RENARRATIVIZING PLATO[1]

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1. Narrative and non-narrative

Postmodernism makes it difficult to maintain, among other things, that historical facts are discovered or found, that these 'facts', things like names, dates, places and events, somehow speak for themselves, although simple reflection should be enough to establish that, to echoe Richard Rorty, "the world does not speak, we do."[2] It is we who speak for names, dates, places, and events, and in so doing, transform a meaningless sequence of letters or series of numbers into an historical person or epoch of some importance. This process of speaking-for otherwise disparate 'facts' is called 'narrative' and narrative, as Roland Barthes once observed, seems to be "simply there like life itself . . . international, transhistorical, transcultural."[3]

But philosophy has also been presumed to be "international, transhistorical, transcultural" and "simply there like life itself," and philosophy is often thought to be a non-narrative form of language. Narrative is thought to deal with what is transitory, ephemeral, and contingent, what the Platonic Socrates calls the world of Becoming, while philosophy deals what persists through change, what is necessarily true. Philosophy's claim to be international, transhistorical, and transcultural is also a function of the "objects" it studies;[4] indeed, philosophy often reads as if it were speaking for these objects, and not for the philosopher who is writing it. Thus does philosophy concern Reality or the world of Being, although the author to whom the distinction between Being and Becoming is usually attributed--Plato--wrote *dialogues* in which the speaking is done by characters and not by Being or Reality, nor for that matter, by Plato himself.[5] Strangely, when Plato's dialogues are seen as philosophy they are typically *not seen* as dialogues; rather, the philosophy in the dialogues is identified with what Socrates--or in his absence, the Eleatic or Athenian Stranger--say plus what their statements logically imply.

Excepting those post-Platonic philosophers who call attention to themselves as writers, philosophers do not often, if ever, claim that Reality is speaking in their philosophical writing; indeed, they rarely acknowledge that anyone--or anything--is speaking or writing at all.[6] Many philosophers would claim that the referent of philosophical statements is Reality--or real objects--whatever is publicly observable or at least knowable through reason. But who is doing the referring to Reality, what these references are supposed to be, and how they are to be understood--is far from clear, though the one thing they presumably are *not* is a narrative. Narratives, after all, are stories, and as such, are problematic because, among other things, they do not distinguish between real and imaginary events. But storytelling becomes a problem, Hayden White points out, "only *after* two orders of events [the real and the imaginary] dispose themselves before . . . [the storyteller] as possible components of his stories and his storytelling is compelled to exfoliate under the injunction to keep the two orders unmixed in his discourse. What we call 'mythic' narrative is under no obligation to keep the two orders of events distinct from one another. Narrative becomes a *problem* only when we wish to give to *real* events the *form* story" (4).

The obligation to keep real and imaginary events separate makes narrative a problem for the historian because without a story there is no way to endow events with meaning which is one of the purposes of historical writing. With narration, however, comes either the threat contaminating the real with the imaginary, or the conceit that it is real events who are speaking for themselves, and not the historian who is writing. For most post-Platonic philosophers, that the imaginary might contaminate the real is sufficient to eschew narrative altogether, but narrative is unacceptable for another, even more important, reason. Unlike the historian, poet, or novelist, the philosopher is concerned to expose and conceptualize the structure of being, language, rationality, or consciousnesses, the structures that are said to support all of our activities, including narrative. Necessary truths are thought to escape the determinations of time which are the stuff of narrative syntax; like the truths of mathematics, they require a propositional syntax. A proposition, say, 'two plus two equals four' is not subject to change; we do not say "'two plus two equals four' today but I am not sure about yesterday and there's no telling about tomorrow." The 'is' of propositions though grammatically tensed is logically tenseless, unlike the narrative 'is'; the philosopher is concerned with *logos*, not *muthos*. Thus are the structures of being, language, rationality, or consciousness often articulated in the language of logic, mathematics, and science, and thus does a philosophical assessment of narrative not sound like a narrative. But neither can a philosophical assessment sound exactly like a logical, mathematical or scientific assessment, for then it would not be specifically "philosophical."

