a god not sufficiently eulogized, see G. R. F. Ferrari, "Platonic love," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 248-276.

⁷*Symposium*, 177d.

⁸*Phaedrus*, 227c3-4.

⁹*Ibid.*, 230d6-e1.

¹⁰In an advertence to the connection Hegel makes between Sophistry and the pursuit of the *avant-garde*, Josef Pieper writes: "[Sophistry] always presumes to be exactly what is necessary and correct 'now'; to be the timely and modern thing. Sophistry and topicality are coordinate concepts in a highly specific sense. Of course this

of "sophisticated irreverence and detachment, of enlightened health doctrines and simultaneous depravity."¹¹ Phaedrus himself, although Socrates' junior by about twenty years, is a man at the end of his thirties — their behavior toward each other throughout the dialogue is that of adult men who treat each other as equals — but, for all that, as susceptible as a juvenile to the influence of his peers. He accepts, by turn, Lysias' case against *eros*, and Socrates' case against Lysias, but makes no attempt in either case to test either the validity of the argument or the soundness of the rhetoric. As an observer has put it, he is entirely focused "on the subject of love, the care of the body, and an appreciation of speech as mere recreation."¹² He is especially fond of speeches that have been harnessed, not to political or philosophical ends, but to "the accepted opinion of those who claim to possess an art." Indeed, in the *Symposium* and in the *Phaedrus*, he delivers speeches on the subject of *eros* that are "penetrated without acknowledgment, by the opinions of the public experts [the speechmaker, Lysias, and the physicians, Eryximachus and Acumenus] he reveres."¹³ Following them, he argues that *eros* has no existence apart from the utilitarian objectives to which it is put,¹⁴ and that the lover is incited into noble activity, less by any desire he might have to bring virtue to public display, than by his need to win his beloved's approval (and avoid his censure). He, for instance, goes forth to battle not because he is an eager warrior or a reliable defender, but because he "wants some dirty little thing from [his beloved]" that as far as the beloved is concerned is "a small thing to accede to the lover in exchange for such an insurance policy."¹⁵ Reflecting upon the matter from his own position as the beloved of Eryximachus, and, as

does not mean that avant-gardism is necessarily Sophistical; but in this realm we must constantly be prepared for masquerade. Sophistry is 'pseudo-contemporaneity' — but the sham is difficult to unmask." [Josef Pieper, *Love and Inspiration: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p.10].

¹¹*Ibid*, p. 7.

¹²Ronna Burger, *Plato's Phaedrus: A Defense of A Philosophical Art of Writing* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980), p. 9.

¹³*Ibid*, p. 10.

¹⁴Stanley Rosen, "Erotic Ascent," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 17(1994), pp. 37-57.

¹⁵Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), pp. 433-434.

such, the recipient of his beneficence, Phaedrus concludes that reciprocity is impossible in paederastic relationships — for the beloved stands to benefit much more greatly from the paederastic arrangement than does the lover.¹⁶ That being the case, one has carefully to distinguish the position of the beloved from that of the lover.

I make a point of this because, while in any case the gods display special admiration for the valor that springs from love, they are even more amazed, delighted and beneficent when the beloved shows such devotion to his lover, than when the lover does the same for his beloved. For the lover, by virtue of Love's inspiration, is always nearer than his beloved to the gods. And this, I say is why they paid more honor to Achilles than to Alcestis, and sent him to the Islands of the Blessed.¹⁷

But, as Allan Bloom argues, Phaedrus is a "flawed exponent of *eros* because he profits from it without experiencing it."¹⁸ As deeply as his passion for speeches on *eros* runs, he appears little interested in *eros* itself.¹⁹ He is more interested in the advantages that he, as the beloved, can expect to receive from an attentive lover, than in reciprocating them. He is not, in that sense, a desiring lover. Even his name, which literally means "bright," "beaming," "radiant,"²⁰ serves to conjure up an image of him as one who, while beautiful and radiant, and capable of drawing love to himself, does not radiate love outward in return. In the dialogue, Socrates expresses amazement over Phaedrus' extraordinary ability to use his physical beauty to compel others to deliver speeches to satisfy his appetite for oratory.²¹ Besides Phaedrus' utilitarian bent there is the matter of his passivity in erotic relationships. Stanley Rosen writes:

Phaedrus is by nature a valetudinarian, a man of low erotic energy and equally low tastes in rhetoric, a beloved rather than a lover who

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

¹⁷ *Symposium*, 180 a-b.

¹⁸ *Love and Friendship*, p. 458.

¹⁹ *Self-Knowledge*, p. 21.

²⁰ John Sallis, *Being and Logos: The Way of Platonic Dialogue*, 2d. ed. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1986), p. 106.

²¹ "Erotic Ascent," p. 41.

sees his own beauty as a useful property rather than as an occasion for spiritual ascent.²²

Not surprisingly, then, Phaedrus waxes enthusiastic over Lysias' speech. He is charmed as much by its display of Lysias' verbal virtuosity as by its articulation of a vision of *eros* that is entirely consistent with his own. For in implicating the figure of the lover in practices displaying self-interestedness and indifference to love, Lysias is making the same point about *eros* in the *Phaedrus* that Phaedrus argues in the *Symposium*, namely, that the practice of *eros* is a practice of a utilitarian non-love, with the difference that in Phaedrus' own statement of the matter, it is the lover, not the beloved, who is its practitioner.²³

Lysias' Speech: Seduction without Eros

"You know how matters are with me, and you have heard me say how I think it is to our advantage that this should happen; and I claim that I should not fail to achieve what I ask because I happen not to be in love with you."²⁴ So begins Lysias in his speech of seduction, with a declaration of his intentions concerning Phaedrus so straightforward as to be crass and offensive. Phaedrus, nevertheless, is impressed, rather than put off, by Lysias' direct manner of speaking, his lack of delicacy, for it is this brazenness that, coupled with the extraordinary ability to harness language to predetermined rhetorical ends, enables Lysias to successfully propound a thesis concerning *eros* at variance with conventional understandings.²⁵

On closer inspection, however, Lysias' portrait of love, and of its converse, non-love, is not as unconventional as it first appears. For one thing, it derives from a cultural practice of Antiquity known as *paederasty*, or the paederastic relationship between an older man (the lover

²²*Ibid.*

²³Charles Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 20-21..

²⁴*Phaedrus*, 230e6-231a2.

²⁵*Phaedrus*, 234c6-7. Lysias' strategy is to deliver an initial shock to an auditor, and subsequently to make it seem embarrassing and even reprehensible to the auditor that he should have been scandalized or shocked at all, and by this means to shake to its foundations whatever sense of conviction the auditor may initially have possessed.

or *erastes*) and a young boy (the beloved or *eromenos*), on the basis of which the lover would "engage in passionate and extravagant gestures of love and devotion" toward the beloved. As his beloved's ethical and intellectual teacher, he would, for instance, supervise his socialization "into the life of a well-to-do Athenian citizen who was serious about his obligations toward his family, his friends, and his city."²⁶ The paederastic relationship, as such, was distinct from the "homosexual" relationship for, as Allan Bloom so candidly points out, if it had been a matter simply of same-sex attraction, the young boys would very likely have been more inclined to engage in sexual relations with one another, not with older men, few of whom, from a purely physical standpoint, would have been attractive enough to incite their sexual fancy.²⁷ Besides, the lover was almost always a married man himself, and considered it an obligation to see to it that his young charge would one day marry as well and start a family of his own. It should also be noted that, as much as the paederastic relationship was a feature of Antiquity, it also ran into problems of general acceptance.²⁸ The beloved acceded to his lover's demands only with the greatest caution, taking care especially not to overtly encourage, and certainly not to derive any great pleasure from the physical or sexual part of their relationship.²⁹ What each

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. xxv. This, of course, sounds more like a rationalization of paederasty provided by the men who practiced it — particularly the older men whose sexual appetites are satisfied by the affair — than a commonly accepted understanding and justification of paederasty by the dominant institutions of society. But as Bloom's analysis shows, the paederastic relationship ran counter to the life of the family, which stood at the base of the life and survival of the *polis*

²⁷*Love and Friendship*, p. 468.

²⁸In his discussion of the paederastic relationship and its conflict with the laws of the *polis* (it ran counter to the life of the family, which stood at the base of the life and survival of the *polis*), Allan Bloom quotes a passage from Aristophanes's play, *Birds*, in which an Athenian citizen, wishing to be free of the prejudicial laws of Athens, conjures up an image of an ideal *polis* where fathers would not object to his sexual advances upon their sons: "I long for a place/ Where a father of a boy in the bloom of youth/ Will blame me for doing an injustice;/ 'It's a fine thing that you did to my son, Stilbonides,/ Meeting him all bathed, leaving the gymnasium,/ You did not kiss him, speak to him, embrace him,/ Or grab his testicles.'" (*Love and Friendship*, p. 444).

²⁹Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, "Introduction" to the *Phaedrus* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), p. xvi.

took from the relationship was "radically different, the older man received pleasure; the younger, education and edification."³⁰

From the above it should be clear that, notwithstanding its appearance of liberality, Lysias' position on the *eros* between a boy and a non-lover is conventional in a double sense: its subject matter is a not uncommon social practice; it does not subvert, only evades, the social disapproval of the practice.³¹ Indeed, faced with the prospect of disapproval, Lysias states his position, not directly, but obliquely, by pointing to the advantages of relating to a non-lover, as opposed to a lover. The attempt to obscure his real intentions fails, however, for the speech reveals much more than it hides. The more Lysias enumerates the benefits to be derived from a relationship with a non-lover, the more the speech betrays the truly erotic motivation behind it. The more he professes his disinterest, the more clearly his self-interested motives, and utilitarian logic, come to be disclosed.