What possible meaning, then, can obtain for philosophical terms and philosophical propositions? It seems more than unlikely that philosophy could sustain the claim to be a non-narrative form of writing and at the same time explain our experience as beings in time, but our interest here is on philosophy before it thought to become non-narrative, when it was written in the form of dramatic dialogues by Plato. Before post-Platonic philosophy, international, transhistorical, transcultural truths, if indeed they were such, were conveyed by narrative. What was true and what was real, then, emerged as or in narrative, since philosophy as we know it did not yet exist, but was occurring in the passage from *muthos* to *logos*.[7]

2. *Muthos* and *logos*

Arguably it is the ancient philosophers concern to distinguish between *muthos* and *logos* which contributes to the picture of philosophy as non-narrative. But it is not clear that the ancient distinction between *muthos* and *logos* corresponds to the distinction between real and imaginary which is thought to drive the distinction between narrative and philosophy. *We* distinguish the true and the real from the false and the fictional, but *muthos* is neither true nor false and so it cannot be the completely false character of myth which distinguishes it from *logos*.

Perhaps our distinction is prompted by the fact that *muthos* conveys what is said of the gods. For the Greeks, what is said of the gods is no doubt true, but this does not mean that what is said of the gods *needs* to correspond to a perceivable state of affairs. As Paul Veyne reminds us, the Greeks would have been astounded to see Zeus emerge from the sea as a white bull. They would have been astounded because the world that myths describe is "situated in a noble and platonic temporality, as foreign to individual experience and individual interests as are government proclamations and esoteric theories learned at school..."[8] By analogy, we might say that the Greeks believed their myths the way we believe the Big Bang; to ask whether the Big Bang is true or not is to completely miss the point of its explanatory or narrativizing power.

It is crucial that what is said of the gods must be said by someone other than the gods themselves. The distribution of the myths is the task of the poet, the speaker who knows. Epistemologically, however, the poet cannot be said to know anything more than his audience because "the essence of myth . . . is that it is worthy of being known by all" (45). Veyne suggests that the poet cannot be primarily interested in establishing epistemic authority over his audience because he is not, *in principle*, privy to esoteric information. The poet, rather, is interested in establishing a relationship with his audience. This relationship consists in the communication of information which belongs to everyone and no one simultaneously--what "everybody knows." *Muthos*, from its origin to its demise, is public property. We suggest it is this public character of myth which should prevent us from too quickly characterizing *muthos* as fictional and false in relation to *logos* as real and true.

As Veyne suggests, although the myths were "foreign to everyday experience," the myths articulate a cultural heritage, a tradition in the fullest sense.[9] Just as traditions are neither true nor false, they are also not present as though "before our eyes." Rather, traditions convey a "general sense" of what is conceivably true or false. As long as one's tradition mandates that the present conform to the past, it is quite easy to believe in myths. It is only when the Greeks begin to interpret the past in terms of the present that narratives like myth become suspect. "For it is one thing to believe that in the past there were already kings and another entirely to believe that there were monsters, which no longer exist" (53).

We call the criticism of traditions--the interpretation of the past in terms of the present--philosophy and history. Unlike myth, philosophy and history call the past into question because the marvelous is not evident in everyday. But does this mean that the marvelous does not or never did exist? Although it is inconceivable to us that the myths could contain a shred of truth, it is more inconceivable to the Greeks that the myths could be full of lies. For to speak in ancient Greece is to always speak of something, never nothing. Veyne suggests that while the earliest "historians" are busy sorting names, dates, places and events from the legends; the first "philosophers" concern themselves with the allegorical interpretation of the myths (62). These allegorical interpretations comprise an ancient form of exegesis which is called "logos" and is conceived as a process of "rediscovering [the] truthful basis" of myth while simultaneously sheering it of its impious and therefore "pedagogically dangerous" content (61-62). In other words, *logos* continues to abide in the world of muthos by reinventing its content and reinterpreting its form.

The transition from *muthos* to *logos* has been explained in a variety of ways; it has been seen to entail or be entailed by "the secularization of speech" by Vernant and Detienne, the invention of democracy by Jaeger, and the miraculous awakening of scientific rationality by Guthrie.[10] All of these explanations are plausible to the extent they emphasize not one narrative or kind of narrative overtaking another but a gradual change in the "content" of narrative. But *logos* continues to convey what is said of the gods, what is immortal or "deathless," what is or has Being. And what is said of Being continues to be said by someone else, by a speaker who knows, and at times, by one who claims to know nothing.

3. Socratic *logoi*

One of the most enigmatic and influential speakers of antiquity had to have been Socrates. Certainly what Socrates said and how he said it is of central concern to those who focus on the Platonic dialogue. What "Socrates said" was written down and collected in a body of work known as the "Socratic *logoi*" or the Socratic conversations, although the phrase "Socratic *logoi*" does not appear in ancient literature until the *Poetics*. Aristotle refers to a vast collection of prose works which feature Socrates and his conversations as Socratic *logoi*, and it is Aristotle who first raises the issue of the proper name for the *logoi* in tandem with another body of work, Sophron's mimes. Like Socratic *logoi*, Sophron's mimes do not adhere to a regular or specific poetic meter, and thus neither the *logoi* nor the mimes would be properly called "poetic" by some. Nonetheless, both the *logoi* and the mimes "imitate humans in action," and it is this feature which Aristotle emphasizes in his attempt to classify the Socratic *logoi* and Sophron's mimes within a larger theory of *mimesis* that includes music, dance and painting.[11] For Aristotle, the *logoi* seem to be significant not because they offer the truth about Socrates but because they imitate or represent Socratic speech.[12] The "genre" to which Plato's dialogues seem to have belonged in their own time was neither narrative nor philosophy, but those works which speak for Socrates and in which Socrates speaks.

The first authors of the Socratic *logoi* were "those of Socrates associates who attempted to commemorate his life by recording his conversations for prosperity."[13] Many of the so-called characters mentioned in, for example, Plato's *Phaedo* or Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, are legitimate authors of their own Socratic *logoi*. Yet the pervasiveness and the diversity of the *logoi* "also enabled others, who were not themselves associates of Socrates, to claim the mantle of his authority" (4) in providing their own philosophical ideas. The result is that Socrates was made to speak for a variety of positions; his presence in any work was considered plausible as long as the philosophical views put forth could be seen to be a development of Socrates' own teachings. Although modern scholarship focuses primarily on Plato's "Socrates" as the major source in establishing the teachings of the historical Socrates, throughout the fourth century Plato's dialogues were seen as "one among several competing interpretations of Socrates' philosophy" (7). We cannot simply assume that Plato's account is the true or real account of Socrates, but neither can we assume that Plato's account is false or imaginary. Concerning the Socratic *logoi*, the distinction between fiction and fact does not obtain, and perhaps neither does the distinction between the voice of the historical Socrates and that of the author who is speaking for Socrates. Indeed the more important question seems to be that asked by Paul A. Vander Waerdt: "How do we think we can understand Socrates without understanding how he was able to inspire such diverse philosophical movements?" (10).

This question might best be answered by first acknowledging that the Socrates of the Socratic *logoi*, like the epic Achilles and the tragic Oedipus of the *muthoi* which preceded it, is public property. Our search for the "true" Socrates reflects our beliefs about the rights of authors to their own intellectual property, and although we might say that such a belief is evident in the competing claims of ancient authors to represent the authentic Socratic philosophy, the issue is what is meant by 'authentic'. The authors of the Socratic *logoi* are concerned to speak for Socrates, but not verbatim. Rather there is an increasing tendency to narrativize over the "external facts" of a situation, to convey not names, dates, places and events *per se*, but something like a "general sense."

In his discussion of the origin of what we call "political philosophy" Werner Jaeger observes that Thucydides, for example, does not reproduce the speeches of important statesmen word for word.[14] Rather, Thucydides freely admits that unlike his record of "external facts" he makes each character say what he feels the political situation demands. Thucydides neither freely interprets what is said by someone else, nor exactly transcribes what is said by someone else, but concerns himself with conveying the "general sense" of what is said. A "general sense" is neither true nor false; rather it fits a given situation in much the same way as anecdotes fit certain conversations and not others. Were not the authors of the Socratic *logoi* also concerned to convey a "general sense" of Socrates rather than the "external facts" about him? Some of Plato's conscious literary decisions, for example, not appearing in the dialogues, might be seen as his attempt *not* to undermine his authority to speak for "the real" Socrates. As Elinor J.M. West observes, Plato's "anonymity" might suggest that Plato is attempting to preserve the oral character of Socrates teaching. That is, Plato is more interested in showing us Socrates than echoing Socrates.[15]

We might still be tempted to ask which "general sense" of Socrates is the most fitting? There is reason to believe that in antiquity this was a crucial issue. Ancient writers eager to criticize Plato insist that Plato modeled his Socrates after one or more of the character types from Sophron's mimes.[16] Modern scholars admit that Plato would have had direct access to the works of the Sicilian Sophron via his association with the court of Dionysus I and II in Syracuse.[17] There is a problem, however, with discussing Plato's possible debt to Sophron: Sophron's mimes are entirely comic and Sophron's characters are "humble" and "low", we might even say vulgar, ill bred, and uneducated. Sophron's dialogues do not occur between contemporaries as do Plato's, but transpire between character types. Conversation between these types is indicated by the letters 'A' or 'B,' but never by the particular character's names. Moreover, one-half of these character types are female. In this way, Sophron's dialogues divide neatly into two seemingly "natural" categories, male and female.