The speech begins with two irreconcilable moments: Lysias' disavowal of erotic passion and his expression of interest in the sexual favor to be granted him by the auditor. The tone of the speech is business-like, and the prose style spare and direct, containing none of the flattery, poetry, and imagery that characterize what a commentator has called the "rhetoric of love."³² This style is intended to match and support the image of the speaker who professes to be rational, disinterested, and free of the compulsions of *eros*. Indeed,

Lysias deeply prides himself on his honesty. (He claims to see and judge Phaedrus without envy, jealousy, passion, or selfish interest.) We see his conception of objectivity in the spare, chaste prose style, pruned of every emotional indulgence, every appeal to feeling through metaphor and rhythm. The message of this style is that rationality is crisp and cerebral, something of the *logistikon* alone.³³

In his unabashed directness, Lysias upholds himself as the model of honesty and transparency. The speech glorifies "crisp and cerebral"

³⁰"Introduction," p. xvi.

³¹See remark in preceding footnote.

³²*Self-Knowledge*, p. 46.

³³Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 209.

rationality, opposing it to passionate emotion, which it characterizes as a form of madness depriving a person of self-control and the capacity for calculation. The portrait of the lover drawn by Lysias may be summarized as follows: the lover, consumed (as by an affliction) by *eros*, acts against his better judgment. Indeed, he acts out of a purely selfish interest, namely, the gratification of his sexual desire. He does not look out for the interests of the beloved. Quite the contrary, he gratifies his lust at the expense of his beloved's well-being.

...[lovers] divert their loved ones from associating with others, fearing that those who possess wealth will outdo them with their money, and that the educated will come off better in terms of intellect; and they are on their guard against the potential influence of each of those who possess some other advantage. So by persuading you to become an object of dislike to these people, they put you in a position where you are without friends, and if you consider your own interest and show more sense than them, you will come into conflict with them.³⁴

The idea of love presented by the non-lover, the idea which underlies the arguments of the speech, is utilitarian in nature. It hinges on the notion of self-interest and the uncontrolled pursuit of it by the lover. The difference between the lover and the non-lover is not that the nonlover is selfless and the lover selfish — although the speech does attempt to portray the non-lover as a benevolent benefactor — but that the lover's self-interest is out of control, whereas that of the nonlover is calculated. Indeed, but for the brief spell of passion which takes possession of him, temporarily suspending his capacity for cool judgment and calculation, the lover is essentially the same as the non-lover. Once out of love, the lover regrets having abandoned himself to the affair, reckons that he has given enough (or even more than enough) to the beloved, and blames their affair for his quarrels with relatives. As soon as the madness of *eros* subsides, the lover reverts to his calculating self, repenting, however, of the losses he had incurred while he was acting against his better judgment, and about which he is unable to do anything now.

³⁴Phaedrus, 232c5-d5.

Those in love repent of the services they do when their desire ceases; there is no time appropriate for repentance for others. For they render services with regard to their own capacity to render them, not under compulsion but of their own choosing, in the way in which they would best look after their own affairs. Again, those who are in love consider the damages they did to their own interests because of their love and the services they have performed, and adding in the labour they put in they think they have long since given return enough to the objects of their love.³⁵

Based on Lysias' description, the lover cuts a pathetic figure, suffering in comparison with the non-lover, for, overcome by desire, he loses both his freedom to act ("not under compulsion but of their own choosing") and his reason, which, significantly, is construed in purely utilitarian terms — i.e. in terms of the ability to calculate and maximize the profit to oneself ("in the way in which they would best look after their own affairs"). The speech emphasizes from beginning to end the "value of enlightened self-interest," of the "satisfaction of physical needs, maximization of pleasure of all sorts, minimization over a length of time of all pain, preservation of reputation and of good standing with family and friends."³⁶

The utilitarian rationality at work in the speech of Lysias manifests itself in the commodification of sexuality. The beloved possesses a commodity that the non-lover desires, a commodity that apparently, the latter has to compete for. The non-lover creates a niche for himself in the market by arguing that the beloved would possess greater liberty, that is, a wider latitude of choice,³⁷ by acceding to the advances of non-

³⁵ *Phaedrus*, 231a-b2.