Most of us remain convinced, with Diskin Clay, that Sophron's "mimes stand a world apart from the world captured and recalled in the Socratic logoi,"[18] and that whatever influence Sophron's unseemly characters may have had on Plato, Socrates provided much greater inspiration; indeed, inspired the creation of the model philosopher. But we must not be too hasty in dismissing the comic aspects of Socrates, for while Socrates was alive he was a model for the comic poets of Athens. Indeed, some readers of Plato have acknowledged comedy's influence on the dialogues; Arlene Saxenhouse has argued, following Strauss and Bloom, that the entire *Republic* is comic, that it is thematically and structurally based on Aristophanes's play the *Birds*.[19]

4. Comedy and philosophy

The plot of the *Birds* is summarized as follows by Saxenhouse:

> two Athenians leave Athens to find a commodious and pleasant place in which to live, one which is free from the tribulations of Athens ...what they seek ...is the natural city, one which accords with natural desires and needs, where one may act without the inhibitions imposed by conventional society...[this] natural city ...[is] among the birds. There they find no money, no private property, no servants, and complete sexual freedom for both heterosexual and homosexual activities (891).

That Socrates nowhere refers to Aristophanes does not argue against Saxenhouse' claim, for it was common practice among ancient writers to suppress "explicit reference to one's philosophical rivals."[20] Claims that another work is being referred to for the purposes of parody, argument, or embellishment rest on apparent allusions to the work in question; Saxenhouse bases her case that "Plato rewrites Aristophanes's *Birds*" on the allusions she finds in the *Republic* to the *Birds* (892). The *Birds*, according to Saxenhouse, reflects the political conflict between *nomos* and *physis*, between the demands of law and the demands of nature, and Plato answers Aristophanes in the *Republic* by showing that the unity of politics and philosophy renders all accounts of justice laughable.

Central to Saxenhouse's argument is her discussion of *Republic* V, in which she finds Plato's extended use of the verb forms of *gelan* (to laugh). This provides evidence of the comic character not only of Book V, but also of the *Republic* as a whole. Book V of the *Republic* is of particular interest to us because of the apparent allusion to Sophron at 451c: [Socrates is speaking]:

> Then I'll have to go back to what should have perhaps been said in sequence, although it may be that this way of doing things is in fact right and that after the completion of the male drama, so to speak, we should then go through the female one--especially as you insist so urgently.

Glaucon has insisted that Socrates expand upon "what the common possession of wives and children will amount to" (450b). Socrates elaborates his suggestion at 455d9-11 when he suggests that "natural capacities are distributed alike among both . . . [men and women] and women naturally share in all pursuits and men in all" (455d 9-11)[21] and insists at 456c9-11 that "for the production of a female guardian, then, our education will not be one thing for men and another for women, especially since the nature we hand over to it is the same".[22]

On Saxenhouse's reading of Book V, the suggestion that the guardian class share everything in common is met with disbelief, disbelief which is expressed by Glaucon's laughter. Indeed, laughter dominates *Republic* V, which culminates in the most ludicrous of all suggestions, that if a state is to be truly just philosophers must become kings (890). At the end of the *Republic*, Saxenhouse acknowledges that the object of laughter shifts from Socrates to the besotted tyrant, but the sting of the work remains: the philosopher is not interested in social justice but in bringing to birth his own just soul. Unlike the *Birds*, the insoluble dilemma of the *Republic* is not between *nomos* and *physis*, but between *politike* and *philosophia*; between being a good citizen and harboring a just soul. Indeed, Saxenhouse reads the *Republic* as a philosophical indictment of community, for the real message of the dialogue is "that there is no justice in the city" and that true political activity occurs not in the highly organized communistic utopia founded in Cephalus' house, but in the private discourse of a few individuals engaged in intellectual inquiry and philosophic endeavor" (900-901). If Saxenhouse is correct, we might conclude that the "general sense" conveyed by Plato aims at the privatization of the "public property" that is Socrates and an abrupt separation of philosophy from statescraft.

To separate philosophy from statecraft would be for Greeks of the fifth and early fourth century an abrupt separation, indeed. For them, the very notion of being *sophos* consisted in expertise in public discourse [to quote Bruno Gentili]:

> it is precisely in such terms -- as expertise in public discourse, whether poetry or prose pertaining to history, religion, or the nature of the physical world -- that the activity of the 'wise man' (*sophos*) is conceived in Greece from the earliest period down to the end of the fifth century. [23]

Moreover, public discourse was central to the emergence of the *polis* and to its concepts of *isonomia* and citizenship.[24] The traditional expression for the political sphere and public affairs is *ta koina* ('that which is common to all'), and Jean Pierre Vernant argues that in the city "all things held in 'common' must be the subject of free debate between those who compose the political body" (181).[25] This free discussion must take place in public, "in the open, in the *agora*, and the discussion must take the form of speeches that develop arguments" (181-182).[26] As the *polis* develops, the privilege of public speech is extended to the citizens of the *polis*; to engage in such speech is a privilege and a sign of their equality. [27]

Philosophy is identified with such speech;[28] indeed the meaning of 'philosophy' was still being contested in the fourth century by Plato and Isocrates.[29] Philosophizing, moreover, involves the body as well as what we would call the mind.[30] Being *sophos* means that one has a certain type of body--a male body--the body of a citizen. The Athenians, Pericles says, can philosophize without becoming soft or effeminate: *philosphoumen aneu malaikas*. That such intellectual cultivation could be seen in the bodies and actions of Athenian citizens as well as in their words has prompted Richard Sennett to draw an analogy between the open and free debate that is the sign of Athenian citizenship and the citizens' proud display of his naked body. [31]Indeed, Thucydides tells us that such nakedness is an achievement; it is what distinguishes the Greek from "the barbarians dressed in patchy furs who lived in the forest or the marshes" (34) and from those "who aimlessly wandered the earth without the protection of stone (33).[32] Thus we find, as Socrates says, traditional Greek *paideia* consisting of *gymnastike* for the body and *mousike* for the soul, for one's body as well as one's voice needs to be trained to stand, move, and speak in a way that is fitting for an Athenian. And thus does learning to be a citizen occur not only in the agora and assembly, but also at the gymnasium and at the palestra. [33]

There can be no doubt that Plato's Socrates challenges traditional Greek *paideia*; Socrates neither looks nor talks like a *kalokagathos*. He is, in fact, somewhat renowned for his lack of attractiveness: short, squat, and bald--a physically ugly man with a paunch, a snub nose and protruding lips. Socrates' very existence is a repudiation of the notion that *sophia* is embodied in those who look noble and beautiful and good and that it is through one's encounters--civic, athletic, and sensual--with such citizens that one becomes virtuous--as Alcibiades reminds us in the *Symposium*. [34] Still, Plato's Socrates is not the comic figure we find in Aristophanes;[35] he is strong and courageous, not soft or effeminate.[36] Socrates contests the notion that the beautiful body is a sign of virtue, but he does not celebrate softness, even for women. Indeed, the only challenge more direct to the traditional notion that virtue is displayed in the male bodies and male voices of Athenian citizens than the character of Socrates himself are his proposals about the education and life of the women guardians in *Republic* V.

The role of women in Greek society –both divine and human-had been a longstanding topic of debate, and whatever the comic potential challenging existing practices regarding gender and citizenship, it was exploited to its fullest extent by Aristophanes in the *Ecclesiasazae*. The tragic potential of such challenges had also been realized by Euripides, whose women characters speak so eloquently to their position that he was caricatured as having nurses and servants philosophizing over their brushes.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the Platonic Socrates is presented as having been instructed by a woman, Diotima of Mantinea, in the one area in which he claims expertise: matters of love. He is also instructed in speech making by Aspasia, mistress of Pericles, and were *sophia* to consist really in giving public speeches, he would have been an expert in that as well, for it was Aspasia, we are told in the *Menexenus*, who was the real author of Pericles' *Funeral Oration*.

If we are to take the dialogues seriously as imitations or re-presentations of Socratic speech, public discourse such as the speech of Pericles is no longer to be identified with philosophy. What Socrates says –how he reshapes the content of *muthos*- is not the only important thing about Socratic speech. Equally important is how he speaks –how he reinterprets the form of *muthos* so that it is *logos*.

The Socratic question 'What is x?' requires an answer in a propositional and not a narrative syntax; it is a question about what is timeless and deathless, like the gods. But if Socratic questions disrupt the logic of the narrative, the answers to the questions, to the extent that they can be answered, bring us back into the narrative, for we are beings in time anticipating death. As such we can only acquire knowledge of what is timeless and deathless from one sufficiently strange and marvelous to convey this *muthos*. One so strange and marvelous might be a comic figure for some, but for those to whom he conveys his *muthos* he will be beautiful and good –someone whose speech can, in the words of Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, "turn our soul upside down." For those who receive this *muthos*, the loss of this strange and marvelous creature will be tragic indeed.