³⁶ The conception of reason expounded by Lysias is purely instrumental. Reason serves no other purpose than the attainment of objects of desire. It seeks not to justify desires but only to figure out a way of attaining their objects: "Reason, that is, is an instrument for the satisfaction of desire; the virtue of intelligence is efficiency. This is a very widespread and very powerful conception of reason, perhaps far more today than ever before (given the mathematization of reason and the infusion of this notion into culture through technology). I do not mean to say that Lysias' speech articulates the full phenomenon of what is now called "technicism." But it does seem to me that Lysias' speech sets out, in a rough way, some of the basic assumptions of the phenomenon." *Self-Knowledge*, 47-48.

³⁷ Note how greater freedom is equated with the free market notion of greater number of commodities to choose from.

lovers, like himself, rather than to those who profess to be true lovers:

Moreover, if you were to choose the best out of those in love with you, your choice would be only from a few, while if you chose the most congenial to you out of the rest, it would be from many; so that you would have a much greater expectation of chancing on the man worthy of your affection among the many.³⁸

This passage recalls the sarcastic response of Socrates to Phaedrus who, at the beginning of the dialogue, had waxed enthusiastic over the novelty of Lysias' proposition:

Socrates: How admirable of Lysias! I only wish he would write that it should be to a poor man rather than a rich one, and an older rather than a younger man, and all the other things which belong to me and to most of us; then his speeches would indeed be urbane, and for the common good.³⁹

This playful remark, juxtaposed with Lysias' contention that "one ought to grant favours not to those who stand in great need of them, but to those who are most able to make a return; not to those who are merely in love with you, but those who deserve the thing you have to give,"⁴⁰ calls into question the supposed standards of merit that the speech implies. Curiously enough, the speech is unable to say why the beloved ought to give in to the wishes of the speaker; all the speech does is to produce a string of binary oppositions between the lover and the nonlover, disadvantageous to the lover, of course. However, the fact that one does not love is by itself not a merit. The speech is unable to say why this particular nonlover ought to be gratified by the beloved. Once the speaker addresses this problem, one realizes that the question of merit cannot be properly addressed by the speech without contradicting itself, that is, without unmasking the nonlover as precisely identical to the very needy lover that the speech condemns:

You will perhaps ask me, then, if I advise you to grant favours to all those who are not in love with you. I for my part think that not

³⁸ *Phaedrus*, 231d6-e2.

³⁹ *Phaedrus*, .227c9-d2.

⁴⁰ *Phaedrus*, 233e5-234a1.

even the man who was in love with you would tell you to take this attitude to all those who were. For neither would it merit equal gratitude from the receiver, nor would it be possible for you to keep things secret from everyone else in the same way, if you wished to do so; but from the thing no harm should come, only benefit to both parties.⁴¹

Regarding the problem of exclusivity, the non-lover is forced to admit that he shares this concern in common with the lover; however, he does not go as far as to attribute this concern to his own desire. Once again, the non-lover takes refuge in discretion; this secures for them both whatever unspoken benefits there are to be derived from the affair.

In the end, the frank and self-assured proponent of the avant-garde position against love must take refuge in public opinion. In the deft hands of the rhetorician, the "lover" is masqueraded as a "non-lover," whereas the non-lover, in his deceit and cowardice in face of public disapproval, is transformed into the paragon of discretion, humility, and righteousness:

Now if you⁴² are afraid of established convention, that if people find out you will be subject to censure, the likelihood is that those in love, thinking they would be envied by everyone else, too, just as they envy themselves, will be on tiptoe with talking about it and boastfully display to all and sundry that they have not laboured in vain; whereas those not in love, who are in control of themselves will choose what is best rather than to have people think highly of them.⁴³

Lysian and Borean Eros

Considered in light of the story of Boreas and Oreithuia,⁴⁴ Lysias' speech emerges as something full of encouragement for the attempt to escape

⁴¹ *Phaedrus*, 234b6-c4.

⁴² Naturally, the speaker makes it appear that it is the beloved and not the nonlover who is concerned about established convention.

⁴³ *Phaedrus*, 231e3-232a6.

⁴⁴ In *Phaedrus*, 229b, as *Phaedrus* and *Socrates* are approaching the plane tree under which they shall be reading *Lysias'* speech, *Phaedrus* asks *Socrates* if it were somewhere in the area, by the river *Ilissus*, that *Boreas*, the god of the harsh north wind, is said to have seized *Oreithuia*, one of the daughters of *Erechtheus*, king of *Athens*.

the bestial quality of sexual desire. It condemns *eros* as a form of madness harmful to the beloved, and as a source of indignity to the lover who suffers while he is in love and regrets its loss once the spell of love wears off and his sanity is restored. It places love in the harsh glare of such excesses as are depicted in the myth: Boreas seizes Oreithuia just as the madness of *eros* possesses the lover and just as the lover preys upon the beloved.