5. Philosophy and tragedy

We suggest that it is a mistake to read Plato's dialogues only in relation to comedy, for as Diskin Clay reminds us, "the Socratic dialogues of Plato allow us to realize that if the comic poets offered models for the literary Socratics while Socrates was alive, the tragic poets of Athens offered models for dramatic representation of Socrates once he was dead."[37] Writers of tragedy, like writers of history, can exploit the fact that unlike the audience for whom they wrote, those in the events they narrate are unaware of the full implications of their words and actions.

Plato is capable of humor, to be sure; Aspasia's claim in the *Menexenus* to have authored not only Socrates' but also Pericles' public speech on the virtues of Athenian democracy is a bit of wicked humor that presumably only someone like Plato--or Aristophanes--could get away with. But Plato is not Aristophanes, and while readers' responses and senses of humor may differ, the *Republic* as a whole, and Book V in particular, are just not that funny. If they were, we would hardly expect to find Thrasymachus--whom we are pointedly told is still present during the conversation in Book V--sitting mum. Plato's irony and humor are typically more subtle than Aristophanes', and were the *Republic* an extended answer to the comic playwright, it would be not only an overblown one, but one that employed some rather stale material. More importantly, if Plato were interested in privatizing Socrates--in claiming him back as it were from the collective memory and consciousness of fifth-and fourth-century Athens-- why would Plato take such pains to situate Socrates in conversation with well known Athenians comprising a variety of political views? Although some of Socrates' interlocutors seem hesitant to speak with him, Socrates appears eager to speak with anyone and everyone. The image of the isolated philosopher is compatible with some accounts of philosophy, but it is not compatible with Plato's representation of Socrates.

Given our propensity to see tragedy and comedy as distinct genres,[38] it is understandable that some readers would associate Plato's dialogues with one kind of narrative to the exclusion of another. But the story of Socrates is public property; the genre of the Socratic *logoi* extensive, diverse, and pervasive. The story of Socrates is a public narrative, and any attempt to claim this narrative for and to oneself would have been as inconceivable then as attempts in the late twentieth century to claim the figure of Martin Luther King Jr. or Robert F. Kennedy. Certain communities attach their political strategies and sentiments to public personas but the attachment works only if the "general sense" of what these figures *mean* is known by all.

We suggest that Plato's dialogues are unique because they contest the notion that comedy and tragedy are "natural" categories, just as Socrates disputes the "natural" categories of male and female, and the concomitant assumptions about gender and citizenship, citizenship and public discourse, and public discourse and philosophy. The closing words of the *Phaedo*, and the many instances of foreshadowing that link the dramatically earlier dialogues to the death of Socrates are the stuff of tragedy, not comedy, as are the sentiments expressed in the Seventh Letter about the death of a good man.

In the *Symposium,* Socrates argues that the same person can write tragedies and comedies. If, like Agathon and Aristophanes, we sleep through this suggestion we are prevented from recognizing what is deeply philosophical about Plato's narrativizing: although it is difficult to imitate, even to articulate, Socrates is a character at once comic and tragic. Plato's Socrates is a different kind of person leading a different kind of life. What he does and what he says are foreign to everyday experience. He is, in many ways, a marvelous creature. Nothing destabilizes our conventional concepts of citizen and community like the narrative fact of the other among us. Yet no one since Plato has been able to offer us a believable account of philosophical stranger, as comic and as tragic as such a figure may be.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper written with Joanne Waugh was presented at the IAPL in May 1998. I would like to thank Joanne Waugh for her part in inspiring the final version of this paper.
2. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
3. Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structuralist Analysis of Narratives," in *Image, Music, Text*, Stephen Heath, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 79.
4. As Richard Rorty suggests in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979).
5. In the *Crito*, however, the Laws do speak.
6. See Hayden White's observation that "*real* events should not speak, should not tell themselves. Real events should simply be; they can perfectly well serve as the *referents* of discourse, can be spoken about, but they should not pose as the *tellers* of a narrative." "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *On Narrative*, W.J.T. Mitchell, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Further references to this work will appear in parenthesis after the material cited.
7. A number of scholars have noted that until the time of Plato there was no distinction between philosophy and narrative as such.
8. Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, Paula Wissing, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 27. Further references to this work will appear in parenthesis after the material cited.
9. The following discussion of muthos as a tradition is by and large a summary of Chapter Four of Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths?*
10. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) and *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, Janet Lloyd, trans. (New York: Zone Books, 1988); Marcel Detienne, *Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, Janet Lloyd, trans. (New York: Zone Books, 1996); Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, 3 vols., Gilbert Highet, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); and W.K.C. Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).
11. This point is made by Diskin Clay, "The Origins of the Socratic Dialogue," in *The Socratic Movement*, Paul A. Wander Waerdt, ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994) 23-24.
12. Aristotle does not directly refer to Plato, however, in his mention of the *logoi*. In another ancient source, there are at least seventy different entries for authors of Socratic *logoi*, and this list excludes the more familiar names of Xenophon and Plato. This suggests that Plato did not invent the Socratic dialogue and that he might have been influenced by other authors. Because Aristotle mentions the *logoi* in close connection to Sophron's mimes, scholars have been especially interested in whether or how Sophron's mimes and Socratic *logoi* are related.