Despite the pretension of reason's sovereign detachment from the compelling force of *eros*, Lysias' speech attempts to overcome the violent and irrational nature of desire by seeking refuge not in reason but in the realm of social convention. The destructive force of *eros* Lysias replaces with or, more precisely, cloaks over with the social benefits of association with those who are not in love. Lysias even seeks to maximize these benefits through the practice of a public discretion that conceals from public view the erotic nature of a man's relationship with a young boy. This strategy of concealment does not, however, result in the extinction of desire. It results, rather, in the reduction of man to the less-than-human. All that is left by the time it winds down to its conclusion is a picture of human sexuality which is merely an instrument of social influence and acceptability. Josef Pieper writes:

Here speaks a man who desires and admittedly does not love; and his speech serves to conceal and to efface the brutish instinctual drive that is bent only on crude enjoyment ... On the other hand, this eloquence also attempts to justify the lack of real love, the non-involvement of the human person. What is really so bad, in fact inhuman, about this attitude is not the craving for sensual gratification, but the deliberate, systematic separation of sensuality from spirituality, of sex from love.⁴⁵

Joël Schmidt, *Larousse Greek and Roman Mythology*, ed. Dr. Seth Benardete (New York: Larousse, U.S.A., Inc., 1980), 51; Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 334. One cannot but find interpretative possibilities in the stark contrast between the cool self-restraint of the Lysian nonlover and the unrestrained eroticism of Boreas.

⁴⁵*Love and Inspiration*, p. 20.

Shorn of all positive qualities, *eros* comes to seem more irrational than ever. This irrationality shows up in the impossibility of maintaining the speech without contradiction. For although the speech professes to condemn desire, it is, in point of fact, shot through with the speechmaker's desire to bring about the seduction of the beloved. It proposes a formula for a life that is essentially debased and deceptive. Once the non-lover's sexual desire has been satisfied, his promise of a mutually beneficial and extended relation is unmasked for being the deception that it is. Why? Because it is patently against the lover's self-interest to invest his time and his resources in a boy who has nothing but his body to offer (and it is a body whose ability to provide gratification has its limits) in return for the economic and social benefits which the lover, presumably, is able to provide.⁴⁶ What is more, the lover succeeds in seducing the beloved only by transforming him into another nonlover — that is, by feeding him with the idea that he must accede to the wishes of the non-lover (rather than of the lover) if he is to secure what he needs in life, he is, in a sense, encouraging the development in him of an exaggerated sense of the importance of looking after his own interests. But were the beloved to begin to think this way, how swiftly would it dawn on him that it would benefit him much more greatly to be connected to a rich and influential lover who at the same time is driven almost to madness with love for him, than it would be to stay with a calculating non-lover who is clearly after only his own interests. Griswold writes: "[W]ould not a crafty beloved prefer to control an enraptured but wealthy lover rather than an independent-minded and poor nonlover?"⁴⁷

The nonlover assumes from the start that the boy is similarly self-interested, passionless, and calculating. The lack of reason the nonlover attributes to *eros* would also characterize a beloved, who would thus by definition be unmoved by the speech. Thus the speaker urges the boy not to allow himself to be infected by *eros*, but rather to "look to your own interest" (232d3). A beloved who did so would be a sort of nonlover. Since he is the counterpart of the nonlover, we might better refer to the self-interested boy as a

⁴⁶ *Self-Knowledge*, p. 49.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

"nonbeloved" ... What reason would a nonbeloved have to gratify a nonlover? Presumably the former too has needs, such as the need for money, social standing, and the like. Such a nonbeloved would look rather like a prostitute, though a prostitute does not require a seduction speech. Perhaps in this speech the nonlover is trying to transform a beloved into a nonbeloved. Yet a nonbeloved would immediately see that much of the speech is groundless. Hence in producing this transformation the nonlover would be achieving a result antithetical to the one he desires. Still further, a nonbeloved who accepted the nonlover's argument would ... actually be a concealed beloved, with all the difficulties that accompany this stance.⁴⁸

In playing out their *eros* on purely utilitarian grounds, both nonlover and non-beloved get caught up in a dialectic of deceit and manipulation. What initially appears as the self-determining freedom from the compulsions of one's desire turns out to be a mask for the debasing dialectic of slavery that binds the nonbeloved and the nonlover in a relationship determined by an economics of supply and demand, albeit one adapted to the erotic realm:

The law of supply and demand renders the relationship between nonlover and beloved unequal. In a labor-saturated market, the beloved controls the capital, and the proletarian nonlover must secure wages by an unusual sales pitch. The non-lover needs rhetoric to survive; Lysias' non-lover even makes a virtue out of his poverty, all the while negotiating in a way that suggests a rough parity between himself and the beloved. In a strange sense, the parity does exist; for while the nonlover is a slave of the master beloved, a beloved who is not desired is worthless. His capital lies in the eyes of his beholders. Thus the beloved is a slave of those who need him even as he masters them.⁴⁹

The speech is Plato's parody of the distortion of *eros* out of the very desire to control its unwieldy force. Ironically, this puritanical condemnation of *eros* leads to the unchecked and unscrupulous practice of sexuality in the name of "controlled satisfaction of subjective preferences."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ This "libertarianism in sexuality" is summarized by Griswold in the following

Eros is alienated from itself. Love is stripped of love. Symptomatic of this alienation is the fact that the remnant of the denial of *eros* remains unnamed. The antithetical name, "non-love", is entirely negative. Non-love is merely a shadowy image of *eros* whose impulse and character remains unclear and unarticulated. The desire that serves as the impetus for the speech praising nonlove and condemning *eros* is unacknowledged by the speech — for how can it name its motivation without revealing its own contradictions? The absence of a definition of nonlove in Lysias's speech indicates that *eros* denounced becomes even more problematic — and no less forceful — than if it were acknowledged and confronted.

The Suppression of Eros and the Concealment of Logos

The suppression of *eros* within the speech is paralleled in the actions between Phaedrus and Socrates. Although Socrates and Phaedrus will be performing some role reversals in the lover-beloved/ nonlover-nonbeloved relationship as the speech-making progresses, in the beginning, it is Phaedrus who speaks in the voice of the non-lover, wooing Socrates, the beloved. Although it is Socrates who delivers the opening line of the dialogue — "My dear Phaedrus, where is it you're going, and where have you come from?" — it is Phaedrus who, responding to this query, invites Socrates to take a walk with him out in the countryside. Phaedrus lures Socrates with the promise of discourse, all the while concealing his desire for him by appealing to an interest supposedly shared by the two of them. In Lysias' speech, this "common" interest is the acquisition and preservation of economic and social advantages. In the encounter between Phaedrus and Socrates, it is the pleasure of hearing Lysias' speech. Phaedrus' deception is emblemized in his thwarted attempt to conceal the written copy of the speech in his cloak. Phaedrus

way: "If both parties are cognizant of the risks and participate willingly in a joint business venture whose profits (maximization of satisfaction consistent with preservation of reputation and so on) greatly outweigh the losses, are not their actions reasonable? Lysias' speech represents a libertarianism of the spirit entailed by the generalization of free market economics to the realm of the erotic. Calculation, frankness, privacy, selfishness, a freedom to choose a lifestyle based on the primacy of the physiological are some of its essential ingredients." *Ibid.*, 46.

hides the speech just as he conceals from Socrates his real motive for inviting the latter to walk with him, namely, to practice before Socrates his delivery of a speech he had been memorizing. The significance of this concealment consists in the fact that it is the first instance in the dialogue where the link between *eros* and *logos*, the written word, is posited.⁵¹ Just as in *Lysias*' speech, the attempt by the non-lover to master *eros* led to its concealment and marginalization — to its radical denial, in fact — *Phaedrus*' attempt to master speech, instantiated here by *Lysias*' speech, necessitates its literal concealment.

The mastery of *eros* does not merely parallel the mastery of *logos*. Both actions overlap each other with the result that speech becomes a tool in the mastery and commodification of desire. The word participates in the act of seduction. Griswold identifies this connection between discourse and seduction by pointing out that the non-lover possesses the quality of discursivity. Alongside the phenomenon of the commodification of *eros* comes the transformation of speech into a medium of commerce:

The nonlover, who is the speaker, is clearly associated with discursivity (as the speech itself testifies) and calculation (*hypologizesthai*, 231b4). That is, the nonlover can articulate what he wants, what he does not want, and how to get the one and avoid the other. The nonlover can talk reasonably because he has mastered his *eros* (we are not told how he achieved this). By contrast, the converse between lover and beloved (232a8-b2) is essentially irrational and so equivalent, from the 'reasonable' standpoint of the nonlover, to the silence of overpowering desire.⁵²

The instrumental role of discourse in the commodification of *eros* in *Lysias*' speech coincides with Burger's interpretation of *Lysias*' seduction piece as self-advertisement on the part of the nonlover. In this way, Burger further brings to light the connection between *Lysias*' conception of *logos* and *eros* with money-making:

The relationship of exchange for the mutual benefit of two contracting parties, which *Lysias* praises in the name of the nonlover,

⁵¹In a more exhaustive study of the *Phaedrus*, the problem of the distinction between spoken and the written discourse should be addressed.