13. Paul A. Vander Waerdt, *The Socratic Movement*, 3. Further references to this work will appear in parenthesis following the material cited.
14. Jaeger, *Op Cit.*
15. Elinor J.M. West, "Plato's Audiences," *The Third Way*, Francisco Gonzalez, ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995).
16. Clay, *Op Cit*, 33-34.
17. *Ibid.*, 35.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Arlene Saxenhouse, "Comedy in Callipolis: Animal Imagery in the Republic," The American Political Science Review, 72, no. 3 (September 1978) 888-901. Further references to this work will be given in parenthesis following the material cited.
20. Vander Waerdt, *Op Cit.* 3.
21. *all' homoiosdiesparmenai hai phuseis en amphoin toin zooin, kai panton metechei gune epitedeumaton kata phusin, panton de aner, epi pasi de asthenesteron gune andros.*
22. *Oukoun pros ge to phulakiken guniaika ouk alle men emin andras poiesei paideia, alle de gunikas, allos te kai ten auen phusin paralabousa.*
23. Bruno Gentili, Poetry and its Public, Thomas Cole, trans. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
24. See Jean Pierre Vernant, *The Origin of Greek Thought*; Pierre Leveque and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Cleisthene* (Paris, 1964); and Marcel Detienne, *Masters of Truth*. It is through engaging in such discourse, Meletus claims in the *Apology* (24d-28) and Anytus insists in the *Meno* (92e-94e) that one becomes not only *sophos*, but also virtuous. Indeed, it is precisely because engaging in such talk is identified with the acquisition of virtue, that Socrates is accused of corrupting the youth of Athens, despite his protestations that he has never claimed such knowledge not the ability to pass it on to others. Even those who believe that traditional methods of acquiring expertise in public discourse can be improved upon –Protagoras, for example—assume that in teaching others how to be proficient speakers they are also making them better people and more virtuous citizens. Indeed, the only characters who does not profess such expertise is Socrates, who only claims expertise in matters of love, an expertise which he says he acquired from the woman, Diotima of Mantinea. In so doing, Socrates does not violate his own claim of ignorance, because he is explicitly serving as a mouthpiece for Diotima in the *Symposium*. Diotima, like Aspasia in the Menexenus for whom Socrates is also a mouthpiece, is a woman and foreigner and not a citizen. As such she is permitted neither participation nor expertise in public discourse.
25. *Logos* is an "instrument" for these public debates; *logos*, Vernant points out, is the word not only for "speech pronounced by an orator at the assembly," but also for the capacity for argumentation. *Logos* is what defines man not merely as a being or an animal; but as a political animal, a being that reasons and is reasonable (182).
26. 'It is by engaging in this debate that citizens demonstrate their standing as equals and peers (*isoi* and *hoimoio*).' The establishment of the *polis* thus involves, according to Vernant, a process in which social life is secularized and rationalized. 'Secularization' is a term employed by Vernant , Leveque, and

Vidal-Naquet, and Detienne. Vernant notes that Leveque and Vidal-Naquet add to their description of Cleisthenes' reforms as secular the qualification 'in so far as there could be any such thing in the sixth century' Jean Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought* (215). Vernant concedes there is a sense in which the use of 'secularization' is an anachronism. He suggests that what emerges with Cleisthenes is "a religion which is itself political" (215). In his foreword to Detienne's *Masters of Truth*, Vidal-Naquet writes that he, Vernant, and Detienne share the view that "'rational thought' arose within a specific political, economic, and social framework...that of the city, which itself appeared through a decisive crisis of sovereignty, and within a social space unencumbered by the dominating presence of a Minoan or Mycenaean monarch modeled after Eastern 'despots'" (8-9).

27. As it was, Detienne argues, for the Homeric warriors whose dialogue-speech is the precursor of public discourse. Detienne argues that the hoplite reform was an essential ingredient in the development of the city and the new model of intellectual thought that accompanied it (103-104). Vernant cites Cleisthenes' reforms as turning point in the development of the *polis*; for Vernant, Cleisthenes' reforms are "the inauguration of politics, the emergence of a true political dimension, the social existence of the Greeks" (*Myth and Thought*, 212).

28. The extant *ipsissima verba* of "philosophers" before Plato suggest that there was no conventional or accepted style for "philosophical" writing: Xenophanes and Parmenides favored hexameter verse, while Heraclitus composed oracular pronouncements in rhythmical prose.

29. See Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Many of the characters in Plato's dialogues –leading figures of fifth century democratic Athens, especially in its closing decades –do not recognize a difference between what they do and 'philosophy', although the enterprise of philosophy is often contrasted in Plato's dialogues with other "genres that have currency in classical Athens –genres which make some claim to wisdom or authority" (5). According to Nightingale, Plato, for whom philosophy consisted of a "unique set of ethical and metaphysical commitments that demanded a whole new way of living" (10ff), is the first to use the term to designate a specific intellectual enterprise.

30. Plato is the first to argue for a conception of the soul as something resembling an autonomous, reasoning self.

31. Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994).

32. One reason that nakedness is an achievement for the Greeks, Sennett points out, is that the body that does not need clothing is strong (34); indeed, body heat is looked upon as a sign of strength and intelligence. When people speak their body temperatures supposedly rise, and so does their desire to act (34). Thus does Pericles call upon the citizens of Athens to gaze upon the City as an *erastes* (lover) gazes upon the *eromenos* (beloved), for it is in public discourse such as the Funeral Oration that the love of Athens was made visible. The very act of speaking these words and listening to them, generated, like physical desire, heat and excitement. Sennett reminds us that "unlike modern

moralists, the Athenian thought sexuality to be a positive element to his citizenship." Sennett thus explains the difference between acceptable sexual practices between fellow citizens in contrast to those between men and women in terms of Greek views of body heat and their expression of notions of equality and subordination in sexual terms (pp. 44-50).

33. As we see in the *Charmides*, where Socrates, just back from the fighting at Potidaea, goes to the *palestra*—the wrestling school--to see what young men are good at philosophy. Sennett remarks that in the gymnasium the boy learns that his body belongs to the city (46).

34. The philosophical significance of Socrates' appearance has been commented on by Paul Zanker. Echoing Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium* in which Socrates is compared to a Silenus, which when you open it, contains a divine image, Zanker suggests that Silenus statues of Socrates be seen as an exemplar of the precept that "true philosophy recognizes the 'seemingness' of the external and leads instead to the perception of the actual being," for the seemingly ugly form conceals the most perfect soul. This idea implies that the entire value system of Athenian society is built upon mere appearance and deception, misled by its fixation on the external form of the body. Seen in this light, the portrait of Socrates becomes a kind of extension of Socratic discourse [or, we might say, of Platonic dialogue] into another medium (39).

35. However comic Alcibiades may be at the beginning of his speech, he is quite serious when describing the true beauty of Socrates.

36. It is Agathon who praises *eros* as tender, soft and effeminate, and in so doing is praising in *eros* what others praise in him.

37. Clay, *Op. Cit.*

38. Hayden White, following Northrop Frye, has identified four ways in which narratives generate meaning by "emplotting" events: tragedy, comedy, satire, and romance. According to White, all narratives "will be emplotted in some way," which means that all the stories we tell will take the form of tragedy, comedy, satire or romance. Although we certainly can and do combine elements of these different kinds of emplotment, *i.e.*, we weave romantic comedies and satiric tragedies, there is an unspoken bias against conflating contrary kinds of stories. On White's view, we not only do not *but are not able* to tell ourselves tragic comedies or romantic satires. Tragedy and comedy, like romance and satire, are "*mutually exclusive* ways of emplotting reality." Indeed, we might go so far as to say that any attempt to thematize a sequence of events as 'tragicomic' violates not only our expectations but out core concepts of what is real and true and meaningful.