⁵²*Self-Knowledge*, p. 45.

is grounded on the principles of exchange in the economic sphere. The nonlover, who is not carried off beyond the bounds of self-interest, must persuasively demonstrate his own merits in a proposition equal to the desired youth and beauty of the beloved; to accomplish this, the nonlover must compose an advertisement against his competitor, the lover.⁵³

It may be objected that construing the speech as self-advertisement is incompatible with the project of seduction, as an advertisement is addressed, in principle, not to an individual, but to a public, an enlarged clientele capable of delivering a maximum return on an investment, whereas a seduction speech is directed to a particular person. This objection, however, only serves to accentuate the contradiction inherent in the speech, a contradiction present even in its form as a written speech. Although the speech, being a seduction piece, is supposedly directed to an individual, there is no mention in it either of the particular aspects of the beloved's beauty, or of the particular merits of the suitor, other than the absence in him of any love for the boy. Such an abstraction from the concrete context of discourse forms part of the dynamics of a written text. According to Griswold, the "speech could only exist in a *written* form," and that "it would make no sense as spoken in a real situation."⁵⁴ It must be noted that of the three speeches delivered in the *Phaedrus*, only Lysias' speech is a written speech, and that Plato presents this written speech within the context of the attempt to conceal it, thereby hinting at the written word's intrinsic tendency to hide itself and to pass itself off as spontaneous, spoken discourse. Even in this early part of the *Phaedrus*, the dramatic action already prefigures the discussion, in the latter half of the dialogue, of the problematic status of the written word.⁵⁵ Burger further particularizes the link between Lysias' speech and its nature as a written text by including in her analysis the significance of the identity and background of the historical Lysias. The significance of Burger's reading is that it veers away from a simple identification of Lysias' speech with written discourse as

⁵³Plato's *Phaedrus: A Defense of A Philosophical Art of Writing*, p.25.

⁵⁴*Self-Knowledge*, p. 46.

⁵⁵The author maintains that what is questioned is not only the status of the written word, but also the parallel status of spoken discourse, and consequently, the status of the very distinction between the written and the spoken word.

such, focusing instead on a particular kind of writing that is exemplified by the first speech. Lysias' speech illustrates the kind of writing that is meant to be used by a demagogue, not so much to sway the people, as to produce in the masses, by means of what appears to be a rational argument, a sense of conviction concerning some predetermined point. Lysias' historical identity as a ghostwriter for litigants in the Athenian law courts makes the speech attributed to him doubly useful in exemplifying not only the propensity of the written word towards self-concealment but also the effectiveness of the written word as a tool of deception in the political arena:

The choice of Lysias as the fitting representative for the power of deception seems to be motivated by Lysias' historical identity as ghostwriter for the litigants of the Athenian law courts. The universal invisibility of the writer beneath the mask of his written work is, in the case of Lysias, doubly present because of his political status as a noncitizen of Athens, interested in the affairs of the city but barred from active participation. Lysias' art, however, is pursued less in the public interest of the city than in the self-interest of monetary gain; his rhetorical skill is rarely directed to the deliberations of the public assembly, being for the most part focused on the legal disputes of private citizens protecting their own possessions and reputations.⁵⁶

In this respect — that is, in the priority given to private gain rather than to the public interest — there seems to be a coincidence between the concerns of the historical Lysias and the author of the first speech, the main purpose of which is the satisfaction of personal desires at the expense of deceiving the public whose approval is sought precisely to guarantee the enjoyment of private, hidden pleasures. This attitude also coincides with the character of Phaedrus, both in his “proclivity for disguise,”⁵⁷ and in his position as the passive beloved, whose preoccupation with personal gains to be acquired from a secret relationship is clearly compatible with the character of the non-beloved who is wooed — or created — by the non-lover.

⁵⁶Plato's *Phaedrus*: A Defense of A Philosophical Art of Writing, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 20.

In view of the aforementioned contradictions, the speech turns out not to be an erotic piece. Burger's observation is instructive here. She says that the paradigm of Lysias' speech is not the relationship of lover and beloved but that of ruler and ruled:

The portrait of the speaker who disclaims his love in the sense of being carried away, but demands the favors of another for his own benefit, is in fact a description of the potential ruler seeking to gain the favors of the electorate. The wooer of the *demos* must provide an assurance of his own completeness, personal disinterest, and perfect self-control, as well as a pledge of his willingness and ability to satisfy the needs and desires of those he seeks to rule. Lysias' portrait of the demagogue courting the favors of the people through his persuasive power of speech presents itself appropriately through the voice of the nonlover.⁵⁸

This coincidence of the person of the non-lover with the rhetoric of persuasion in the service of the demagogue points to what may be called non-erotic discourse. Because of this convergence between desire and discourse, Plato's forthcoming revision of the notion of *eros* found in Lysias' speech cannot but be intertwined with the project of reforming the notion of discourse — in particular, rhetoric — that is represented by Lysias' speech.

Socrates' Struggle with Seduction: Eros and Logos as Enchantment

The problematic nature of the word indicated by Socrates' ambivalence towards it reveals itself in the metaphors that Plato "makes" Socrates use to describe himself and the speech:

Socrates: You see, I'm a lover of learning, and the country places and the trees won't teach me anything, as the people in the city will. But you seem to have found the prescription to get me out. Just like people who lead hungry animals on by shaking a branch or some vegetable in front of them, you seem to be capable of leading me round all Attica and wherever else you please by proffering me speeches (*logoi*) in books in this way.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁹*Phaedrus*, 230d3-e1.

Socrates represents himself as a dumb animal which, overtaken by its hunger for food, is unwittingly led wherever its master may wish to bring it. The branch or vegetable is not a metaphor of nourishment. It is conceived by Socrates in terms of a prescription, a drug. The Greek word is *pharmakon*, which has been translated as "remedy" but at another level may also mean "poison."⁶⁰ From the context, the *pharmakon* seems to function as a potion, perhaps some kind of a love potion, whose power of enchantment induces a kind of madness, the madness of self-forgetfulness. Although the prescription, signified by the food, promises to be beneficial to the dumb animal, it is actually an illusion conjured by the person who attracts the animal in order to achieve his own veiled intention. The *pharmakon* speaks of a promise not meant to be kept. The man leading the animal on does not intend mainly to feed the animal. The food is a bait that dangles before it, indefinitely out of reach until the destination set by the man has been reached. Furthermore, by subjecting the one to whom the *pharmakon* is administered to slavery, the conjuror's deception is harmful to the one who is prevailed upon to forget himself. This image of Socrates being led throughout Attica like a dumb animal by means of his inordinate desire for speeches is an image of seduction, the very same relationship which is outwardly condemned by Lysias' speech depicting the lover as the seducer who abandons the beloved once his own desires have been satisfied. However, as the analysis of the speech has shown, since the self-possessed nonlover is in fact a concealed lover, the image of the seducer actually depicts the Lysian non-lover. At the same time, one realizes that the dumb animal, mad with desire for the promised food, is actually a picture of the lover as depicted by Lysias' speech, beside himself with desire for the beloved. Unwittingly, Phaedrus plays the role of the Lysian non-lover, the calculating seducer, the magician who victimizes the passionately desiring lover, played by Socrates, who blindly succumbs to the influence of the *pharmakon*.

By this short prelude to Lysias' speech Plato subverts the contents of Lysias' speech by unmasking the veiled play of seduction orchestrated by the Lysian persona. The dramatic action between Phaedrus and

⁶⁰Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 125-127.

Socrates in this prelude also foregrounds the theme of seduction that encompasses both *eros* and *logos*. In this encounter, Socrates is revealed as the philosopher who struggles with the seductive powers of both *eros* and *logos*. That Socrates is struggling with the attraction of love and discourse is shown in the fact that despite his hesitation, he still joins Phaedrus in acting out the game of seduction — he does agree to be led by Phaedrus outside the city in order to hear Lysias's speech. Nevertheless, Socrates, unlike Phaedrus, enters the game of seduction with an ironic sense of his own vulnerability to it.

Phaedrus' seduction of Socrates presents an incongruity with the usual pattern of seduction because Socrates is the older of the two. This incongruity signals a fragility in this relationship of seduction; it indicates that the game cannot easily be sustained and in all likelihood will be shattered before long. This exactly is what happens. It does not take long for Socrates to uncover the deception in Phaedrus' attempt to take advantage of his love for speeches: he challenges Phaedrus to produce the text of Lysias' speech hidden in his cloak. The text is exposed and with it, Phaedrus — and analogously, the nonlover's — true intention. This recognition, however, does not end the seduction game. Although not as blindly as the dumb animal, Socrates nevertheless allows Phaedrus to read Lysias' speech to him. In a sense, he allows himself to be seduced. As Socrates agrees to deliver a speech which promises to outdo Lysias' speech, the seduction is reversed, and Socrates, in competing with Lysias, in turn plays the part of another seducer, a competitor for the sexual favors to be granted by the beloved whose role is now played by Phaedrus.

In the succeeding speeches in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates grapples with the seductiveness of both the beloved and the word as he gradually transforms both the practice of loving and the practice of speaking into higher and more self-aware forms. In Socrates' palinode to *eros*, the third speech in the dialogue, the image of the animal being led by the object it desires will re-emerge in the image of the team of winged horses being driven by the charioteer, an image which departs from and reformulates the vision of *eros* as blind madness in Lysias's speech. ☞